



Pakistan, Russia can achieve new heights in bilateral relations: Russian envoy

Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert Khorev while speaking at the 'Day of Russia' reception organized by his embassy, highlighted the historic importance of the national day and underscored Russia's current geopolitical challenges. (Details on Page 5)



Punjab unveils 'tax-free budget' with Rs5.4tr outlay

The Punjab govt on Thursday unveiled a budget with a total outlay of Rs5.4 trillion, terming it a first tax-free budget of the incumbent govt. Punjab Finance Minister Mujtaba Shuja-ur-Rehman presented the budgetary proposals, saying no new tax has been levied in budget for next fiscal year, reported Radio Pakistan. He said revenue collection will be increased by 50% through other means and the next Annual Development Programme will be of Rs842 billion.

Called on

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Thursday.



Photo: PID

PM Shehbaz proposes committee to resolve political issues

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday met with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman wherein he proposed the formation of a committee to collaboratively address the prevailing political issues.

The prime minister suggested this while visiting Maulana Fazlur Rehman's residence to inquire after his well-being. Maulana Fazl welcomed the prime minister, who appreciated the JUI-F chief's religious services and his continuous support to peaceful struggle for protection of democratic values.

PML-N has proven track record of pulling economy out of crisis: Dar

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Thursday said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif had a proven track record of pulling the country's economy out of crisis.

Keeping in view the past performance, the deputy PM hoped to replicate the previous successes in the current tenure as well.

Addressing an event organized by the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ishaq Dar said when the PML-N government was formed in 2013, all the international rating agencies and financial institutions were indicating that Pakistan's economy was on the brink of default and that it would take 10 to 12 years to stabilize.

However, he said that the PML-N government managed to stabilize the economy within three years due to its prudent policies. He regretted that whenever the country's economy started taking off, some hidden hands created hurdles and made the economy unstable again. He recalled that in 1998, when Pakistan faced international sanctions after performing successful nuclear tests, the PML-N government under the leadership of then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif revived the economy within eight months.

Pakistan targets up to 13% tax-to-GDP ratio by 2027, says Aurangzeb

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Thursday that Pakistan has targeted up to 13 percent tax-to-GDP ratio by 2027, as below 10 percent ratio is not sustainable.

Addressing the post-budget press conference, the finance minister said "We have to take it up to 13 percent in next three years gradually," as per the international benchmark marks, no country could sustain at 9.5 tax-to-GDP ratio base without external assistance. Hence, there is dire need to enhance tax to GDP ratio, he added.

He also underscored the importance of doing away with undocumented economy with end-to-end digitization to reduce human intervention as much as possible and make the tax mechanism transparent and mitigate chances of corruption.

The minister admitted that the Federal Board of Revenue



(FBR) could not do compliance and enforcement to the extent it should have done.

Aurangzeb maintained, the government had introduced progressive taxes in the federal budget for upcoming fiscal year 2024-25 to tax more those having high income.

He said, the country needed to move on the direction of broadening tax base to make economy sustainable adding therefore, it was imperative to bring into tax net the retailers and wholesalers to share the burden.

The minister said, the government had launched tax scheme for retailers and wholesalers and they were offered to registration on volunteer basis, however it was termed unsuccessful as of April 2024.

In May, he added, the FBR workforce mobilized itself and as of now around 31,000 retailers had registered themselves with the scheme.

He said, the registration would continue and tax would also be

salary slabs were intact, adding that there was change in other slabs falling between.

The government took up tax for non-salaried personals upto 45 percent, he added.

Talking about youth development, the minister said Pakistan was having third largest freelancer population in the world.

Hence, keeping in view this reality, the government had provided record allocations for Information and Technology sector to improve digital infrastructure and provide the youth an enabling environment.

The minister said, the country's IT exports stood at \$ 3.5 billion which could be lifted upto \$7 billion provided an enabling environment was given to youth.

He admitted that proper financing was not provided to SMEs because banks had no appetite for them and assured that banks would now come with specific schemes, in three sectors including agriculture, IT and SMEs.

Finance Minister said that the exemption and 35% category of

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves stand at US\$14.38bn

Bureau Report

KARACHI: Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves increased by US\$168 million in the first week of June, reaching US\$14.38 billion.

As per a statement issued by the central bank, Pakistan's reserves held by commercial banks increased by US\$174 million to \$5.28 billion during the week ended on June 7.

The reserves held by the SBP decreased by US\$6.2 million to stand at US\$9.10 billion. The central bank did not mention the reasons for the decrease in the reserves held by it.

"During the week ended on 07-June-2024, SBP reserves decreased by US\$ 6 million to US\$ 9,103.3 million," the SBP's statement read. Earlier on June 6, it was reported that the foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) stood at US\$ 9.093 billion after a decrease of US\$ 63 million due to external debt repayments.

Empowerment of youth through skill based education key to country's progress

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaulah Tarar said on Thursday that education was backbone of the society and economy and empowerment of youth through skill based education was vital for the progress of the country.

Talking to the media persons at an education exposition organised by a leading media group here, he said that such education expositions were a praise worthy step to provide opportunity to the students to get information about best universities of the world and make a good career choice.

He said about 68 percent of the population of Pakistan comprised youth and such expositions would

PM directs federal ministries, deptt heads to utilize Task Management System

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Thursday instructed federal secretaries and heads of departments to personally utilize the Task Management System.

He issued these instructions while chairing a meeting to assess the implementation progress of directives requiring federal ministries and departments to use the Task Management System.

The Task Management System is a modern software of international standards used to monitor instructions issued by the prime minister to federal ministries, and progress in this regard.

The prime minister also

Govt challenges Imran, Qureshi's acquittal in cipher case in SC

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has challenged the Islamabad High Court's acquittal of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and former Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case before the Supreme Court.

On June 3, the Islamabad High Court acquitted Khan and Qureshi in the cipher case, a decision that has been met with strong opposition from the government.

Justice Aamer Farooq, presiding over the case, had accepted the appeals against the

Governor Kundi meets Bilawal Bhutto

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi along with party President Ali Shah Bacha, General Secretary Shazia Khan and others on Thursday met with Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

They discussed party matters and the political situation of the province, said a news release issued here by the party secretariat. The newly elected member National Assembly from Multan, Ali Qasim Gilani also called on the Chair-

Continued on Page 8

AJK PM vows to serve state population, continue welfare works

Bureau Report

BAGH: Azad Jammu Kashmir Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq on Thursday said that there is a dire need to move beyond the political rhetoric and serve the population of the state by resolving their genuine issues.

He said this while addressing a function to mark the eighth death anniversary of former Minister Col. (Retired) Raja Muhammad Naseem Khan in Bagh town of Poonch division.

"Making empty assurances and raising hollow slogans of progress and prosperity won't change the situation on the ground," he said. He added that one who delivers would only find acceptability among the masses.

"Those who fail to protect the interests of their people are bound to lose their ground," he said.

The PM further stated that he never



betrayed people and instead fought for their legitimate rights.

Referring to the breakdown of the governance system, the PM said, "We are all responsible for it."

The PM said that he was trying to save this system.

On previous governments' failure to rebuild the infrastructure, the PM said, "An estimated 1260 educational and health institutions were damaged due to the deadly earthquake that struck the region on October 8, 2005."

We should also ask the people who

were at the helm of affairs at that time why they did not fulfill their responsibilities, the PM noted.

Appreciating Col. Naseem's significant contribution to society, the PM said that the deceased was a fearless leader who served his people selflessly.

The PM, on the occasion, assured his full support and cooperation for the infrastructural development of the constituency. The event was presided over by retired Prof. Raja Jalil and addressed by government ministers including Imtiaz Naseem, Sardar Mir Akbar Khan, Information Minister Pir Mazhar Saeed, and others.

Meanwhile, addressing the inauguration ceremony of the newly constructed building for Girls Inter College Kafalgarh, AJK PM Chaudhry Anwarul Haq said, "Kafalgarh is the land of martyrs and Ghazis."

He said that problems faced by the people of Kafalgarh would be

addressed on priority basis.

Announcing Degree College status for Kafalgarh Girls Inter College, the PM expressed that the government would provide transportation facilities for the students of the college. He declared 2024 to be the year of education and health.

The event presided over by Principal Raja Khalid, and addressed by government ministers including Sardar Mir Akbar Khan, Pir Syed Mazhar Saeed, Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, Commissioner Poonch, DIG Poonch, Deputy Commissioner Bagh.

Earlier, on his arrival, the PM was accorded a warm welcome by students of the college.

On this occasion, government minister Imtiaz Naseem gave a detailed briefing regarding the problems faced by the people of the area and projects that were launched by the late Col. Raja Naseem during his time.

Hamdard Shura Karachi lauds government move to privatize state-owned enterprises



Spokesman Report

KARACHI: The members of the Hamdard Shura Karachi chapter welcomed the decision of the federal government to privatize state-owned enterprises and expressed hope that the process of selling national assets would be handled transparently and effectively. They expressed their views in the monthly meeting of Hamdard Shura held yesterday at Hamdard Corporate Head Office on the topic "Privatization of state-owned enterprises and the future of laid-off employees". Speaker Gen (r) Moinuddin Haider presided over the proceedings. Ms Sadia Rashid, President of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan also attended the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Gen (r) Moinuddin Haider said the major reasons for the failure of state-owned enterprises are overstaffing and the country's overall economic conditions. "Unfortunately, Pakistan has never been able to attract constant foreign direct investments in various sectors, resulting in a lack of employment opportunities. This caused overstaffing of the existing state-owned corporations and companies," he said.

He also said present economic challenges compelled the government to reduce its expenses and privatize around 25 SOEs with management rights. The increase in direct and indirect taxes has negatively impacted the purchasing power of ordinary citizens. The nation has been suffering the consequences of decades of mismanagement and corruption in state institutions and departments.

Esteemed members Zafar Iqbal, Cdre (r) Sadeed Anwar Malik, Engr. Anwar-ul-Haq, Rizwan Ahmed, Sultan Chawla, Amir Tauseen, Huma Baig, Senator Abdul Haseeb Khan, Prof. Dr. Bhuwani Shankar and Col (r) Mukhtar Ahmed Butt said SOEs face annual losses due to overstaffing and mismanagement. There is a possibility that privatization may lead to many employees losing their jobs, which needs to be addressed before moving ahead in the privatization process because it may potentially fuel social unrest. Unfortunately, many of the current SOE employees cannot be employed abroad or elsewhere because they lack modern knowledge and skills. There is a need for adult education and skill development courses to address this issue.

Many employees of SOEs have turned to alternative sources of income. Besides that, if they get laid off, they will get funds through schemes like golden handshake. They will have multiple options to manage their financial obligations by opening small shops and other businesses after retirement. Therefore, the fears of widespread unemployment after privatization are unsubstantiated.

The privatization of PTCL and K Electric proved fruitful for the government as the state retains a majority stake, earning millions of rupees annually. Moreover, privatization has led to increased operational efficiency in PTCL and K Electric.

An agreement should be made with investors that they will not lay off any employees for at least a year and will give them a chance to prove their abilities. The role of the state is not to conduct business but to create and harness a favourable business-friendly environment and regulate economic activities. Steel mills can be profitable because steel is in demand worldwide. The country's biggest problem is mismanagement, which needs to be addressed.

Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan says Kashmir is artery of Pakistan

Abdul Majeed Tahir

RAWALKOT: All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference President and former prime minister of the Azad state of Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan has said that the Quaid-e-Azam said that "Kashmir is the artery of Pakistan" and made all kinds of sacrifices to uphold it. Ready to give, we are the unpaid soldiers of the borders of Pakistan, the children of Kashmir will work together with the Pakistan Army to secure the borders of Pakistan. He was addressing the participants of the "Historic Kashmir Bane-ga Pakistan" rally at Rawalkot here on Thursday. The rally started from Dhirkot in which a large number of vehicles participated. On the way, the participants of the rally were welcomed and flowers were showered. Muslim Conference Poonch workers welcomed Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan in the form of a rally near Rawalakot sector headquarters and he was brought to Rawalakot city in a big rally where Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan addressed the rally participants near the court premises. He said that Pakistan was not created because it would break, but it was created to unite the Muslim Ummah and it will remain forever. He said that the neighboring country India is making conspiracies to spread ideological chaos in this region, but these conspiracies cannot be successful in any case. Our army is the best army in the world which is fully capable of countering all conspiracies. He said that this is the land of Ghazi Millat Sardar Ibrahim Khan, Mujahid e Awwal Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan Baba e Poonch Col KhN Muhammad Khan, Khan of Ming and Captain Hussain Khan. This is the land of martyrs and soldiers. No anti-Pakistan ideology can be accepted here. He urged the youth to unite in their ranks and fight ideological terrorism. He thanked party workers, workers of other political parties and civil society for making this rally a success.



Punjab Budget

LAHORE: Members coming out with copies Budget of the Punjab after the speech of the Budget Session 2024-25 in Provincial Assembly.



Photo: Online

Chaudhry Latif Akbar urges private sector to help control unemployment

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: Speaker AJK Legislative Assembly Senior Parliamentarian Chaudhry Latif Akbar said that the government is engaged in maximum effort to control the drag-on of unemployment by sponsoring private partnership night business which is the largest trade in the world to provide employment opportunities. It is an effective weapon. If public enterprises do not focus on hard work to improve their performance, then the private sector will keep the whole process hollow. Earning halal sustenance through trade is a prophetic profession. Through trade, the economy of countries is strengthened. At this time, the biggest challenge of Azad Kashmir is employment and economic crisis. He expressed these views yesterday at the third branch of Rahat Bakers, a large business center in Neelam Road Plate. Speaking to the media after the inauguration as a special guest, when Speaker Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Latif arrived



at the opening ceremony of the business center, well-known political and social figure Syed Ali Naqvi welcomed him warmly, Minister of Social Welfare and Development of Women Syed Bazal. Ali Naqvi, Assembly candidate for Constituency Seven, Shaukat Javed Mir was also with him. Special guest Speaker Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Latif Akbar showered flowers on him and welcomed him warmly. Chh Khan Abdul Nasir Khan Shaukat

Javed Mir Former Administrator Zilla Council Mir Mushtaq Former Deputy Administrator Sheikh Azhar along with businessmen inaugurated it. Speaking on the occasion, Chaudhry Latif Akbar said that he who earns halal sustenance is a friend of Allah Almighty. He said that the benefactor of humanity, the cause of creation of the universe, the government of the two worlds, Hazrat Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him, has set

a wonderful example for the Muslim Ummah all over the world by trading with his blessed hands. Money has been made. The Prophetic profession teaches dignity and service to humanity with halal sustenance. Speaking on the occasion of the opening ceremony, Minister of Social Welfare Syed Bazal Ali Naqvi said that our family has always done land settlement along with zamindari and Trade is the only forum in the world that strengthens the bonds of humanity and mutual tolerance beyond the boundaries of color, race, region, and community. This caste made headlines at every forum. Syed Ali Naqvi, managing director of Rahat Bakers, said that in this era of selfishness, the young generation should strengthen their commitment to create a secure future through trade instead of depending on governments and government jobs. Naqvi thanked the honorable guest Speaker Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Latif Akbar and all the distinguished guests for coming and giving their time to make the event four moons.

Huawei Tech Connect 2024

A commercial market event to target SMEs for the South region of Pakistan

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Huawei Technologies Pakistan successfully executed Huawei Tech connect 2024. This event was focused on bringing Digital Transformation to the SME sector of Pakistan, revolutionizing the way organizations operate with a steadfast approach towards improving the ICT landscape of Pakistan. The cross-industry event focused on tackling IT infrastructure challenges of various sectors including Education, Pharma, Energy, Banks, Real Estate, HealthCare and Retail.

This event has given industry related experts to share their insights, inter-



act and network with one another to discuss modern world technology challenges and how Huawei's cutting edge solutions can make organizations stay one step ahead of them. Over 100+ customers participated, representing a broad spectrum of industries. Also High-profile attendees, including C-level customers from key organizations were present. Huawei Pakistan Showcased Huawei's latest solutions, attracting and retaining the interest of attendees. The successful event facilitated meaningful connections between participants, leading to potential collaborations and business growth.



While talking at the Event Mr. Shahzad Ahmed, Director IT - UIT stated on the occasion that: "It was a good event in a way that we got to know about Huawei's offerings in the field of Storage and Network technologies. It was an amazing opportunity to connect

with fellow industry experts and share insights about where the industry is headed w.r.t IT infrastructure landscape. Being from Education Industry, we're interested in Huawei's IP portfolio especially switches and access points"

Islamabad
30° - 38° Clear

SERVICES

Namaz Timings

Fajr 3:13 am
Zohr 12:08 pm
Asr 5:08 pm
Maghrib 7:19 pm
Isha 9:03 pm

EMERGENCY

Rescue (Police) 15
Bomb Disposal 15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad 1122 & 1122 & 1122
Emergency Ambulance 1122 & 4451122
Motorway Police 9266044
Motorway Police 9270601-20

ENQUIRY

Edhi Ambulance 115
PIA Flight Info 114
PIA Cargo 9280979
Railway Inquiry 117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi 5555489
CAA 9281092

HOSPITALS

CMH 561111
MH 561116
MH 561116
Cantt Hospital 9270907-11
DHQ 5556311-4

Students display innovative projects at NUST-MCS Open House

Spokesman Report

RAWALPINDI: NUST Military College of Signals (MCS) held its highly anticipated annual Open House. Graduating students displayed over 60 innovative projects in the fields of Electrical Engineering, Software Engineering and Information/Cyber Security. Vice Chairman P@sha Mr Khurram Rahat graced the event as chief guest. In addition, an overwhelming number of guests from the government, academia and industry attended the event, and admired

the broad spectrum of practically and commercially viable projects in AI, Block Chain, Communications, Cyber Security and Software.

The event also provided an ideal platform for students to network with industry professionals, explore placement opportunities, and gain valuable insights into career paths.

In his remarks, the chief guest said that the creativity and ingenuity on display reflected not only the hard work of the students but also the commitment of the faculty and the supportive environ-

ment fostered by NUST-MCS. He maintained that these projects speak volumes of the practical skills and problem-solving abilities the students had developed over the course of their degree programmes, which, he believed, they would utilise towards serving the nation.

Earlier, Commandant MCS Brig Omer Khalid welcomed the esteemed guests. He appreciated the students for their innovative projects and their potential to make significant contributions to the industry with their forward-thinking ideas and problem-solving skills.

Teachings of Sufis can completely eradicate terrorism and sectarianism:
Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi



City Desk

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Arts Council, in collaboration with the International Shah Hamadan Association, organized the Shah Hamadan International Conference on the occasion of the death anniversary of the great Sufi of the Islamic world, Syed Ali Hamadan, known as Hazrat Shah Hamadan. The conference was presided over by the eminent scholar Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi, Chairman of the International Shah Hamadan Conference. In his address, Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi stated that promoting the teachings of Hazrat Shah Hamadan can completely eradicate terrorism and sectarianism. Hazrat Shah Hamadan serves as a significant cultural bridge between Central Asia and Pakistan, and his personality and achievements should be included in the curriculum. Director Sajjad Hussain mentioned that due to Hazrat Shah Hamadan, Muslims in Azad Kashmir and occupied Kashmir stand united. A comprehensive strategy should be formulated by the government to republish the works of Hazrat Shah Hamadan. His influence allowed women in Central Asia to work alongside men. The Punjab Arts Council has developed a comprehensive program to commemorate Sufis. Renowned historian Professor Dr. Riaz Ahmed stated that the International Shah Hamadan Association has the honor of establishing a memorial at the place of Hazrat Shah Hamadan's death. Promoting Sufism can rectify our moral values. President of Bazm-e-Urooj-e-Adab, Naem Akram Qureshi, suggested that the death anniversary of Hazrat Shah Hamadan should be officially observed in Pakistan and Kashmir. The proceedings were conducted by the Secretary of the International Shah Hamadan Association, Saghar Abbas Hamdani. During the conference, a prayer was offered for the patron of the association, Makhdoom Sajjad Hussain Qureshi, founding president Professor Dr. Ahmad Hasan Dani, and founding secretary-general Professor Dr. Agha Hussain Hamdani.

First Cohort of Sparktank Graduates In Lahore

Spokesman Report

LAHORE: Spark Tank by Beaconhouse, Pakistan's first business incubator for 10-19 year-olds, celebrated the graduation of its inaugural cohort at an event titled 'The Spark Tank Showcase' held at the Ramada Hotel Gulberg, Lahore.

The Spark Tank Showcase featured five promising startups developed by eight students over a five-month incubation period from September 2023 to February 2024. The graduating startups include Go Clean, Pak Maweshi, Bitty Bop's Perfumery, Takhti.pk, and BreatheEasy.

The event featured an exhibition and presentations by the graduating students where they introduced their idea and the startups to an audience including investors, experts from the startup industry, as well as students, parents, and educationists. A keynote speech by Chief Sustainability Officer at Al Futtaim Group, Ellora-Julie Parekh, highlighted the importance of promoting entrepreneurship from an early age to equip the youth with the skills and mindset necessary to tackle challenges. Education technology entrepreneur and CEO of Build Something Different, Chris Geary, spoke on 'Tech Education: Cultivating Tomorrow's Innovators'. A panel discussion titled 'Navigating Early Stage Funding' explored the various opportunities for obtaining initial financing for startups.

It provided practical advice on overcoming funding challenges and planning for long-term financial sustainability.

Panelists included CEO & Founder, CIRCLE, Sadaf Abid; Founder & General Partner, Zayn Venture Capital, Faisal Aftab; Co-Founder & CEO, Smartlane and Co-Founder, Rent It, Fatin Tariq Gondal; and Managing Director, Endeavor Pakistan, Shehryar Hydri. The discussion was moderated by Co-Founder of Out-Class & Taraki, Ali Nomani. Speaking at the event, CEO Beaconhouse School System and Spark Tank, Kasim Kasurisaid, "We are incredibly proud of our first cohort of young entrepreneurs. Their dedication and innovation have been truly inspiring, and we are excited to see the impact they will go on to make. Spark Tank is committed to supporting innovation among the youth, nurturing their talent while promoting creative thinking and business acumen."

COMSTECH, IsDB and LRBT Partner to Train African Ophthalmologists in Fight Against Rising Blindness



Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: In a collaborative effort to address the growing challenge of blindness in OIC African member countries, COMSTECH (OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and the Layton Rahmatullah Benevolent Trust (LRBT) Hospital have joined hands to launch a comprehensive training program for ophthalmologists of African OIC member states.

This one-year training program aims to equip 18 doctors from Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Somalia, and Togo with advanced skills in treating Glaucoma and Diabetic Retinopathy.

The training takes place at the LRBT Hospital in Korangi, Karachi, a renowned non-profit organization dedicated to preventing blindness and providing high-quality eye care. LRBT's extensive experience, coupled with COMSTECH's leadership in science and technology cooperation, and IsDB's AFAB (Alliance to Fight Avoidable Blindness) program, creates a powerful alliance to combat this critical health issue.

