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Caretakers slash petrol price by Rs14 per litre

ISLAMABAD: The caretaker government, providing relief to the inflation-hit Pakistanis, slashed the price of petrol by Rs14 per litre.

In a notification, the Finance Division said the new prices of petroleum products for the fortnight — starting from December 16 and remaining in place till December 31 — were recommended by the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra).

Petrol's price has been dropped to Rs267.34 per litre, while diesel rate has been decreased by Rs13.50 per litre to Rs276.21 per litre, according to the Finance Division's statement.

The division further said that Kerosene oil's price has been slashed by Rs10.14 per litre to Rs191.02 and the light diesel oil will be available at Rs164.64 per litre after a reduction of Rs11.29.

The fuel prices were expected to fall in the next fortnightly review due to a substantial drop in global oil prices over the past two weeks.

The government reviews the prices of petroleum products every fortnight and adjusts them according to the international market trends and the exchange rate of the rupee.

Four security men martyred in two terrorist attacks in KP

TANK: Four security personnel were martyred and at least 10 others sustained injuries in two different terrorist attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Geo News reported on Friday.

At least two security personnel were martyred and seven others were injured after terrorists attacked Nala Joint Post in the Khyber district of the province. During the attack, the terrorists used heavy weapons including hand grenades.

According to Hayatabad Medical Complex Hospital administration, they received seven injured personnel of Frontier Constabulary, whose condition was said to be out of danger. The injured personnel were admitted to neurosurgery, surgical and orthopaedic wards of the hospital.

Separately, at least two policemen embraced martyrdom and three others sustained injuries in a terrorist attack in Police Lines in KP's Tank district.

According to the police, the militants targeted the Police Lines in the wee hours of Friday. In retaliation by the personnel, one terrorist was killed.

SC suspends LHC order on polling officers

CJP Isa-led bench asks electoral body to issue election schedule

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday evening ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to issue an election schedule the same day, while suspending the Lahore High Court's (LHC) order on the election officers — which had jeopardised the conduct of February 8 general elections.

A three-member bench,

which came on a plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawyer Umair Niazi, suspended ECP's decision to appoint ROs and DROs from the executive branch.

The single-member LHC bench then referred the matter to the court's chief justice, seeking the formation of a larger bench to hear the issue further. The LHC, on Friday, constituted a bench

CJP Isa then asked ECP's lawyer Sajeel Swati what was the hurry that he had to appear before the court at this hour. In response, Swati said: "Our petition regarding the February 8 elections needed to be heard today."

The CJP — who was set to leave abroad on Friday — asked the lawyer what would have happened if he had



headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Sardar Tariq and Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, took up an appeal filed by the ECP on the LHC order halting the training of district returning officers (DROs) and returning officers (ROs).

"The election commission should do its job [...] we will not micromanage you," CJP Isa told the ECP's team at the court, noting that there should be no hindrance in staging the polls now.

In its order on the ECP's petition, the SC bench ruled that the LHC would not hold further hearings on the petitions related to the appointment of polling officers and that any matter pertaining to the issue should be referred to the top court, Geo News reported.

The LHC's decision,

to hear the case on December 18. However, after the top court's order, the issue will not be taken up in the high court as the petitions have been deemed "non-maintainable" by the SC.

CJP Isa, while reading out the order, also issued a contempt of court notice to the PTI lawyer, seeking an explanation from him as to why proceedings should not be initiated against him.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Isa clarified that the benches are being constituted under the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023. "It was my wish that senior-most judges should be part of this bench and I proposed the same. However, Justice Ijazul Ahsan could not come due to his engagements. Then, I asked Justice Mansoor Ali Shah."

boarded his flight. "But well, it's my constitutional responsibility and I have to fulfill it."

The ECP's lawyer then informed the court that the LHC had suspended the commission's notification to appoint ROs and DROs from the bureaucracy.

"The LHC's order stopped the election process," Swati said.

When the court asked the lawyer to explain the issue further, he said PTI's Umair Niazi had moved the LHC seeking the appointment of the DROs and ROs from the judiciary and not from the executive.

Accepting the PTI's petition, he said, the LHC suspended the commission's notification.

The lawyer further said for the ECP, its priority was the judicial officers, but the judiciary declined.

Pakistan doesn't care two hoots about Indian SC Kashmir verdict, says PM

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has lashed out at the Indian Supreme Court for validating the Narendra Modi-led government's decision to abrogate the semi-autonomous status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

The premier stated this while addressing the media

in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Muzaffarabad district on Friday.

"Kashmir was never a part of India and will never be," the caretaker PM said adding that no court can decide the future of Kashmir.

PM Kakar's statement comes days after the Indian Supreme Court ruled that

Article 370 which guaranteed special status to IIOJK was a temporary provision, declaring the occupied territory an integral part of the country.

The Indian CJP-led bench held that the occupied territory became an integral part of India "which is evident from Article 1 and 370 of the constitution".

BD HC hosts weeklong 'Development Fair' to strengthen bilateral ties

KARACHI: The Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Karachi organized a weeklong "Development Fair" from December 7 to 13, 2023, aimed at showcasing Bangladesh's recent developments and fostering economic relations with Pakistan.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has emerged as a global 'Role Model' for socio-economic development. Currently ranked 35th in terms of GDP, Bangladesh is among the five fastest-growing economies globally. Fulfilling all criteria for graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status, Bangladesh is set to be officially graduated in 2026, boasting a present per capita income of USD 2824.

The fair provided visitors with insights into mega projects through briefings, audiovisual presentations, and interactive question & answer sessions. Exhibits included displays on significant initiatives such as the Padma Bridge, Dhaka Metro Rail, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Karnaphuli River Tunnel, Elevated Ex-



pressway in Dhaka, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's 3rd Terminal, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Model Masjids, Deep-Sea Port, Bangabandhu Satellite-1, Free Text Book distribution, and more.