The program focuses on both medical and surgical treatments for pediatric and adult patients, empowering these doctors to become leaders in eye care upon returning to their home countries. This will significantly enhance local capacities to prevent and treat blindness, transforming lives and communities.

Beautiful view

ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of Golden shower of Laburnum tree (Amaltas) on a green belt along a road in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

foodpanda extends support to Gaza through World Food Programme



Spokesman Report

KARACHI: As part of its ongoing commitment to humanitarian causes, foodpanda, Pakistan's leading delivery platform, has partnered with the World Food Programme (WFP) to offer critical assistance to people in Gaza. The ongoing conflict in Palestine has led to a dire humanitarian crisis, with thousands of families facing food insecurity and lack of access to basic necessities. Recognizing the urgent need for assistance, foodpanda has stepped forward to contribute towards the relief efforts being undertaken by WFP in Gaza.

Muntauqa Peracha, Managing Director of foodpanda in Pakistan, expressed the company's solidarity with the people of Palestine, stating, "Our hearts go out to the people of Palestine during these unimaginably difficult times. We believe it is our responsibility as a socially conscious organization to support these people in their time of need."

Ms. Coco Ushiyama, Country Director for WFP Pakistan while appreciating the efforts of foodpanda Pakistan said, "WFP continues to distribute food aid in Gaza despite significant challenges and dwindling food stocks. This generous contribution from foodpanda will make a big difference and help WFP deliver life-saving aid to around 6,863 people daily for a month".

The campaign is part of a global partnership between foodpanda Pakistan's parent company, Delivery Hero, and WFP's innovative fundraising platform, ShareTheMeal.

Incubating Innovative Ideas and Solutions to Tackle Challenges Posed by Climate-Induced Disasters

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is home to over 13,032 glaciers spanning the Karakoram, the Hindu Kush, and the Himalayan mountain ranges, making its northern region the largest reservoir of glaciers outside of the polar regions. However, with striking changes in the climate, these glaciers and the habitats surrounding them are deeply troubled, with 10,000 glaciers reported to be receding.

The Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) Project, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Ministry of Climate Change & Environmental Coordination and supported by the Green Climate Fund, is focused on overcoming the climate vulnerabilities of the valleys of Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The project aims to protect communities from the impacts of GLOFs resulting from significant glacial melts. In collaboration with Cirrus Pakistan, the project is rolling out awareness sessions at various universities and colleges in GB and KP, leading up to a climate-centric hackathon to incubate ideas and solutions based on local knowledge to propel climate adaptation mechanisms and programming.

Dr. Allah Ditta, Associate Professor/Chairman, Department of Environmental Science



of the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sheringal, Dir said, "Collective efforts in engaging our youth through such initiatives will pave the way for innovative solutions to combat the severe impacts of climate change in our region."

Sumaira Gul, a student of Karakoram International University, (Chilas) Diamer Campus, discussed the need to invest in climate-centric solutions to overcome the impacts of global warming during the awareness session.

UNDP's GLOF-II project works in 16

valleys of Gilgit Baltistan and 8 valleys in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It empowers communities to identify and manage risks associated with GLOFs and related impacts of climate change, strengthens public services to lower the risk of disasters related to GLOFs, and improves community preparedness and disaster response. The project also supports the development of sustainable livelihood options in project areas, with a particular focus on the participation of women in ensuring food security and livelihoods.

High-security facilities worldwide using Chinese biometric system are at risk: Kaspersky

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Kaspersky has identified numerous flaws in the hybrid biometric terminal produced by International Chinese manufacturer ZKTeco. By adding random user data to the database or using a fake QR code, a nefarious actor can easily bypass the verification process and gain unauthorized access. Attackers can also steal and leak biometric data, remotely manipulate devices, and deploy backdoors. High-security facilities worldwide are at risk if they use this vulnerable device.

The flaws were discovered in the course of Kaspersky Security Assessment experts' research into the software and hardware



of ZKTeco's white-label devices. All findings were proactively shared with the manufacturer prior to public disclosure.

The biometric readers in question are widely used in areas across diverse sectors - from nuclear or chemical plants

to offices and hospitals. These devices support face recognition and QR-code authentication, along with the capacity to store thousands of facial templates. However, the newly discovered vulnerabilities expose them to various attacks.

Attackers can inject specific data into the QR code used for accessing restricted areas. Consequently, they can gain unauthorized access to the terminal and physically access the restricted areas. When the terminal processes a request containing this type of malicious QR code, the database mistakenly identifies it as originating from the most recently authorized legitimate user.

"In addition to replacing the QR code, there is another intriguing physical attack vector. If someone with malicious intent gains access to the device's database, they can exploit other vulnerabilities to download a legitimate user's photo, print it, and use it to deceive the

device's camera to gain access to a secured area. This method, of course, has certain limitations. It requires a printed photo, and warmth detection must be turned off. However, it still poses a significant potential threat," says Georgy Kiguradze, Senior Application Security Specialist at Kaspersky. To thwart related cyberattacks, Kaspersky advises isolating biometric reader usage into a separate network segment and employ robust administrator passwords, changing default ones. Consider enabling or adding temperature detection to avoid authorization using a random photo and minimize the use of QR-code functionality, if feasible and update firmware regularly.

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G-7 Actions: Risking Greater Conflict with Russia

The government, people, and political elite of Pakistan seem largely unaware that the Russia-Ukraine war is taking a dangerous turn as the G-7, a powerful coalition of the world's wealthiest and most resourceful countries, is currently meeting in Italy (13-15 June, 2024) and while enjoying Italy's legendary hospitality, they have taken the decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S. and Western arms, ammunition, drones, robots, missiles, and other weaponry to launch attacks within Russia.

G-7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on a glass of wine has also decided to unfreeze Russian assets amounting to US\$ 50 Billion mainly parked in Europe and other parts of the world, which were frozen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine to fund Ukraine's war efforts, including repaying the U.S. and other Western countries that have been supplying weapons and military support to Ukraine.

These vital and highly sensitive and critical decisions are akin to poking Russia to react violently and take desperate and drastic actions to counter these moves and protect its interests.

If Russia implemented its strategy and US and Europe may respond with a comprehensive and coordinated approach by bolstering their military presence in Eastern Europe, deploying additional troops and equipment, and increasing direct support to Ukraine with advanced weaponry and intelligence.

They may impose economic sanctions

targeting key sectors of the Russian economy, such as energy and finance, and cyber countermeasures to strengthen defenses and retaliate against Russian attacks.

Diplomatically, they would isolate Russia internationally, rallying condemnation through forums like the UN and strengthening alliances with countries opposed to Russian actions.

Each of these actions carries significant risks and could lead to unpredictable and potentially catastrophic consequences, requiring careful international responses to avoid a broader and more devastating conflict. Moreover, the implementation of Russia's aggressive strategy and NATO's counter-strategy would severely impact weaker economies like Pakistan.

Disruptions in Russian energy supplies to Europe would cause global energy prices to soar. Pakistan, heavily reliant on energy imports, would face drastically increased fuel and electricity costs, straining its economy. This surge would lead to higher transportation, manufacturing, and household energy expenses, exacerbating inflation and reducing disposable income for its citizens.

The conflict would likely disrupt global supply chains, affecting shipping routes and logistics networks. Pakistan, which depends on imports for essential goods and raw materials, would experience delays and increased costs. This disruption could lead to shortages of critical items,

higher import prices, and further inflation, negatively impacting both consumers and businesses.

Financial markets would experience significant volatility, with investors seeking safer assets amid the uncertainty. This could result in capital outflows from emerging markets like Pakistan, causing the Pakistani rupee to depreciate. A weaker currency would make imports more expensive, further fueling inflation and increasing the cost of servicing external debt, straining Pakistan's financial stability.

Amid global economic instability, foreign direct investment (FDI) in weaker economies would likely decline as investors become more risk-averse. Reduced FDI would hinder economic growth and development projects in Pakistan, exacerbating unemployment and slowing down infrastructure and industrial development. International aid and development funds might be redirected to address the humanitarian and economic impacts of the conflict in Europe. Pakistan could see a reduction in international assistance, leaving it with fewer resources to manage its economic challenges.

The combined effects of rising energy prices, trade disruptions, financial instability, reduced investment, and decreased aid would have severe socioeconomic impacts on Pakistan. Higher inflation would erode purchasing power, leading to increased poverty and social unrest.

The government would face challenges in providing adequate public services and maintaining social stability amid growing economic hardships.

To safeguard its interests and economy from the aftershocks of the Russian strategy and NATO's counter-strategy, Pakistan should implement a comprehensive contingency plan. This plan includes diversifying energy sources by investing in renewables and securing LNG imports while enhancing energy efficiency. Trade resilience should be bolstered by exploring new markets and supporting domestic production. Financial stability can be achieved by building foreign exchange reserves, encouraging remittances, and managing debt through restructuring and diverse borrowing. Attracting foreign investment through investor-friendly policies and special economic zones, alongside boosting domestic investment via public-private partnerships and local investor incentives, is crucial. Strengthening social safety nets with cash transfer programs and subsidies, and enhancing public services in healthcare, education, and employment are essential. Diplomatic efforts should focus on regional alliances and international aid. Cybersecurity measures and military preparedness must be prioritized to protect infrastructure and ensure national security. A crisis management task force should coordinate and monitor the plan to ensure effective implementation and adaptability.

Writer is Former Press Secretary to the President, Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former MD, SRBC



Analysis

Qamar Bashir

Over 8,000 children diagnosed with malnutrition amid ongoing Israeli shelling in Gaza

Heavy shelling reported in the so-called safe zone of Al-Mawasi in southern Gaza on Thursday came despite the ongoing international push for a ceasefire and as the UN health agency reported 32 deaths from malnutrition "including 28 among children under five years old".

In a stark assessment of the dire situation after more than eight months of war, the head of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that "a significant proportion of Gaza's population is now facing catastrophic hunger and famine-like conditions".

To date, more than 8,000 youngsters have been diagnosed and treated for acute malnutrition, including 1,600 children with the most dangerous form of the condition, the WHO Director-General said.

"Despite reports of increased delivery of food, there is currently no evidence that those who need it most are receiving sufficient quantity and quality of food," Tedros maintained.

Lifesaving treatment for dangerously malnourished children is dwindling in the war-shattered enclave, with only two of three specialized nutrition stabilization centres for seriously undernourished youngsters in Gaza still open, according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

In an update on Tuesday, the UN agency had warned that malnourished children were 'dying before their families' eyes', while the UN aid coordination office, OCHA, reported that escalating hostilities across Gaza continued to significantly hinder access to health care.

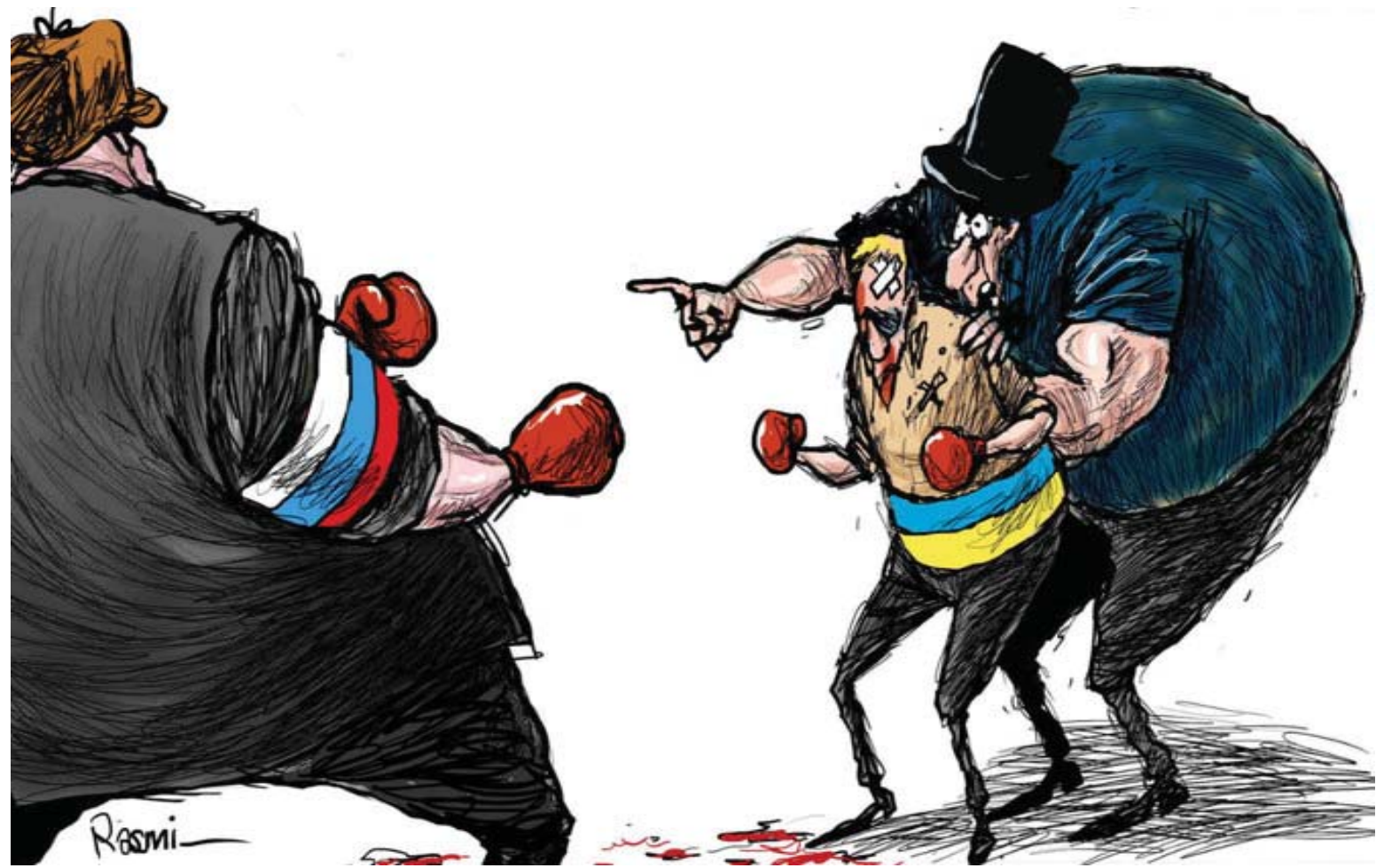
Despite the ongoing operational and security challenges for aid teams, "humanitarian partners are currently reaching some 280,000 people per week in Gaza with health services", OCHA said, before noting that shortages of cooking gas and lack of a power supply had made it difficult to keep community kitchens and bakeries running.

"Efforts to distribute food remain constrained by the active fighting, damaged roads, a limited number of entry points into Gaza, suboptimal operating hours at crossings and checkpoints, and the limited number of trucks allowed access," the UN aid office said. "To roll back months of near-starvation conditions in Gaza, other types of critical aid must also reach people in need."

In the occupied West Bank, OCHA warned that the situation was worsening, amid ongoing violence by Israeli forces and settlers targeting Palestinians.

Since October 7, more than 520 Palestinians - nearly a quarter of them children - had been killed in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, latest OCHA data indicated.

"Almost three quarters of those fatalities occurred during operations by Israeli forces. During the same period, more than 5,200 Palestinians were injured in these areas," OCHA said in an update, which counted 960 attacks against Palestinians by Israeli settlers since 7 October. These incidents are "on the rise," OCHA noted.



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Ashraf Al-Awsat)

Politics of Captain - II

In a video message released before his departure for the federal capital, where he was scheduled to appear in court, Imran asserted that he had previously informed the Lahore High Court (LHC) about the involvement of "dirty Harry," the senior officer, in the attempts on his life. He further claimed that the joint investigation team (JIT) looking into the Wazirabad case had its findings undermined by this official.

Imran continued by stating that the second assassination attempt occurred on March 18 outside the Islamabad judicial complex and expressed concern for the safety of PTI leader Murad Saad. "They claim that terrorists are targeting him [Saad], but any harm that comes to him will be attributed to 'dirty Harry,'" he asserted. The former prime minister reiterated that if any harm befell him, it would be the responsibility of "dirty Harry" and not terrorists or foreign agencies. "I have received threats from him and those associated with him," he added.

Stirring controversy over the February 8 general elections, PTI founder Imran Khan confirmed a few weeks ago that he had written a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), urging the global lender to thoroughly scrutinize the election results before providing any new financial assistance to Islamabad. This action clearly indicates his ego and superiority complex, demonstrating a preference for his personal politics over the interests of the state.

Recently, Imran Khan's X account has disseminated content critical of the state and has propagated false narratives and misinformation targeting state institutions, notably the military, seemingly with the intent of provoking military personnel to rebel. In a video shared on this account, he draws comparisons between Sheikh Mujeeb Ur Rahman and General Yahya, insinuating who might be considered a traitor. This video essentially shifts blame onto the Pakistani Army and its leadership, while disregarding the contentious role of politicians and alleged Indian interference in the fall of Dhaka. It is perplexing how the social media account of an individual incarcerated can be utilized to propagate such anti-state sentiments. This raises the question of whether other inmates in jail enjoy similar privileges. Imran Khan, who has championed the establishment of a Riasat e Madina (State of Medina), contradicts this aspiration by availing himself of privileges unavailable to other inmates. In the true Riasat e Madina, rules and laws applied universally, irrespective of one's status. Imran Khan's actions and conduct cast doubt on the sincerity of his pledges to transform the country into a Riasat e Madina, suggesting they may have merely been political rhetoric. Later, there was a claim from someone within PTI that Imran Khan's X account is managed from the US. If this is accurate, it highlights a contradiction in the leader's stance and a pattern of dishonesty. Imran Khan himself has previously accused the US of orchestrating



Analysis

Abdul Basit Alvi

the removal of his government and has made numerous statements against the US and its administration. If these allegations were sincere and heartfelt, why would his X account be operated from the very country he accuses of interfering in his government's affairs? His conduct, as well as that of his party's senior leadership, has been consistent. Another example is the statement made by Sher Afzal Marwat. During a private TV program, Sher Afzal Marwat suggested that Saudi Arabia was involved in the regime change operation, asserting that this operation had occurred with the cooperation of Saudi Arabia and America, and that all investments coming into Pakistan were part of this plan. It is remarkable that Imran Khan entered politics under the banner of change and clean governance, but the reality has been quite the opposite. The importance of clean politics cannot be overstated for the health and stability of any democratic society. Clean politics entails a system where transparency, integrity, and accountability are upheld across all levels of governance. It fosters trust and confidence among citizens in their government and elected representatives. When people believe that their leaders are honest and acting in the public's best interests, they are more likely to actively engage in the democratic process and adhere to the rule of law. In a clean political environment, elected officials are held accountable for their actions and decisions. Transparency in political processes ensures that those in power are accountable to the public, reducing the risk of corruption, misallocation of resources, and abuse of authority.

To be continued

Public Diplomacy of Pakistan in 21st century

Public diplomacy has become a very important element in today's era for the well-being of the state at the international level. Pakistan's public diplomacy depends on the state's interest to develop friendly relations with other countries without neglecting its foreign policy goals. Pakistan's officials engage with foreign nationals and promote people-to-people interaction with the mission to improve mutual understanding and appreciation of foreign cultures and civilizations. The main spheres of Pakistan's public diplomacy are: Cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, Educational programs, and think tanks, Youth and civil society engagement, and Tourism which includes religious tourism as well.

The cultural diplomacy of Pakistan aims to exhibit the art, literature, culture, and heritage of Pakistan and share it with foreign nationals to develop a better understanding of Pakistan as a multi-ethnic, modern, and multi-religious country. Pakistan has cultural exchange programs that provide a concept of collaboration in cultural promotion. Activities for promoting cultural cooperation include art and cultural exhibitions, music concerts, audio-visual and performing arts, exhibitions, joint production of film content, archeological research, and preservation.

Through educational programs, Pakistan's public diplomacy aims to promote knowledge and awareness about Pakistan such as its evolution, history, culture, art, and languages. Pakistan offers scholarships to students from developing countries, such as students of Africa, South Asia, and East Asia in subjects like sciences, and engineering. These students act as a bridge between these countries and Pakistan. Collaboration between universities, academia, and think tanks is also an important pillar of Pakistan's public diplomacy. NUML (National University of Modern Languages) Pakistan is an institute of multiple national and international languages. NUML has won awards from the international community. Alumni from multiple universities within Pakistan and outside Pakistan are very helpful in promoting social cohesion in Pakistan. Pakistan's youth and civil society engagement helps to promote the understanding of its foreign policy. Pakistan engages with the youth creating networks for the exchange of ideas, skills, and knowl-

edge to promote mutual understanding and friendly relations.

Pakistan has celebrated bilateral anniversaries with numerous countries, enumerated as follows: 2023Belgium (2023), Italy (2023), Kuwait (2023), Norway (2023), Republic of Korea (2023), Russian Federation (2023), The Netherlands (2023). Embracing the modern information age, the Ministry has created a comprehensive digital footprint, and social media platforms (X, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Facebook) in a proper manner. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs works broadly to share content to target specific audiences. Pakistan

Portal <https://sharepakistan.mofa.gov.pk/login> was launched in May 2023. It aims to communicate the impact of public diplomacy initiatives in the execution of Pakistan's foreign policy objectives. Pakistan's abroad missions help Pakistan's public diplomacy by engaging diplomats, civil society, media, think tanks, academia, opinion-makers, students, and government officials to share Pakistan's perspective and importance.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs publishes a quarterly 'Public Diplomacy Newsletter' documenting public diplomacy activities of the Mission abroad in the domains of culture, arts, sports, tourism, fashion, and other avenues of people-to-people collaboration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan engages in various public diplomacy initiatives and activities to promote Pakistan's image, foster cultural exchanges, and enhance bilateral relations. These efforts include organizing cultural events like food festivals, literary events, poetry recitations, music festivals, Sufi Qawali nights, photo exhibitions, and sports tournaments. Pakistan also participates in major international fairs and expos, conferences, and seminars to showcase Pakistan's rich heritage and traditions.

Pakistan through its public diplomacy and soft power is on the way to achieving its positive image in the international community. Some external factors and extreme groups are affecting Pakistan's reputation but with the hard-core struggle of our officials and through the means of public diplomacy we can achieve our importance in the region.

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Analysis

Zubia Ishfaq

Reception marks 'Day of Russia'

Pakistan, Russia can achieve new heights in bilateral relations: Russian envoy

Naveed Ahmad Khan

Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert Khorev while speaking at the 'Day of Russia' reception organized by his embassy, highlighted the historic importance of the national day and underscored Russia's current geopolitical challenges.

"Russia is encountering the most serious challenge in its contemporary history with the special military operation in Ukraine," he said.