Deputy High Commissioner S. M. Mahbubul Alam, during the inaugural and concluding ceremonies, highlighted Bangladesh's impressive socio-economic progress. He informed that Bangladesh boasts a near 100 percent primary enrollment rate, 100 percent electricity coverage, and a 100 percent children vaccination rate, with an overall literacy rate of around 80 percent. The country is self-sufficient in food production and ranks

2nd globally in Ready-Made Garments (RMG) production and export.

Alam emphasized Bangladesh's achievements in areas such as women education and empowerment, social safety nets, digitization, technology, healthcare services, agriculture, and SMEs. He invited potential investors, industrialists, entrepreneurs, and businesspersons from Pakistan to invest in Bangladesh and explore trade opportunities.

Highlighting the vision for the future, Deputy High Commissioner Alam stated that Bangladesh aims to become a trillion-dollar economy and the 9th largest consumer market globally by 2041. The government is working to

wards implementing "Vision-2041" to transform Bangladesh into an upper-middle-income country by 2031 and a developed and smart Bangladesh by 2041, with a prosperous and climate-resilient delta by 2100.

Visitors to the weeklong "Development Fair" expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to learn about Bangladesh's outstanding development stories and trade and investment opportunities. They expressed a desire for deeper and wider business and economic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. The fair served as a platform for fostering mutual understanding and strengthening bilateral ties between the two nations.



RAFAH: A Palestinian woman and children look on following Israeli bombardment on Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, on Friday, amid continuing battles between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

ECP issues much-awaited election schedule after SC order

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Friday night issued the much-awaited schedule for the general polls, set to take place on February 8, 2024, following the Supreme Court's order.

The polling process begins four days from today i.e., December 19, when the returning officer (RO) will issue a public notice, while the ECP also resumed the training for the ROs and district returning officers (DROs).

The election programme also applies to the reserved seats for women and non-Muslims in the national and four provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochis-

tan. The commission issued the election schedule late at night in line with the Supreme Court's orders.

In a hiccup to the polling process, the Lahore High Court (LHC) had suspended the commission's notification for the appointment of the ROs and DROs from the executive branch — in defiance of the SC's orders.

The LHC's verdict was issued on a petition filed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — the same party that had called for timely polls in a plea filed in the Supreme Court.

Due to the LHC's order, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sul-

tan Raja met with senior officials to ensure that everything went according to plan. Following detailed deliberations, the commission filed a petition in the top court seeking the annulment of the LHC's order. The SC accepted the plea a few hours back, putting the process back on track.

The political parties had also voiced concerns against a possible delay in the elections, noting that it was crucial for the democracy that polls take place on February 8.

In a statement a day earlier, the ECP had also rebuffed claims of the PTI that the upcoming general polls could be delayed, claiming that "all preparations" were completed.

COAS, US officials agree to enhance counter-terrorism, defence collaboration

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan and the United States have agreed to enhance cooperation on matters related to counter-terrorism and defence collaboration during Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir's official visit to Washington, said a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Friday.

The development comes during the Army chief's meetings with US officials, including Secretary of State Antony J Blinken, Secretary of Defence General (ret'd) Lloyd J Austin, Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, Deputy National Security Adviser Jonathan Finer and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Q Brown, according to the military's media wing statement.

"Both sides agreed to continue engagement for exploring potential avenues of bilateral collaboration in pursuit of shared interests," it added. During the meetings with

defence officials, counter-terrorism cooperation and defence collaboration were identified as core areas of cooperation. Both sides, the ISPR said, reiterated the intent to increase interaction and explore ways to expand the scope of mutually beneficial engagements.

During the meetings, Gen Munir underscored the importance of understanding each other's perspectives on regional security issues and developments affecting strategic stability in South Asia.

In this context, the Army chief also highlighted the importance of resolving the Kashmir issue in line with international law and relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

Gen Munir's visit comes at a time when Pakistan is facing immense security challenges from both internal and external terror outfits with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan suffering the most at the hands of terrorists.

Israel presses Gaza assault as top US official visits

GAZA STRIP, Palestinian Territories: Israel pressed its offensive in Gaza on Friday despite mounting international calls for restraint, with key backer the United States saying the war to crush Hamas must not lead to a long-term Israeli occupation of the territory.

The war began after Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7 that Israeli officials say killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

Vowing to destroy Hamas and bring home an estimated 250 hostages taken by militants into Gaza, Israel launched a massive military offensive that has left much of the besieged territory in ruins.

The health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip says the war has killed more than 18,700 people, mostly women and children.

Late Thursday in the southern city of Rafah near the Egyptian border, crowds of Palestinians used flashlights to search under the rubble of buildings for survivors following an Israeli strike.

"This is a residential neighbourhood, women and children live here, as you can see," said resident Abu Omar. "Three missiles on a residential neighbourhood that has nothing to do with any militant activities."

Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said troops were engaged in fighting with militants in two districts of Gaza City late Thursday.

"There will be more tough battles in the days to come," he said.

Street crime incidents claim 130 lives in Karachi this year

247 street crime incidents reported in city daily; over 82,632 incidents recorded in 11 months

By our correspondent

In Sindh, the government's claims remained just claims as street crime continued in Karachi and authorities were occupied with only making statements since this year began. The Citizens-Police Liaison Committee and Police record has revealed the truth behind the government and police claims.

Last year, the daily rate of street crime was 240, while this year, it has increased to 247. Robbers have claimed the lives of 130 citizens, injuring more than 600, in contrast to the government's assertions that efforts curb street crime are yielding results.

According to the CPLC, so far over 82,632 street crime incidents have been recorded this year.

The year 2023 has passed, but the control over street crime could not be achieved in Karachi, while an increase has been observed in cases of murder and robbery.

In Karachi, a total of 619 people have been reported murdered in the current year so far, according to police reports and data compiled by

newspapers. In 2023, dacoits took the lives of 130 citizens while over 6,00 people were injured resisting robberies, as per the reports. In 2022, the daily rate of street crime was 240, which has increased to 247 in 2023, according to the CPLC report.

In reference to street crime, August has proven to be the worst, with 8207 incidents of street crime reported.

The recorded street crime incidents include mobile phone snatching, car theft, motorcycle theft, and other theft.

In January 2023, a total of 7,249 street crime incidents were recorded, with the victims being deprived of 2,379 mobile phones, 227 cars and 4,643 motorbikes.

In February, 6,798 incidents were reported, with the victims being deprived of 2,255 mobile phones, 163 cars and 4,380 motorbikes.

In March, 7,822 incidents were reported, with the victims being deprived of 2,577 mobile phones, 188 cars and 5,057 motorbikes.

In April, 7,287 incidents were re-

ported, with the victims being deprived of 2,253 mobile phones, 161 cars and 4,873 motorbikes.

In May, 7,845 incidents were reported, with the victims being deprived of 2,472 mobile phones, 165 cars and 5,208 motorbikes.

In June, 7,141 incidents were reported, with the victims being deprived of 2,200 mobile phones, 193 cars and 4,748 motorbikes.

In July, 7,162 incidents were reported, with the victims being deprived of 2,092 mobile phones, 158 cars and 4,912 motorbikes.

In August, 8,207 incidents were reported, with victims being deprived of 2,582 mobile phones, 231 cars and 5,394 motorbikes.

In September, 8,070 incidents were reported, with victims being deprived of 2,464 mobile phones, 207 cars and 5,399.

In October, 7,866 incidents were reported, with victims being deprived of 2,446, 207 cars and 5,213 motorcycles.

In November 7,185 incidents were reported, with victims being deprived of 2,272, 189 cars and 4,724 motorcycles.

Sindh

Empowering Advocacy: Sindh Human Rights Commission Hosts UN Mechanism Training in Sukkur

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: In a significant stride towards advancing human rights advocacy, the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) organized a one-day training workshop on the UN mechanisms, titled "Strengthening Human Rights Advocacy" in Sukkur on Thursday.

The Chairperson of SHRC Iqbal Ahmed Detho highlighted the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as the corner-

stone of human rights, and outlined the commission's objectives, focusing on addressing and redressing human rights violations and abuses. Detho also emphasized the accessibility of SHRC's complaint form, encouraging individuals to report instances of rights violations. The participants gained valuable insights into UN human rights, with Detho presenting case studies that showcased successful advocacy outcomes achieved through collaborative efforts.

CEO of PAHEL PAKISTAN Deedar Ali Mirani emphasized the critical importance of strengthening human rights advocacy, particularly through UN mechanisms. Mirani highlighted the collaborative efforts between PAHEL and SHRC in championing human rights causes in the region. Provisional Coordinator of SAAHIL Barkat Ali Ansari contributed to the workshop by delving into child rights advocacy, presenting a strategic approach aligned with international frameworks.

Project Lead of SRSO Khan Mohammad Mangi played a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and network-building among participants, emphasizing shared objectives in advancing human rights advocacy. The workshop concluded with a dynamic Q&A session, facilitating an exchange of ideas and insights. The participants were recognized through certificates, marking a step forward in empowering advocates for human rights in the region.

Youth mysteriously killed in robbery

By Niaz Narijo

DADU: A young man, Jafar Shahani, was mysteriously killed within the limits of Makhdoom Bilawal Police Station in Dadu, however the deceased sister claimed that her brother was murdered in an ongoing personal enmity. The incident occurred at the residence of Sher Muhammad Solangi at Monder Link Road village.

According to preliminary reports from the police, Jafar Shahani met his untimely demise while reportedly resisting a robbery attempt. Authorities have stated that the young man was fatally attacked during the confrontation. The police are actively investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident, aiming to unravel the mystery behind Jafar's tragic death.

However, the plot thickens as allegations of a deeper motive surface. The sister of the deceased has come forward, claiming that Jafar was not a victim of a random robbery but was instead targeted due to an underlying enmity.

Controversy surrounds over decision of DF appointment

By Our Correspondent

SUKKUR: Caretaker Sindh Minister for Health Niaz Khalid Saeed has courted a controversy when he awarded additional charge of Director Finance of Ghulam Muhammad Mahar Medical College Civil Hospital Sukkur to Faheemullah Shaikh, who had earlier been suspended from the same post in Khairpur by Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqir.

According to the details, the contrary to the directives issued by the Caretaker Chief Minister of Sindh to suspend Director Finance of Khairpur Medical College (KMC) Civil Hospital Faheemullah Shaikh, the caretaker health minister did not comply the suspension order. Instead, Faheemullah has been given the additional responsibility of Director Finance at Ghulam Muhammad Mahar Medical College Civil Hospital Sukkur.

The decision to suspend Faheemullah Shaikh was made following the caretaker chief minister's

surprise visit to the KMC Civil Hospital Khairpur on October 25, 2023. Expressing dissatisfaction with the facilities, the CM had ordered the transfer of MS Civil Hospital Khairpur Dr. Abdul Qadir Bhutto and suspension of Director Finance Faheemullah Shaikh.

Notably, the Sindh Health Department, instead of enforcing the suspension order, appointed Faheemullah on an additional post of Director Finance in Sukkur. When contacted, Secretary Health Dr. Mansoor Abbas Rizvi declined to provide a statement on the matter, stating that his office is reluctant to comment on the decision to reward an individual who was suspended by the caretaker chief minister of Sindh.