The reception was a mix gathering that of the diplomats (mostly from the Arab, Asian and the Central Asian countries) and the representatives from the government and opposition benches.

Minister for Petroleum, Musadik Masood Malik was the Chief Guest on the occasion while among the noted guests included the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Senator Sehar Kamran, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of Turkmenistan, Atadjan Movlamov, JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman and others.

Pakistan and Russia have recently agreed to expand their energy cooperation and strengthen security partnership in the bilateral relations therefore one could see prominent figures from these two areas particularly.



"By acting together in the interest of our countries, we can reach unforeseen successes for the benefit of our people," he said in his welcome address.

It was in 2024, Russia assumed the chairmanship of notable international and regional associations, including BRICS and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The ambassador outlined Russia's priorities during its CIS chairmanship, which included growing economic integration,

foreign policy coordination, strengthening of joint response mechanisms to both traditional and emerging challenges, and expanding of cultural and humanitarian ties.

About BRICS, the ambassador highlighted a commitment to multilateralism, respect for international law based on the United Nations charter, upholding international peace and security, ensuring sustainable development and respecting rights and freedoms for all, regardless of

ethnicity, religion or gender. He emphasized countering unilateral approaches and restrictive measures that negatively impact the global economy.

On regional issues, the ambassador reaffirmed Russia's dedication to resolving international problems. He highlighted Russia's role in advocating for a resolution to the situation in Gaza based on relevant UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, aiming for the establishment of a fully-fledged Pales-

tinian state.

The Russian envoy recognized the "tremendous potential" for deepening and strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. He noted the growing bilateral trade, which exceeded \$1 billion last year, and expressed optimism for further growth.

"Russia closely cooperates with Pakistan at various international forums, including the UN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Organization for



Islamic Cooperation," the ambassador said.

said.

Philippines mark 126th anniversary of independence with pride and joy at National Day

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Philippines celebrated the National Day with pride and joy, featuring traditional dances and singing. The event marked the 126th anniversary of the Philippines' independence—a significant milestone in the nation's history.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador of the Philippines Maria Agnes M. Cervantes emphasised the importance of the occasion.

"This special event allows us to honour the bravery, resilience and unwavering spirit of our forefathers, who fought for the freedom we hold dear today," she said.

The celebration highlighted the Philippines' progress and



unity as a nation. On June 12,

1898, the Philippines declared its independence, ushering in a new era of self-determination. This day stood as a testament to the struggle for freedom and justice, serving as a reminder of the country's rich history, cultural heritage and values.

The theme of this year's celebration was 'Freedom, Future, and History'.

Ambassador Cervantes explained that these three words captured the essence of the festivities.

"Freedom signifies the hard-earned liberty our ancestors achieved for us. The future represents our determination to build

a prosperous nation, and history reflects our rich past," she added.

She noted the remarkable resilience and courage the Filipino people had shown throughout history, from the colonial era to the present.

"Our fight for freedom demonstrated our unwavering spirit and desire for self-determination. Despite many challenges, we have always emerged stronger, remaining committed to justice. We are reminded of our responsibilities as guardians of the freedom our ancestors fought for. It is our duty to preserve this legacy by promoting unity, fostering peace and working for the common

good," Ms Cervantes added.

The ambassador highlighted the Philippines' continued commitment to democracy, human rights and social justice.

She emphasised that "freedom, future and history" should constantly remind of the ongoing task of nation-building, which required innovation, ingenuity and perseverance.

In times of global challenges, Ambassador Cervantes said the Philippines continued to contribute positively to the world, drawing on its rich cultural heritage and historical lessons.

"By doing so, we honour our past, enrich our present, and pave the way for a brighter future," she added.

Ms Cervantes expressed gratitude for the warm and hospitable environment provided by the host country, Pakistan. This year also marked the 75th anniversary of Philippines-Pakistan relations, highlighting the enduring friendship and cooperation between the two nations.

"Over the past seven and a half decades, our countries have built strong diplomatic ties grounded in mutual respect, shared values and commitment to bilateral cooperation. This enduring partnership has fostered economic collaboration, cultural exchange and mutual support for the international order," the envoy said.

She extended her embassy's



gratitude to the people of Pakistan for their friendship and support, looking forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration and solidarity.

"This friendship is crucial in realising that building a brighter

future is a collective responsibility. Together with the international community, the Philippines believe in peace in the world. We ensure that the legacy of the past inspires our future," Ambassador Cervantes said.

7 Must-Visit Souqs in Saudi for an Unforgettable Shopping Experience

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Exploring the vibrant souqs of Saudi is a journey through time and tradition. These traditional markets offershoppers a unique blend of culture, history, and hidden treasures waiting to be discovered. Here are some of the most celebratedsouqs in Saudi, each with its unique appeal.

1. Souq Al Alawi, Jeddah

Wander through the storied lanes of Souq Al Alawi, one of Jeddah's most celebrated souqs at the heart of UNESCO heritage site Al Balad. You can find virtually anything at the shops here, from local produce and spices to authentic handicrafts and traditional outfits to modern electronics and consumer goods, capturing the full essence of Saudi's cultural tapestry. Take home a piece of history with jewelry, art, handcrafted rugs, and vibrant decorative items that add a touch of Arabian elegance to any space. During Hajj, Souq Al Alawi is a sight to see, with bustling throngs of visitors from across the Islamic World.

2. Souq Al Zal, Riyadh

In the AlDirah neighborhood in the heart of Riyadh, near the iconic Al-Murabba



historical palace, Souq Al Zal is one of Riyadh's oldest traditional markets that carries 100 years of history within its alleyways. As soon as you start your tour and hear the sellers' voices in the auctions, you will feel that you have traveled to the past of the city. The souq is known for its antiques, rare coins, and old utensils. You may also find musical instruments, old record players, and hundreds of interesting items that seem as if they came from a museum of ancient folk traditions. There are shops of incense, oud, and oriental perfumes. There is also an antiques auction that is held every day in the market for a few hours following the Asr (afternoon) prayers.

3. Souq Al Dirah, Riyadh

Near the iconic Al Masmak



Fort lies Souq Al Dirah, also known as Souq Al Thumari, a haven for aficionados of heritage and art.

The labyrinthine alleys of this souq beckon shoppers with a mesmerizing array of local artwork, perfumes, and handicrafts. Dive into the rich culture of Saudi as you browse through unique treasures not found elsewhere. Don't leave without indulging in the opulence of gold jewelry, crafted with exquisite designs fit for royalty.

4. Souq Al Tumor, Madinah

Saudi is one of the world's largest producers of dates, and the city of Madinah is particularly famous for its highquality and variety of offerings, namely the Ajwa dates. These small fruits make for nutritious snacks and are a major part

of Saudi culture—the date palm is even the national symbol. They also preserve well, so you can take them home to share a piece of Saudi with your friends and family. Souq Al Tumor, the date market of Madinah is the most famous place to browse and buy dates in Saudi. With over 150 species of dates ranging from the locally-grown favorite Ajwa dates to the rare and expensive Majdool, you're bound to find a few you'll love — and many sellers will let you try a sample before you buy.

5. Souq Qabil, Jeddah

Also known as Qabil Street, or Qabel Trail (on Google Maps), Souq Qabil is a historic market, possibly the oldest in Jeddah. These days, Souq Qabil is known as a lively cultural center, particu-

larly in the evenings during Ramadan and Eids, when it fills with food stalls and traditional entertainment. Despite being a small street, it's an essential part of any visit to Al Balad, Jeddah's old town, with web of alleys leading to museums such as Nassif House, Al Matbouli House, and Al Shafie Mosque that preserve a piece of the Jeddah of old.

6. Souq Al Qaisariah, Al Hofuf

Step back in time at Souq Qaisariah, a testament to the enduring spirit of tradition. Dating back three centuries, this souq in AlHasa invites visitors to immerse themselves in the sights and scents of old-world charm. After undergoing restoration, Souq Al Qaisariah now stands as a tribute to its illustrious past. Discover an eclectic mix of spic-



es, incense, and traditional handicrafts, perfect for capturing the essence of Saudi.

7. Souq Okaz, Taif

Venture to the ancient city of Taif and discover the enchanting Souq Okaz, a celebration of Saudi's cultural heritage. Originally an open-air market, Souq Okaz transports visitors to a bygone era of trade and tradition. Experience the magic of the annual Souq Okaz Festival, when poetry, storytelling, and cultural performances take center stage. With over 200 shops and 150 attractions, this cultural extravaganza is not to be missed.

While this list is a good start, curious shoppers will find that any souq in Saudi is worth visiting. Whether you're a seasoned shopper or a curious traveler, a

visit to a souq offers a shopping experience like no other that will surely be a highlight of your trip to Saudi.

Saudi Tourism Authority has recently launched the country's spectacular summer program for 2024, "Saudi Summer is Next Door". The summer program will run for four months until the end of September, across seven destinations – Aseer, Al Baha, Taif, the Red Sea – a new destination, Jeddah, Riyadh and AlUla. Offering over 550 exceptional tourism products and more than 150 special offers and packages curated for families and children, it caters to diverse segments including adventure lovers, those looking for luxury retreats and activities, and culture and heritage enthusiasts.

It has never been easier, smoother, and safer to visit Saudi – visa initiatives have been continuously developed, with the eVisa program now including 66 countries, reduction of the total price of the eVisa by 20%, as well as the free 96-hour Stopover Visa. To learn more about Saudi and experiencing all the unique experiences with your family, visit: <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en> for more information. Plan your unforgettable trip today!

Bull & Bears
PSX 100-Share
Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index	
Current	Prev. Close
76,208.16	72,797.43
Day's High	Day's Low
76,338.14	73,329.79
Index Value	Change
21,143,580,162	+3410.73
Percentage	Time
+4.69%	13 Jun, 2024 5:00 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index	
Index Value	Change
8,163.67	-51.81
Percentage	Time
-0.63%	13 Jun, 4:35 pm GMT+1

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average	
Index Value	Change
38,599.07	-113.14
Percentage	Time
-0.29%	13 Jun, 1:53 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average	
Index Value	Change
38,720.47	-156.24
Percentage	Time
-0.40%	13 Jun, 3:15 pm GMT+9

Open Market Forex Rates		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	182.15	184.15
Bahrain Dinar	740.88	748.88
Canadian Dollar	204.15	206.15
China Yuan	38.38	38.78
Danish Krone	40.19	40.59
Euro	296.25	299.25
Hong Kong Dollar	35.66	36.01
Indian Rupee	3.33	3.44
Japanese Yen	1.9	1.98
Kuwaiti Dinar	908.19	917.19
Malaysian Ringgit	59.3	59.9
New Zealand \$	170.79	172.79
Norwegians Krone	25.97	26.27
Omani Riyal	723.52	731.52
Qatari Riyal	76.45	77.15
Saudi Riyal	72.8	73.55
Singapore Dollar	203.65	205.65
Swedish Korona	26.45	26.75
Swiss Franc	309.99	312.49
Thai Bhat	7.58	7.73
U.A.E Dirham	74.85	75.8
UK Pound Sterling	350.55	353.05
US Dollar	277.6	280.4

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Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Zong 4G, Pakistan's largest telecom operator offers affordable International Roaming Bundles for your next trip to Saudi Arabia this holy month to ensure you stay connected to your loved ones while performing Hajj! Zong 4G stands as Pakistan's only telecommunications provider, offering thoughtfully designed international roaming packages. In response to the contemporary connectivity issued faced by travelers, Zong has introduced specialized roaming bundles aimed at offering both cost-effectiveness and accessibility for users travelling abroad. The Saudi Arabia International roaming bundles have ample and generous resources to last all through your trip ensuring that you stay seamlessly connected to your loved ones this Hajj. Customers can activate the roaming bundles for Saudi Arabia through MY ZONG APP or dial *4255# for subscription. Zong 4G, as a customer-centric network, has prioritized meeting the needs of its users. Consequently, it has facilitated seamless and uninterrupted connectivity for travelers heading to the Saudi Arabia, allowing them to effortlessly share their Hajj memories with loved ones throughout their journey.