However, he confirmed that, on the orders of the competent authority, Minister Health, his office issued a notification of appointment of Faheemullah Shaikh with additional charge of Director Finance at Ghulam Muhammad Mahar Medical College Civil Hospital Sukkur.

ATC Court Sukkur awards death sentence in policeman's murder case

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Sukkur made a significant announcement on Thursday, delivering a verdict of death by hanging for two undertrial prisoners convicted in the murder of a police officer. The presiding judge, Mr. Syed Shakil Hyder Shah of ATC Court-11, Sukkur, issued the verdict after thorough scrutiny of the registered First Information Report (FIR), evidence, witness statements, cross-examinations, and arguments presented by the lawyers of both the complainant and the accused.

According to reports, the judgment was rendered against undertrial prisoners Zaheer Chachar and Waqar Chachar. The charges relate to the murder of Police Officer Farzan Ali in the year 2020 within the jurisdiction of Adilpur Police Station in Ghotki.

Sports

Pakistan dig in as Lyon edges closer to 500 Test wickets

PERTH, Australia: Australian spin king Nathan Lyon moved to within three wickets of joining the elite 500 club Friday as Pakistan dug deep to stay in touch on day two of the opening Test in Perth.

The visitors were 132-2 at stumps, trailing by 355, with a dogged Imam-ul-Haq not out 38 and nightwatchman Khuram Shahzad on seven after they lost skipper Shan Masood late in the day. But it was a slow grind after Aamer Jamal took 6-111 on debut to help dismiss the hosts for 487 in their first innings.

Mitchell Marsh starred with 90 after David Warner's defiant 164 on day one.

"Probably would have liked to have a couple (more) wickets, but we're happy with the score we got," Australian wicketkeeper Alex Carey said.

"We need to come back tomorrow and hit the right areas once again. We probably missed our lengths a

bit, will have a chat tonight and come up better tomorrow."

Abdullah Shafique was the first to fall in reply, getting a big inside edge from Lyon to Warner at leg slip after battling to 42. It was the veteran Lyon's 497th Test wicket as he closes in on 500 to join a group of just seven other players.

Haq was stoic at the other end, weathering a fiery bowling blitz from Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins on a pitch that still had some zip.

It took him 85 deliveries before his first boundary, guiding one fine off his hip.

An aggressive Masood made 30 before his stay ended 10 minutes before close, caught behind by Carey off Starc on review.

Masood had earlier taken a nasty blow to the back when he turned to avoid a Haq drive but was able to continue after treatment.

The visitors kept in the hunt for a first Test win in

Australia since 1995 by dismissing the hosts early in the second session, after the home side went to lunch at 476-7.

Marsh was bowled by paceman Shahzad for 90 on the first ball back and the tail collapsed with impressive speedster Jamal in the thick of the action.

"Quite satisfied the way the bowlers were able to fight back," said Pakistan bowling coach Umar Gul.

"I'm quite confident and quite happy with the performances, the way they brought us back from the first session on the first day."

Australia had resumed on 346-5 after dominating the opening day, with Warner hitting 164 to silence his critics. Marsh began on 16 and Carey 15, with Pakistan desperate for an early breakthrough.

But the tourists struggled to make an impact on another scorching day, with some pedestrian bowling before Jamal was introduced.

MLS unveils measures to speed up play in 2024

NEW YORK: Major League Soccer's heads on Thursday approved the introduction of new rules for injuries and substitutions next season designed to speed up play.

The measures were given the green light at a meeting of the league's board of governors on Thursday.

From next season, a new off-field treatment rule will be adopted across the US professional soccer league.

Under the protocol, referees will halt play when a player with a suspected injury remains down on the field of play for 15 seconds or more.

The player in question will then be removed from the field for further treatment on the sidelines, for a period of at least two minutes before being permitted to return.

The two-minute rule will not be enforced for injuries that are caused by a yellow or red card offense. Exceptions are also granted for goalkeeper injuries and head injuries.

Ahmed Shehzad voices disappointment over PSL snub

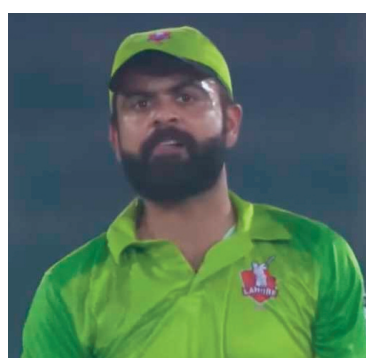
Ahmed Shehzad expected to make decision about his future in PSL tomorrow

LAHORE: Pakistan cricketer Ahmed Shehzad expressed on Thursday his disappointment for not being selected in the ninth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Sources divulged that Ahmed Shehzad had contacted people close to him in line with his future cricketing career.

Ahmed Shehzad is expected to make the decision about his future in the PSL tomorrow.

Islamabad United batter Azam Khan said on Wednesday that he was currently working on his fitness ahead of the ninth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Expressing his thoughts, Azam made it



He highlighted the importance of adaptability, saying, "I believe in making a conscious effort to play in any position where the team requires my skills. Wherever the team needs me, I will strive to play and make a positive impact."

Regarding his approach to the game, Azam Khan emphasised, "I focus on my game, and my primary responsibility is to perform."

Azam Khan expressed his determination for the upcoming season, stating,

"The effort will be to perform wherever the team needs me. The collective goal is to deliver standout performances for Islamabad United."

clear that he wants to clinch title of the United in the upcoming edition of the domestic premium tournament.

Metropole

Book fair attracts thousands more on 2nd day

By our correspondent

Former senator and educationist Khushbakht Shujaat has said Pakistani children are very talented, but their training is being done properly by their parents due to which they are suffering from mental disorders.

"Today's parents are definitely educated but the training of children is lacking due to which children are suffering from mental disorders. There is to a dire need to educate the children and pay attention to their training," she said while speaking during a visit to the 18th Karachi International Book Fair being held at the Karachi Expo Center under the Pakistan Publishers and Booksellers Association.

Association chairman Aziz Khalid, KIBF convener Waqar Matin, deputy convener Nasir Hussain, Nadeem Mazhar, M. Iqbal Ghaziani, Iqbal Saleh Muhammad, Nadeem Akhtar, Kamran Noorani, Saleem Abdul Hussain, Saad Bin Aziz, Asghar Zaidi and Owais Mirza Jameel were also present.

No tolerance for artificial shortage of medicines: Baqar

Sindh Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqar on Friday said there is no shortage of insulin (anti-diabetic drug), anti-rabies vaccine (ARV) and anti-hypertensive drugs in the province, and directed the health department to ensure the availability of these drugs in every government hospital.

"I will not tolerate if any patient suffered due to artificial shortage or black marketing of the medicines," he told the health department.

The CM had received complaints that there was an acute shortage of insulin, ARV and anti-hypertensive drugs in the government hospitals and even in the market.

In the light of the complaint, Justice (retd) Baqar sought a detailed report about the available stock of the medicines in the government hospital and in the market.

The health dept told him that 2,955 vials of the ARV,

84,252 vials of insulin and 2,003,967 packs of anti-hypertensive drugs were available at the government hospitals.

The report regarding the availability of the said medicines in the open market said that 187,138 packs of anti-hypertensive drugs, 20,700 vials of the ARV and 23,486 vials/pens of insulin were available in the market.

The report said that two local pharmaceutical companies, Getz Pharma and Elli Lilly Pakistan, were producing insulin. Of them, the Getz Pharma informed the health department that they were producing insulin in sufficient numbers keeping in view the market demand while the other company said it was facing a problem relating to the import of insulin due to the delay in the approval letter of import from the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap).

The CM took up the matter with Drap authorities and urged them to ensure timely approval of import letters so that patients may not suffer.

The report said that as far as the ARV was concerned, it was mostly imported as the National Institute of Health (NIH) Islamabad was the only institute in the country that produced it. According to the report, the generation capacity of NIH is not sufficient to cater to timely needs of hospitals.

The CM talked to the federal government to ensure the availability of ARVs in the market.

It may be noted that the registration, manufacturing, import and pricing of medicines are within the purview of Drap under the federal government, whereas, the sale of such drugs is a provincial subject.

The interim CM has directed the health department to activate its drug inspectors to ensure the availability of the said medicines in the market and any kind of black marketing or artificial shortage would not be tolerated.

contradictory statements with regard to the incident as on the one hand, it was stated that alleged militants of the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army were killed in the operation of the police and Rangers, and on the other hand, the Sindh United Party's (SUP) general secretary said those killed were supporters of the SUP and they were killed during a protest for the release of detained student Liaquat Jalbani, who was in the custody of law enforcement agencies.

They submitted that as per media reports, the SUP's Benazirabad president identified the dead as Akhan Ali, his brother Nizamuddin, Mehar and Sajawal, while Allahad and his other son Imamuddin received injuries.

They said two different versions had been narrated in the FIRs registered by villagers and the police against each other.

Shaheed Benazirabad DIG told to trace persons involved in Sakrand villagers' killings

By our correspondent

The Sindh High Court (SHC) has directed the Shaheed Benazirabad DIG to trace the persons involved in the alleged extrajudicial killings of four persons and injuring of nine others in the Marri Jalbani village in Sakrand town.

The direction came on Friday on a petition seeking a judicial probe into the killing of four villagers on September 29. The DIG filed a progress report of the case submitting that he had recorded statements of witnesses and the investigations had revealed that the incident was committed by 10 to 12 unidentified persons. He sought further time to trace the whereabouts of those unidentified persons.

A division bench comprising Justice Naimatullah Phulpoto and Justice Amjad Ali Sahito granted time to the

officer and directed him to trace the unidentified persons involved in the killings.

The DIG submitted that he had also filed a report before the judicial magistrate concerned. Observing that the matter needed further investigations, the high court directed the judicial magistrate not to pass any order on the police report till further orders.

A counsel for the Rangers also filed comments on the petitions. The high court directed the police officers to submit a progress report by January 15.

Senior advocates Tahmasp Rasheed Razvi, Zulfiqar Ali Jalbani and Aaqib Rajpar had submitted in the petition that four persons were killed and nine others, including women, injured in the incident that took place on September 29. They submitted that there were

Business

Rupee strengthens on higher FX reserves, IMF hopes

KARACHI: The rupee gained for a second day on Friday, supported by improved dollar supply and a rise in the country's foreign exchange reserves, dealers said.

The rupee closed at 283.26 per dollar in the inter-bank market, up 0.09 percent from Thursday's close of 283.51. It was unchanged at 284.50 in the open market.

Dealers said the rupee was buoyed by increased dollar inflows from exporters and remittances, which met the demand from importers and corporates.

The rupee also benefited from positive data on the foreign exchange reserves, which increased by \$99 million to \$12.206 billion as of Dec. 8, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

SBP raises farm loan target by 26.7pc for FY24

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan has set a higher farm credit disbursement target of Rs2.25 trillion for the current fiscal year, up 26.7 percent from the previous year, to support the agriculture sector and meet the growing demand for such loans, it said on Friday.

The SBP said banks had lent Rs1.776 trillion to farmers in the last fiscal year, despite challenges such as floods, showing a year-on-year growth of 25.2 percent and meeting 97.6 percent of Rs1.819 trillion target.