Robbing the public to fill the coffers of the elite will continue

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Muhammad Hanif Mughal, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Shadbad, said on Thursday that increasing government expenditure and wrong policies are making the process of reforms meaningless. He added that it is shameful to raise taxes on the salaried class in the budget, which will accelerate the brain drain. In a statement issued here today, Dr. Hanif Mughal said that the budget shows that the policymakers are neither ready to do anything themselves nor want to burden the elite to improve matters. He said that the announcements made by economic managers before the budget could

not be implemented for obvious reasons. Expenditures have been increased in some unnecessary sectors which would increase the economic burden, and no other purpose will be achieved. He said that in the budget, people with an income of 50 thousand rupees per month have been exempted from income tax, while the income tax of those earning 6 lakhs to 12 lakhs per year has been increased to five percent. The government is well aware that even those earning around Rs 125,000 per month are barely making ends meet, but still increasing the tax on them is cruel. He demanded that those earning up to one and a half lakh per month should be exempted from income tax, so this proposal should be reconsidered.



Raising taxes on the salaried class is proof that FBR has failed miserably to find new taxpayers and widen the tax net; its target is always the salaried class. Dr. Hanif Mughal said that eight billion rupees are collected from the whole country as property tax. In comparison, one hundred and fifty billion rupees are collected from only Mumbai, a city in India. If this sector is brought under the federal government, at least Rs 500 billion could be collected, but those calling the shots are bent on saving this mafia in the way the landlords are being saved. He noted that the budget clearly shows that the drama in the name of reforms will continue, and people with low incomes will be further squeezed to reward the elites.

Non filer

RAWALPINDI: Workers are busy in making loading vans iron safety grill and bumper at their workplace in Gawalmandi area in the city.

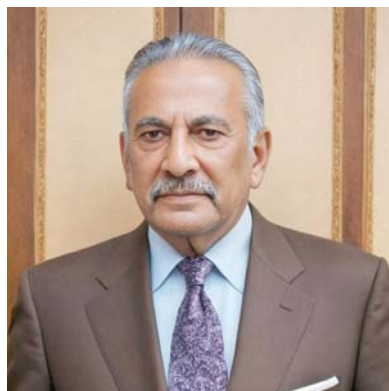


Photo: Online

Disappointingly, Rs4 trillion in tax exemptions are kept intact

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Thursday that the overall budget is disappointing and has not met the expectations of the common person and the business community. He added that the budget had done nothing to improve the economy, and many important reforms had been ignored. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that getting tough on non-filers will affect the economy while eliminating tax exemptions on industries in FATA will save fifty billion rupees. The business leader said that in the current situation, a 3.6 percent growth rate and a 38% increase in revenue seem impossible. He added that the budget will not be able to cure the economic problems, and the country will continue to be run on debt. He observed that the budget has done



nothing to control inflation, revive investment, or bring the underground economy into the mainstream. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that exports have not been encouraged much, to the dismay of exporters. However, removing tax concessions for the erstwhile FATA and PATA industries is a positive step in reducing smuggling. Hundreds of factories in the rest of the

country will start running, and the revenue will increase by at least fifty billion rupees, but exemptions to the tune of 3.9 trillion rupees are still intact. The 2.25 percent advance tax on wholesalers and retailers will only affect registered manufacturers and will increase the prices the public will bear. Registered businesses will find it difficult to compete with those selling smuggled and unregistered products. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that the salaries of federal employees have been increased, which is a good step. The wages of provincial employees will also increase, and it will impact the private sector, but it will also increase inflation and business costs. He said that no suggestion has been made in the budget to stop intelligent people from leaving the country, and no attempt has been made to increase investment. This time, too, the budget has tried to give all possible facilities to the elite while further squeezing the public.

500 MW Floating Solar Energy Project To Be Setup At Keenjhar Lake

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: GO Energy and Sindh Transmission & Dispatch Company (STDC) today signed a MoU for the transmission evacuation of a 500 MW Floating Solar Project at Keenjhar Lake, Sindh, Pakistan. The Honourable Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Minister for Energy, Government of Sindh was the Chief Guest at the signing ceremony held in Karachi today. Other dignitaries present at the occasion included Mr. Musaddiq Ali Khan, Secretary Energy, Government of Sindh, Mr. M. Saleem Shaikh, CEO Sindh Transmission & Dispatch Company, Mr. Ammar Ali, CEO, GO Energy & Mr. Haris Jamil, Director CEO Secretariat, K-Electric. The 500 MW Floating Solar Project is set to become one of the largest floating solar installations in the world with state-of-the-art solar panels and floating infrastructure designed to withstand the unique challenges of Keenjhar Lake's environment. Speaking at the occasion, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Minister for Energy, Government of Sindh emphasized the need for sustainable, renewable and ecofriendly energy. "The Government of Sindh is proud to be part of the 500 MW Floating Solar Project at Keenjhar Lake by providing the conducive environment to encourage



investment in the renewable energy industry, reducing dependence on imported fuel and also reducing overall cost of electricity for the people of Sindh. This project will be a major milestone and achievement for the Government of Sindh as we continue to provide full support to make this project operational as soon as possible. Mr. Musaddiq Ali Khan, Secretary Energy, Government of Sindh noted, "We welcome GO Energy's efforts for development of this innovative 500 MW Floating Solar Project at Keenjhar Lake. This landmark initiative aligns perfectly with our provincial & national goals to expand renewable energy capacity and reduce our carbon footprint."

Mr. M. Saleem Shaikh, CEO Sindh Transmission & Dispatch Company said, "At STDC we are pleased to be a part of the 500 MW Floating Solar Project at Keenjhar Lake as it represents an innovative approach to integrating renewable energy into KE's grid. Mr. Ammar Ali, CEO, GO Energy said, "We are excited to embark on this historic journey, in partnership with Government of Sindh for developing a unique and innovative renewable energy project at Keenjhar Lake. Project Bankable Feasibility Study has been completed by Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore (SERIS) with an extensive experience in floating solar worldwide."

SECP issues ESG disclosure guidelines and strengthens the code of corporate governance

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has taken a major stride towards promoting responsible business practices and environmental stewardship with the issuance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Voluntary Disclosure Guidelines for listed companies. Furthermore, amendments in Listed Companies (Code of Corporate Governance) Regulations, 2019 (Corporate Governance Regulations) have been made to strengthen oversight responsibilities of the board regarding sustainability priorities.

ESG performance through a separate sustainability report, integrate the ESG information into their existing annual report, or publish it directly on their website. Additionally, in order to ensure a safe and respectful work environment, the SECP has introduced significant amendments in the Corporate Governance Regulations requiring listed companies to develop comprehensive anti-harassment policies and ensuring compliance with relevant Government legislation of Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Further, the boards of listed companies have been made accountable for setting sustainability priorities for companies, by proposing formation of sustainability committee and alignment with the SECP's ESG Disclosure Guidelines.

The SECP actively pursued a consultative approach for finalizing the ESG Guidelines and amendments in Corporate Governance Regulations to incorporate feedback of all key stakeholders. The ESG Disclosure Guidelines and amendments in Code of Corporate Governance are now available on the SECP website at <https://www.secp.gov.pk/document/secp-esg-disclosure-guidelines-for-listed-companies/?wpdmdl=51940&refresh=666a958b23ea51718261131>

Govt must start constructive dialogue with business community to remove its real concerns: ICCI President

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has that the budget 2024-25 will not at all be supportive for ease of doing business in the country, stressing a simplified tax system by arguing that excessive tax rates will definitely disprove the potential benefits.



In a statement issued here on Thursday he said that the government still has the time to initiate serious consultations with all the stakeholders before the finalization of the budget document if it really wants to pull the country out of the existing economic mess and to enable the poor masses to heave a sigh of relief. He warned that imposition of federal excise duty on cement and immovable property will hinder business operations and questioned how the construction sector would grow in the country when capital gain tax has been imposed on real estate and property. He warned that increasing tax rates in this manner itself invites tax evasion. He expressed his astonishment over the fact that

there was no mention of the measures vis-à-vis export promotion, import reduction, privatization policy and most importantly the IPPs, the key factor behind the high power tariff. He also apprehended that the budget will aggravate inflation and create hurdles in the way of industrialization and economic activity in the country adding that it would badly hamper exports, because of the inclusion of the export sector in the normal tax regime. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari concluded his statement by saying that the business community is the real locomotive force for the economy of the country but the Government has totally ignored the proposals floated by the Chambers including the ICCI to tailor a business friendly budget to help revive the corporate activities in the country.

Mohsin Naqvi fumes over slow upgradation work at Gaddafi stadium

Sports Desk

LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi has expressed displeasure over slow upgradation and renovation work at the Gaddafi stadium, Lahore.

The PCB has undertaken upgradation and renovation of the Gaddafi stadium, Lahore besides National Bank stadium Karachi and Rawalpindi cricket stadium to prepare for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 to be held in Pakistan.

The Chairman PCB visited the Gaddafi Stadium on Tuesday night to oversee the progress of the upgradation work and was unhappy to see that no work was being undertaken at night by the contractors despite the fact that Mohsin Naqvi had ordered to work round the



clock in order to complete the upgradation and renovation well before the

deadline. Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi direct-

ed the relevant stakeholders to work 24/7 on the project, adding that the huge project could only be completed on time by working round the clock.

Naqvi also visited various parts of the main building of the stadium which is being dismantled and demanded for the upgradation timeline to be followed strictly. He also directed immediate repair of the main water pipeline under the main building of the stadium and quick drainage of the accumulated water.

Directing to accelerate speed, the PCB Chairman said that more resources be mobilized to complete the upgradation work of the stadium well before Champions Trophy 2025.

Director International Cricket Usman Wahla and GM Infrastructure were also present on this occasion.

Rs 3,100m allocated for sports infrastructure

Sports Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government has green light a series of substantial projects aimed at bolstering Pakistan's sports infrastructure, with a significant focus on the South Asian Games and Pakistan Sports Complex (PSC) and various facilities across the country.

According to a budgetary document released here on Wednesday, Rs 3,100 million has been allocated under Public Service Development Programme (PSDP) for Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) Division for the fiscal year 2024-25.

An amount of Rs 2,433 million has been allocated for ongoing schemes while new schemes (667 million) in PSDP 2024-25.

Among key projects in the ongoing schemes include providing and installing of electronic displays and scoring system of different sports facilities at Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad and PSB Coaching Centers at a



cost of Rs 735.394 million; Provision of missing facilities for South Asian Games viz. warm-up track, heat exchanger, residential flats for coaches, revamping of multipurpose halls, fencing wall, 5-A Side Hockey Ground, Futsal Ground & master planning of Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad an amount of Rs 388.429 million was earmarked.

Rehabilitation & upgradation of existing facilities at PSC, Islamabad for preparation/holding of South Asian Games 2021-22 at a cost of Rs 312.083 million; Laying of synthetic athletic track/football ground, sprinkling system and flood lights at PSB Coaching Centre, Karachi an amount of Rs 304.893 million was earmarked.