"The stellar growth of 30 percent during July-October 2023 gives optimism that we are on track to comfortably achieve the disbursement target," the SBP's governor Jameel

Ahmad said at the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) annual meeting, which took place in Lahore on Thursday.

He urged the banks to intensify their efforts to not only meet but also surpass the target.

Ahmad emphasised the need to strengthen and promote growth in the agriculture sector, which is pivotal for the socioeconomic development of the country. He urged the banks to ensure easy, timely, and hassle-free access for farmers to all financial services including credit, deposits, payments, etc.

He commended the concerted efforts of banks, specialised banks, microfinance banks, and microfinance institutions that led to these achievements, showcasing the sector's strength and adaptability in the face of challenges. The

SBP's governor also showed optimism about the strong recovery in the agriculture sector, paving the way for a projected real GDP growth in the range of 2 - 3 percent in FY2024.

Acknowledging the challenges, particularly attrition of borrowers, the SBP's governor informed the ACAC that the SBP will engage with each bank individually to develop plans and strategies to achieve a sustainable increase in agri borrowers continuously. Ahmad advised banks to not only develop their agrifinance capacity but also develop partnerships with microfinance institutions to increase the outreach of agriculture and rural finance services.

He also emphasised the critical need to improve the productivity of farmers to make them a better risk for the banks.

Weekly inflation stays at six-month high on food, gas prices

ISLAMABAD: Weekly inflation rate remained at a six-month high of 43.16 percent in the week ending on December 14, as soaring food prices continued to squeeze consumers, official data showed on Friday.

The main drivers of the inflation were food items, especially sugar, pulses, eggs, and rice, which saw sharp increases in their prices over the year.

The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) inched down by 0.06 percent week-on-week from the previous week, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). This was the highest level since the week ending on June 1, when the SPI inflation was 43.17 percent.

It was also the fifth consecutive week that the SPI inflation stayed above 40 percent. For the week ending November 16, SPI was 41.9 percent, November 23 (41.13 percent), November 30 (41.06 percent), December 7 (42.68 percent), and now at 43.16 percent.

The country is facing severe inflationary pressures. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) earlier this week, kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged at a record high of 22 percent, as it awaited signs of easing inflation pressures after a recent hike in gas prices. In response to high inflation, the SBP has increased interest rates by a total of 15 percentage points during the last two years.

The central bank expects the headline inflation to de-

cline significantly in the second half of FY24 due to contained aggregate demand, easing supply constraints, moderation in international commodity prices and favorable base effect. PBS data showed gas prices surged by a staggering 1108.6 percent or Rs1,569.4/MMBtu over the year for consumers using up to 3.3719 MMBtu, now reaching Rs1,711 rupees per MMBtu.

Similarly, cigarette prices increased by 93.2 percent, chili powder by 81.7 percent, wheat flour 81.4 percent, garlic 71.2 percent, broken rice basmati by 64.3 percent, rice IRRI-6/9 by 60.6 percent, gents' sponge chapal 58 percent, gents' sandal 53.4 percent, sugar 50.5 percent, gur 50.4 percent, and mash

pulse prices increased 45 percent over the same week of 2022.

As per the inflation bulletin, for individuals in the lowest income slab, earning up to Rs17,732 per month, the SPI inflation stood at 35.59 percent, while for those in the group spending more than Rs44,175 per month, it was recorded at 41.47 percent. For the middle quintile (Rs22,889 to Rs29,517), the weekly inflation was at 46.99 percent—the highest among all groups.

Out of 51 items whose prices the SPI monitors, 19 items (37.26 percent) witnessed an increase, 10 items (19.6 percent) recorded a decrease, while prices of 22 items (43.14 percent) remained unchanged.

Editor Eatasham

Karachi's escalating dog-bite crisis demands urgent action

The canine crisis gripping Karachi has intensified, pushing public hospitals to the brink as they grapple with a staggering surge in dog-bite cases. This urgent plea aims to shed light on the acute shortage of rabies immunoglobulin (RIG), a critical serum for severe animal exposures, exacerbating the already precarious healthcare situation in the city.

The epicenter of this crisis is the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK), where physicians report an alarming uptick in daily dog-bite cases over the past 10 days. Recent reports indicate that CHK has treated over 500 patients in the last three days alone—a notable spike compared to the typical monthly average of around 900 cases. The urgency of the situation is underscored by CHK's longstanding operation of a dedicated rabies prevention clinic for over 15 years.

The surge is not localized; it engulfs diverse neighborhoods such as Golimar, Lyari, Baldia, New Karachi, Manghopir, Orangi Town, Gadap Town, Korangi, Landhi Town, and Malir. Instances abound where a single dog has inflicted harm on multiple individuals, including children and elders. Noteworthy cases include referrals from a major tertiary care hospital, redirecting patients to CHK for RIG administration post-rabies vaccination.

The critical shortage of RIG is a pressing concern for both CHK and the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC), the two public hospitals on the frontline of dog-bite treatment. The supply from the health department has nearly ground to a halt, forcing hospitals to reallocate resources from their budgets to secure this vital serum. Even as the JPMC treats 150-200 dog-bite patients daily, it grapples with its own challenges in ensuring RIG availability.

Karachi's predicament is further exacerbated by the staggering report of over 13,000 dog-bite cases this year alone. Indicators point to the breeding season of canines—occurring twice a year—as contributing significantly to the spike.

As public hospitals confront an influx of patients coupled with a dire shortage of rabies serum, the absence of a comprehensive government initiative to address this escalating crisis is cause for concern. Urgent and targeted intervention is imperative to safeguard public health, necessitating immediate measures not only to address immediate shortages but also to implement sustainable strategies in controlling Karachi's burgeoning canine menace.

Resilient women

It's been a difficult few years for poor people in this country. Just a year after the pandemic era safety net expansion saw poverty fall to its lowest level on record, we saw a historic 60 percent increase as those programs expired.

Women and children have been among the hardest hit. In 2022, the last year we have data for, at least 32 million women and children were living in poverty. Despite that hardship, I feel some hope.

That's because I've spent the last few years working with poor and low-income people — mostly single moms — impacted by systemic poverty. Through helping them tell their stories, I've learned that they're some of the strongest — and most resilient — members of our society.

Take Amy Adams from rural Kentucky.

She has two associate degrees. Yet with a dearth of child care options, no public transit, and wages too low to afford even a second bedroom, her daily challenges are astounding. She walks to and from work late at night, depends on family for child care, and somehow fits her family of four into a small one-bedroom apartment.

Despite these challenges, Amy still gives her time as a member of a non-profit advocacy board to help other struggling mothers fight for policies that will improve their lives.

Or Joyce Kendrick. Joyce grew up in a middle-income family but suffered abuse as a child that led to lifelong physical and mental health challenges. The increase in food benefits and cash assistance during the pandemic briefly lifted her out of poverty. But when Congress failed to renew those critical supports, she fell right back in.

Yet even as she struggles to make ends meet, Joyce co-leads an Ohio chapter of the Poor People's Campaign, a national coalition of poor and low-income people working together for more just policies.

Growing up poor and escaping an abusive partner later in life, Trish Brown has benefited from safety net support not only to take care of her family, but also her community. She volunteers as a coordinating committee member of the Poor People's Campaign in Florida and gives back as the founder and director of Power Up People in Tallahassee.

Wisconsin mom Kali Daugherty's family was transformed by the expanded Child Tax Credit included in the American Rescue Plan, which cut child poverty by half nationally. With that help, she was able to return to school, get her child new clothes, and take her to a water park for the first time. When Congress let that expansion expire and these advances for families were reversed, Kali advocated for their return as a RESULTS expert on poverty.

Kazmyn Ramos, another RESULTS expert on poverty in Indiana, learned through generational poverty how key housing is to well-being. Believing that "housing should be seen as a human right and a community builder, not a wealth builder," she founded the affordable housing non-profit Seeking 1610.

My organization, the Institute for Policy Studies, partnered with the Poor People's Campaign to study the increase in suffering since the expiration of the pandemic era supports that helped these women keep their families heads above water.

Excerpted: "The Resilience of Low-Income Women". Courtesy: Counterpunch.org

By Mark Sappenfield

What if the way we're thinking about climate change is wrong? Or maybe, what if we should be thinking about it differently? When the words "climate change" come to mind, the pictures that often accompany them are political strife and environmental catastrophe.

Of course, those are crucial elements of the climate crisis. But what is the climate crisis about, really? I might argue it's about embracing change as much as regulating it. Can we enforce our way to climate safety through international treaties? Maybe, but maybe not. Public will for

dramatic steps is uncertain at best. But what are we really asking people to do? Turn off a light switch? Take a bus instead of the car? Buy a Tesla? Nearly two centuries ago, the Industrial Revolution reshaped human lives in a way the world had never seen before. New machinery changed the trajectory of what societies could accomplish. New tools have since given humans extraordinary power over their environment. We could essentially remake our world as we saw fit. And so we did.

Now the planet is telling us that, in our exuberance, we went too far. What we need is a new sense of balance. We need a new way of

living with the world that is neither preindustrial poverty nor postindustrial excess, but a demonstrable and more mature understanding of responsibility, for nature and

called regenerators in Stephanie Hanes' cover story this week. They are young people who have returned to the land, farming in more sus-

Facing the climate crisis surely requires individual sacrifice. But regenerative farmers see it differently — instead of austerity, sustainability practices seed resilient and flourishing farms

one another. The solution to climate change is really about finding this mindset, and perhaps no one understands this more intimately than the so-

tainable ways in an attempt to be pioneers of a new balance. Of course, not everyone needs to become a farmer to bend the arc of cli-

mate disruption. But we all need to think like they do within the context of our own lives. That is what climate change is demanding of each of us.

Intriguingly, this mindset, when consented to, doesn't bring poverty or endless sacrifice without reward, but rather renewal, wealth, and the sustaining bonds of closer interconnection. One couple in Stephanie's story turned to farming thinking they would just grow food for themselves. Their success, however, came with a realization: They couldn't eat all the crops they grew.

To their great surprise, people flowed to their food. They now supply produce

boxes to 20 families, Stephanie writes.

Change is always disruptive. But when we see only the disruption, we miss the opportunity for the progress and growth also inherent in change — and often found in no other way. Climate change is no different. And the Climate Generation sees this.

"It used to be ecology versus economics," the co-founder of one effort to support sustainable farming in Portugal tells Stephanie. "Now people realize it doesn't have to be that way. Instead of being exploited and exploiting nature, we can live differently." That begins with thinking differently.

Prospects of Economic Cooperation Between Central and South Asia

Uzbekistan's foreign policy, which is aimed at rapprochement and strengthening friendly and mutually beneficial relations with neighboring states, has created a solid foundation for the development of trade and other economic and investment cooperation between Central Asian countries. Central Asian countries cover a market area of 75.3 million people. In 2020, the total GDP of the CA countries reached \$291.1 billion and foreign trade turnover reached \$142.5 billion.

In recent years, the economy of Central Asian countries has shown high growth rates ranging from 5% to 7%, and even in the crisis year of 2020 the growth rates were negative only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. According to World Bank estimates, Central Asian countries will be able to restore the positive dynamics of GDP growth in 2021 and increase growth rates in 2022. Favorable conditions for mutual trade have been created between Central Asian countries within the framework of the following trade agreements:

All Central Asian countries, except for Turkmenistan, have been part of an "agreement on a free trade zone of the CIS," since 2011. This allows the participating countries to be free from import customs duties toward each other. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the WTO. Uzbekistan is actively negotiating for WTO membership. Turkmenistan in 2020 received observer status in the WTO. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as members of the EAEU, are in a common customs space. Central Asian countries also have bilateral agreements to create favorable conditions for mutual trade.