Some of the new schemes include holding of National Games at a cost of Rs 317 million and construction of swimming pool at PSB Coaching Centre, Karachi an amount of Rs 200 million was earmarked. Meanwhile an amount of Rs 150 million was kept for rehabilitation/upgradation of existing facilities at PSB Coaching Centre at Quetta.

Pak athlete to feature in Asian Throwing C'ship



Sports Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani athlete Muhammad Yasir has departed for Korea to participate in the 2nd Asian Throwing Championship, scheduled to take place from June 14-15.

He was accompanied by coach Syed Fiaz Hussain Bukhari.

The championship will feature athletes from Asian countries.

Athletics Federation of Pakistan (AFP) President, Brig (R) Wajahat Hussain, hoped that Yasir will deliver an outstanding performance in the championship.

This is a significant opportunity for him to showcase his talent and bring laurels to the country.

The AFP has been working tirelessly to promote Pakistani athletes, and Yasir's participation in the championship is expected to inspire young athletes in Pakistan to strive for excellence in the sport.

Pakistan Football League to commence on Oct 15: Chairman PFL

Sports Desk

KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Football League (PFL) Farhan Junejo on Thursday said that ten teams from various cities, including Karachi, will participate in the PFL scheduled to commence on October 15 and will continue for 65 days.

He expressed these views while talking to the Mayor Karachi, Barrister Murtaza Wahab at the mayor's office here.

The Chairman PFL informed the mayor that the teams participating in the league, each team featuring four international players. The matches will be played in Karachi and Lahore, and preparations and upgradation of the grounds are underway.

Farhan Junejo also mentioned efforts to build a world-class football stadium in Karachi to host various football competitions.

He said that the team that wins the PFL final will have the opportunity to play against international teams and will be



included in clubs from different countries. Speaking on the occasion, Mayor Karachi, Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that we will provide full cooperation to the administration in organizing of the PFL.

He mentioned that sports activities enhance the atmosphere of the city, and all international football players coming

to Karachi will be provided with facilities. He said that KMC will provide land for the construction of a world-class football stadium in Karachi.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab, said that Karachi has produced international football players, and Lyari is especially known as a hub for football players.

He said that a large number of Karachi residents are expected to attend the Pakistan Football League matches in Karachi.

The Mayor added that sports are now a means of representing and promoting the country worldwide, and good relations can be established globally through sports.

He mentioned that football is the most popular sport in the world, with millions of fans across various countries.

The Mayor also stated that KMC has its own football team, which will be given further training to enhance their performance.

On this occasion, Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab was presented with a symbolic football and a T-shirt of the Pakistan Football League.

Municipal Commissioner Afzal Zaidi, Deputy Parliamentary Leader Dil Muhammad, UC Chairman Haji Abdul Majeed, Waqas Rizvi, and other relevant officials were also present on this occasion.

Sukhan Faiz selected for PCB women panel umpires

Sports Desk

MULTAN: Sukhan Faiz has been included in PCB Women's Panel Umpires bringing an honour for Multan's women cricketer.

Sukhan Faiz has also had the honor of playing in the Women's World Cup 2009 in Australia.

Before her job at Zakariya University, Multan, she won medals as an athlete and cricketer.

The teams trained by her have shown outstanding performance in higher education women's cricket. Expressing happiness over being included in the PCB panel umpires, Sukhan Faiz said that after being a cricketer and coach, she now has another golden opportunity to stay connected with cricket through umpiring. She stated, "God willing, I will strive to meet the PCB's standards through my experience."

Now, being officially included in the PCB Panel Umpiring is a special honor for both her and her Alma metre.



Sindh bag Blind Cricket Super League title



Sports Desk

KARACHI: Sindh team emerged victorious in the final of the Pakistan Blind Cricket Super League 2024 at APS School Cricket Ground, Abbottabad on Thursday.

Sindh defeated Balochistan Blind by eight wickets in the final. Sindh chased down the target of 177 runs in just 13.3 overs, securing the championship title.

Balochistan set a competitive total of 176 runs in 19.1 overs. Naseeb Ullah (B2) led the charge with a well-crafted 42 off 27 balls, supported by Muhammad Ayyaz (B1) with 22 runs off 16 balls and Bashir Khan (B1), who scored a quickfire 32 off 16 balls. Despite their efforts, Balochistan's innings saw regular fall of wickets, with the team being all out in the 20th over.

Sindh's bowlers delivered a disciplined performance, with Irfan (B2) and Muhammad Idrees Saleem (B1) taking 3 wickets each. Irfan's economical spell of 4-0-15-3 was particularly impressive, significantly containing Balochistan's scoring rate.

In response, Sindh Blind chased the target with remarkable ease, scoring 177 runs for the loss of only 2 wickets in 13.3 overs. M Safdar (B3) was the star of the innings, remaining unbeaten on 97 off 48 balls, hitting 17 fours at a strike rate of 202.08. Ayoub Khan (B2) provided excellent support with a rapid 54 off 32 balls, including 6 fours and 2 sixes.

The partnership between Safdar and Ayoub set a solid foundation, and despite losing Ayoub and Muhammad Shoaib (B1) in quick succession, Sindh comfortably reached the target. Sanwal Shahzada (B3) remained not out with 9 runs off 6 balls, ensuring Sindh's victory. Balochistan's bowlers struggled to contain Sindh's aggressive batting. Haroon Khan (B2) conceded 55 runs in his 4 overs, while Imran Sarwar (B3) and Mohsin Khan (B3) also faced a tough time against Sindh's batsmen. Bashir Khan (B1) was the only bowler to take wickets, with figures of 2-0-24-2. Muhammad Safdar was declared Man of the Match.

Man of the Tournament includes Muhammad Salman (B1 Category), Badar Munir (B2 Category), Akmal Hayyat (B3 Category) and Nisar Ali (Best Wicket Keeper). The dignitaries present in the final were Gen (R) Ayyaz Rana, Col (R) Khalid Bashir, Principal APS, Tariq Mehmood, Ex-DG Sports KP, Syed Sultan Shah, President World Blind Cricket Ltd, Syed Salman Tariq Bokhari, Director Marketing PBCC, Muhammad Bilal, Director Cricket Operations PCB, Tajamul Hussain, President Abbottabad Cricket Club of the Blind and Shaukat Jadoon, Representative PCB.

Brian Lara picks USA over Pakistan to qualify for T20 World Cup Super 8



A Sports

LAHORE: West Indies' great Brian Lara has backed the United States of America (USA) instead of Pakistan to qualify for the Super 8 of the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024.

The Men in Green are relying on the results of other teams after they lost two out of their three games in the group stage of the marquee event.

The Babar Azam-led Pakistan faced USA, the co-hosts of the T20 World Cup 2024, in their opening game and were handed a shocking defeat in the super over.

In their second game, Pakistan faced another heartbreak as they failed to chase down the 120-run target set by arch-rivals India in New York on June 9.

However, they kept their hopes alive by defeating Canada on June 11. Reacting to the qualification scenarios of the team, Brian Lara said that Pakistan had a chance to qualify for the next round, however, he is backing the USA to join India in the Super 8s from Group A.

"Of course mathematically they (Pakistan) have a chance. I think the USA just got to take care of a win in their last game, they do that and they qualify," he added.

"But we're hoping that they get to win plus the USA lose their game. So my money is on the USA, I think they're full of confidence and they would want to make it to the Super 8 that will be so huge, historic for US cricket," the former West Indian batter said.

Babar Azam's men are set to take on Ireland on June 16 in their last group-stage game.

They will not only need to defeat Ireland but also hope that the USA, who are second in Group A standings, lose their game. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the Super 8 round of the T20 World Cup 2024.

Weather may ruin Pakistan's chances of qualification to Super Eight

Sports Desk

LAHORE: Pakistan cricket team's fate hangs in balance after persistent inclement weather in Lauderhill, Florida is likely to wash away the USA versus Ireland fixture of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup to be played in Lauderhill, Florida on Friday.

Pakistan's hopes of qualification to the Super Eight Stage in West Indies may remain alive if USA loses against Ireland on June 14 (Friday) while Pakistan wins its contest against the Irish team on June 16 (Sunday) at the same venue. Pakistan are currently placed third on the Points Table with two points from three matches while USA sit second with four points from as many

matches but Pakistan enjoy small advantage on the run rate.

A no result between USA and Ireland will earn both the teams one point and it will be enough to take USA team to the Super Eight stage in its maiden appearance at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Even a no result match will propel USA to the next stage by virtue of its narrow win against Pakistan. USA also beat Canada in a spectacular run-chase in the opening match of the World Cup.

According to the weather pundits Accuweather, the maximum temperature forecast is 29 degree Celsius with couple of showers and a heavy thunderstorm; cloudy and humid while additional rain can lead to flooding problems. A 12.1 mm of rain



is the forecast in the morning and all the matches at the venues in the USA are being played in the day. Heavier rain is expected in the afternoon on Friday while the chances of rain and thunderstorm are minimum.

Pakistan cricket team's practice session scheduled for Thursday in Lauderhill, Florida was also

cancelled due to a wet outfield, according to the team's Media Manager Raza Kitchlew. The team members attended light physical training session.

Senior sports journalist Muhammad Yousaf Anjum told APP from Lauderhill Florida that the field is soggy at the ground due to persistent rain for 10 hours the

other day, adding that a match between USA and Ireland is only possible if the rain relents tonight. "It did not rain in Lauderhill as we talked to Muhammad Yousaf Anjum."

The stadiums in the USA are not well equipped like the other cricket playing nations and Lauderhill, Florida stadium does not have Super Soppers to clear the water from the cricket field in case of rain," Yousaf Anjum said, adding that in the absence of right facilities, the possibility of the match tomorrow looks a far cry.

Yousaf Anjum said 'let's keep our fingers crossed and hope there is no rain tonight in Lauderhill so that a game could be played between the USA and Ireland.'

Israeli aggression

A Palestinian woman walks among the rubble of a damaged building, which was destroyed during Israel's military offensive, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday.



Photo: Reuters

Palestine family lives atop rubble of demolished home in Gaza

Reuters / News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The al-Kahlout family is living on memories in Gaza after being displaced by Israeli bombardment and then returning to live in a large tent pitched atop the rubble of their home.

"We are staying in this tent because this is our place and home. It's our house, we can't abandon it, it has our dreams and memories," said Umm Nael al-Kahlout, whose son was killed earlier in the

Hamas-Israel war.

"We had good memories in this house, I'm trying to heal our pain and find a place to stay. We can't stay away from our home, even if there are fierce (Israeli) strikes, we'd leave for a day or two then we'd be back in our place."

Many Palestinian families share their plight as Israeli air strikes and heavy shelling has killed tens of thousands of people and reduced much of the Gaza Strip to ruins since Hamas carried

out a cross-border attack on Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages.

Many homes like that of the al-Kahlouts have been pulverised, displacing families, some of whom have returned in hope that at least part of their dwellings might have survived air strikes and shelling.

The al-Kahlouts' house, part of a vast swathe of concrete rubble in the densely built-up northern Gaza town of Beit Lahia, consisted of five

floors, which all collapsed. But the family remain attached to their home, clinging to the destruction.

"Despite all of this struggle that we are going through and the tragedies we have witnessed, we have roamed around, and we couldn't live anywhere else but here," said Ismail al-Kahlout, Umm Nael's husband.

"Five families eat, sleep, and stay in this tent you see here." Umm Nael hangs clothes to

dry on a rope and waters her plants. She sorts food pots and places them on an open fire.

"Why all this suffering? What did we do wrong to deserve all of this? We are helpless, we don't have any hand in all of this (war)," she said.

"We couldn't save anything from the house, from the work (studio) or from the furniture, everything went under the rubble. These are old items. I'm cleaning them up as much as I can."

Pakistan welcomes UN report on Palestine; reiterates call for Israel's accountability: FO spokesperson

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday reiterated its call for holding Israel accountable for its grave crimes in Gaza and urged the global conscience to force Israel towards an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and bringing an end to the war on the Palestinian people.

"Pakistan believes the time has come to hold Israel accountable for its grave crimes... In this context, Pakistan notes positively the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2735 and express-

es hope for a permanent and sustainable ceasefire and an end to the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said at her weekly press briefing.

She said that Pakistan welcomed the June 12 report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel.

"The findings of the commission of inquiry have confirmed reports of Israeli war crimes, including starvation as a method of



warfare, murder or willful killing, intentionally directing attacks against civilians,

forcible transfer, torture, and inhuman and cruel punishment," she remarked.

The report called the Israeli authorities responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the military operations and attacks in Gaza since 7 October 2023.

Based on the interviews with victims and witnesses, hundreds of submissions, satellite imagery and forensic medical reports, the report calls for holding Israel accountable.

Calling this week important for Pakistan's diploma-

cy for Palestine, she apprised the media of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar's visit to Turkey on June 8 to attend the extraordinary meeting of the D8 Council of Foreign Ministers, held to discuss the situation in Gaza. At the moot, Dar called for an urgency of an unconditional ceasefire, lifting of the siege, and unimpeded flow of aid for the Palestinian people, besides the efforts to end the war.

On the sidelines, he met with the foreign ministers of Turkey, Malaysia, and the acting foreign minister of Iran.

Punjab govt proposes tax increase in Finance Bill 2024-25

Bureau Report

LAHORE: The Punjab government proposed increase in the rate of court fees, stamp duty, tax levied on immovable properties in urban areas on the basis of capital value (DC rate) instead of rental value in the Finance Bill for the fiscal year 2024-25 presented in Punjab Assembly session by the Provincial Finance Minister Mian Mujtaba Shuja-ur-Rehman, here Thursday.

According to the proposals, the government will have the power to declare any property as high value property, the assessing authority will be able to audit the self-assessment of the property and if a person is underpaying tax or tax evasion. If he tries to do so, he will be fined in addition to the hidden or stolen tax.

In the Finance Bill for the next financial year, it has been recommended to amend the Motor Vehicle Taxation Act, 1958 that motorcycle and A Lifetime Token Tax of Rs 1500 will be levied on a scooter and if it is sold within 10 years, a rebate of 10 percent is recommended on its Token Tax every financial year while Token Tax on a vehicle is levied on the invoice value. It has been proposed to increase the cess duty for labor welfare under the Labour Act 1967.

In the different series of column three of schedule one of the Court Fees Act, 1870, it has been suggested that the court fee should be charged at Rs 100

instead of Re.01 and 50 paise; Rs 500 instead of Rs 2, Rs 7.5, Rs 15, and Rs 20.

In the Finance Bill, by amending the Stamp Act 1899, an increase in stamp duties has been proposed, according to which the stamp duty which was of Rs 100 has increased to Rs 300; the stamp duty of Rs 1200 has increased to Rs 3,000. Similarly, in Article 17, the stamp duty increased from Rs 100 to Rs 500; in Clause A of Article 48, stamp duty has been increased to Rs 2,000 instead of Rs 500; and, in the clause (bb) the stamp duty will be Rs 3,000 instead of Rs 1200. Similarly, in Article 54, and 61 it has been proposed to replace the word 100 with 1000.

In the Finance Bill for the next financial year, the Punjab Urban Immovable Property Tax Act, 1958 has been amended and it has been proposed that property tax on properties in the cities of the province will now be collected according to the capital value (DC rate) instead of the rental table. The government will have the authority to declare any property as a high value property. The property owners will be informed about the specific procedure for assessing the value so that they can self-assess their property. However, the assessing authority will be able to audit the self-assessment of the property and if a person under pays tax or tries to evade tax, he may be fined in addition to the amount of tax evaded.

If a person does not self-assess his

property, the authority will give him a two-week grace period. For capital value tax collection, it has been proposed that residential property worth Rs 5 million will be exempted from tax while on the commercial property of the same value, tax will be collected at the rate of 0.07 percent; the residential and commercial property above Rs 5 million and up to Rs 10 million will be taxed at the rate of 0.07 percent; residential and commercial property valuing above Rs 10 million and up to Rs 25 million will be taxed at 0.08 percent; and property worth above Rs 25 million, the tax rate will be 0.09 percent.

If the tax payable on or before 31-12-2024 is less than taxes, residential property worth Rs 5 million will be exempted from tax, while commercial property will be taxed at the rate before 31-12-2024. Residential and commercial property worth Rs 5 million and up to Rs 10 million will be taxed with an increase of 10 percent before 31-12-2024. Residential and commercial property worth Rs 10 million and up to Rs 25 million will be taxed with an increase of 10 percent. Residential and commercial property worth Rs 25 million and of above value before 31-12-2024 will be charged with an increase of 10 percent. Residential and commercial property worth Rs 25 million and of above value before 31-12-2024 will be charged with an increase of 20 percent.

In the proposed finance bill for the next financial year, the Punjab Motor Vehicle Taxation Act, 1958 is proposed to be amended. It has been suggested

that a lifetime token tax of Rs 1,500 will be collected for motorcycles and scooters and if it is sold within ten years, a rebate of 10 percent has been recommended on its token tax every financial year. In Punjab, in the coming financial year, it is proposed to collect vehicle token tax on invoice value instead of engine power. A vehicle with an engine of more than 1,000 cc will be charged a registration fee of Rs 20,000 and if this registration is transferred in 10 years then 10 percent rebate will be given on it every financial year.

Token tax of 0.2 percent of the invoice value will be charged on vehicles with engine power of more than 1000 cc and less than 2000 cc. Similarly, a tax of 0.3 percent of the invoice value will be charged on a vehicle with an engine of more than 2,000 cc. If the annual tax rate is lower than the above tax rate, then the annual token tax will be charged on the basis of the old rate.

The Punjab government has proposed an increase in the cess duty for labor welfare under the Labor Welfare Act 1967 in the finance bill of the next fiscal year, according to which the Mines Labor Welfare Cess, which was previously fixed at Rs. 30 per tonne has been increased to Rs. 50.

Similarly, it has been proposed in the amendment of Section 39 Sub-section (1) of the Punjab Sales Tax on Services Act, 2012, now the authority will decide who will process the case.

VIRAL: Reporter questions FinMin over burdening salaried class in budget

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Finance Minister and other government officials failed to answer the tough questions asked by the Sanaullah From Dawn News during the post-budget press briefing session here in Islamabad.

During the post-budget briefing session, a Pakistani reporter lambasted the Pakistani government's fiscal policies and their impact on the common citizen.

The journalist highlighting the plight of an employee earning a meager Rs 45,000 per month, whose mobile SIM was blocked by the PTA for being a non-filer but, he pointed out, no action has been taken against the unexplained wealth of many high-ranking officials exposed in the Dubai Leaks.

"Why there is no accountability for generals, parliamentarians, and high-profile figures like Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, who own significant, unexplained properties in Dubai," reporter questioned the FBR chairman.

He criticized the apparent double standard where the assets of the wealthy are left uninvestigated while ordinary citizens face 'punishments' for minor violations.

He further condemned the government elites' privileges announced in the budget 2024-25,



including 5000 free electricity units, 2000 free gas units, and cars with fuel on government account, stated that the government don't want to do austerity measures but to only burden the salary class citizens.

The journalist pointed out the 30 percent increase in parliamentary funding and the expanded budget for the Prime Minister's House, show a lack of commitment to austerity measures by the government officials.

Addressing the public sector wage increase, he noted the disparity with private sector wages, citing a private bank where security guards earn only Rs 20,000 per month.

He also highlighted the stagnant wages of media workers, who have not seen a pay raise in a decade and often receive salaries in cash, leading to tax discrepancies.

The Finance Minister in response to the journalist's critique over Budget 2024-25 agreed with the points highlighted by the reporter stated that "the actions have to speak louder than words," however, failed to answer reporter's questions.

CCP Grants Time-Bound Exemption in Uber-Careem Deal

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has granted exemption till December 2025 on specific clauses of Non-Compete Deeds of Covenant and the Common Stock Purchase Agreement (CSPA) signed between Emirates Telecom group, Careem Networks FZ-LLC, Careem Technologies Holding Limited, Managing Founders and Uber Technologies Holding Limited.

Emirates Telecommunications Group Company is a UAE-based public joint stock company which offers a range of communication services across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Under the three separate Non-Compete Deeds of Covenant, the Emirates Telecommunications Group, the Managing Founders,

and the Uber Group commit not to engage in certain competing businesses under the covenants. They accordingly submitted an application to the CCP seeking exemptions on those Non-Compete clauses of the agreements.

Accordingly, the CCP while granting exemption till Dec 2025 have specified certain conditions therein to be met also. These inter alia include matters related to super-app and its availability for the consumers along with certain disclosures to be made. It is expected that the entry of the Emirates Telecommunications Group into the relevant market will further foster technical progress, leading to enhanced services for customers for delivery of food, groceries, physical goods, and micro-mobility ride services in the territory of Pakistan.

Religious minister collaborates with HOAP to ensure well-being of Private Hajj Scheme pilgrims

City Desk

MAKKAH AL MUKARRAMAH: Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Chaudhry Salik Hussain chaired a consultative meeting with the Hajj Organizers Association of Pakistan (HOAP) to ensure the well-being of Hajj pilgrims performing the religious obligation under the private scheme.

The meeting was part of the government's on-going efforts to enhance the facilities and services provided to Hajj pilgrims.

Representatives from Pakistani private Hajj companies, led by Hafiz Tahir Ashraf, also participated in the meeting and discussed the issues related to the pilgrims.

The session saw the attendance of key officials, including Secretary for Religious Affairs Zulfikar Haider, Director General Hajj Abdul Wahab Soomro, Joint Secretary Hajj Sajjad Haider Yaldram, Director Makkah Faheem Khan Afridi and Director Monitoring Cell.

During the meeting, the minister emphasized the importance of providing robust facilities for both govern-

ment and private Hajj pilgrims at the holy sites of Mina and Arafat.

"Ensure facilities for Hajj pilgrims in the holy sites," he asked the HOAP, underscoring the government's commitment to an inclusive and comprehensive Hajj experience.

Chaudhry Salik noted a marked improvement in the performance of private Hajj companies, acknowledging their efforts in better serving the pilgrims this year.

However, he also issued a stern warning to those companies that might exploit the pilgrims, promising strict action against any fraudulent activities. "Companies that deceive private Hajj pilgrims will be dealt with strictly," he warned.

Secretary Zulfikar Haider called on private Hajj tour operators to formalize their operations by entering into comprehensive agreements with Iqafa companies, which are responsible for organizing and managing pilgrimages.

He also urged HOAP to form an action committee dedicated to protecting the rights of private scheme pilgrims, ensuring that their needs and concerns were adequately addressed.

Empowerment of youth through...

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He said that skilled youth could play an active role in the global economy and boost the national economy. "The attention of the government is always focused on the promotion of modern education," he remarked.

The minister said when Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif was chief minister of Punjab, he introduced a laptop scheme for the students which was a unique initiative in the entire world.

Tarar said that the world had moved forward with technical education and artificial intelligence was introduced.