Although Central Asian countries are open to international and regional trade, labor and capital moves on multiple levels. They have great potential for building closer partnerships and integrated interactions with each other. In 2020, the total trade turnover (in goods, excluding trade in services) between Central Asian nations was \$12.2 billion and the total foreign trade turnover was \$145.5 billion. The share of intraregional trade in the total foreign trade turnover of Central Asian countries was 8.4%. At the same time, it should be noted that the participation of Central Asian countries in mutual intraregional trade varies.

The share of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in the volume of trade between Central Asian countries is lowest, with total trade turnover at 5.5% and 4.5%, respectively. The participation of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in intraregional trade is the highest 28.3% and 21.0%, respectively. Uzbekistan occupies an intermediate position with an indicator of 13.3%. The foreign trade of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is less focused on the regional market due to the predominance of hydrocarbons in their exports, which are mainly supplied to non-CIS countries (European countries, China, Russia) and most of the imported goods also go to these countries.

Due to the fact that the majority of the commodity exports of Central Asian countries are fossil natural resources, regional trade with each other occurs to a much lesser extent than sales to countries outside the region. In particular, in 2020 the share of gold in total exports of Tajikistan was 58.1%, Kyrgyzstan 50.2% and Uzbekistan 38.3%, which is supplied to Switzerland or Great Britain. About 66% of exports of mineral products from Kazakhstan are supplied mainly to Europe. The main share of Turkmenistan's exports, 70-80%, goes to China, where Turkmen natural gas is mainly exported.

In this regard, the share of mutual trade between Central Asian countries is much higher if their exports of raw materials (oil, gas and precious metals) to third countries are not taken into account. At the same time, Central Asian countries have great prospects for increasing the volume of intraregional trade in finished goods, which meets the interests of all countries in the region. The creation by Central Asian countries of regional value chains, including industrial and agricultural clusters, will contribute to an increase in the number of joint ventures for the production of finished goods that can be exported to third countries.

Regional integration will help reduce the costs of producers and promote the production of goods that are competitive in foreign markets. In addition, when the Central Asian countries carry out trade operations within the region, they have the shortest distances to deliver goods, which gives them advantages in savings on transport costs. The interests of the CA countries also meet the joint creation of international transport corridors and international transport infrastructure in the region, which will help to reduce transport costs in delivery of export products from Central Asia to world markets.

It should be noted that all countries in Central Asia are interested in increasing export volumes and diversifying their foreign trade, entering new foreign markets, as well as creating and using new transport routes. Currently, the main trade routes of Central Asian countries lie in a northern direction, encouraging areas of economic cooperation in the southern direction, including South Asian countries, which geographically include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. Economic Cooperation Potential between Central and South Asian Countries

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's trade volume with South Asian countries in 2020 was \$1.38 billion or 3.8% of the total foreign trade. In the commodity turnover of Uzbekistan with the countries of South Asia, the largest volume goes to Afghanistan (56.2%), India (32%) and Pakistan (8.9%). Trade with the Maldives and Nepal is insignificant, while there is practically no trade with

Bhutan. Uzbekistan's exports to Afghanistan make the main share (99.7%) of Central Asia's trade with Afghanistan, which makes Afghanistan a profitable trade and economic partner.

The main share of Uzbekistan's exports to Afghanistan is electricity (30% of exports), wheat flour and legumes (24.1%), as well as metallurgical products. There is also a plan to implement the investment in the "construction of a 500-kW power transmission line" in Surkhan-Puli-Khumri in Afghanistan. The length is 260 km and the cost is about \$150 million, and will be accomplished with loans from ADB and \$45 million financed by Uzbekistan. This transmission line will connect the power system of Afghanistan to the unified power system of Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

In November 2020, Uzbekistan's president signed two important documents concerning Afghanistan: The decree "on measures to further expand and strengthen economic cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and the decree "on measures to further develop the activities of special economic and small industrial zones in the Surkhandarya region and the city of Tashkent," which create new legal conditions for strengthening economic cooperation with Afghanistan.

The documents provide for the signing of an agreement on preferential trade between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and will bring the annual volume of mutual trade to \$2 billion by 2023. For these purposes, a free trade zone, the "International Trade Center Termez," is being created in the territory of Termez with Afghanistan, with an appropriate logistics infrastructure and a special visa-free regime.

On February 2, 2021, a meeting of the trilateral working group was held in Tashkent with the participation of the government delegations of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan

A close look at trade potential between Central and South Asia, especially through Afghanistan—a country that can serve as a potential trade partner and a trade catalyst between these two key regions

on the implementation of the Mazar-i-Sharif—Kabul—Peshawar railway project. As a result of the meeting, a joint roadmap was signed for the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif—Kabul—Peshawar railway. The construction of the railway will significantly reduce the time and cost of transporting goods between the countries of South Asia and Europe through Central Asia.

The railway will provide access to the Pakistani seaports of Karachi, Qasem and Gwadar and will connect the South Asian railway system with the Central Asian and Eurasian railway systems and significantly increase the transit potential of Central Asia. India ranks second in terms of Uzbekistan's trade with South Asian countries. At the same time, Uzbekistan's export volumes lag significantly behind imports, which mainly consist of pharmaceutical products in demand in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's exports to India mainly consist of textile products (13.6% share), base metals (8.4%), food products (5.8%), etc.

Uzbekistan's imports from India are growing mainly due to the growth of purchases of "pharmaceutical products," which is 47% of the total share. At the same time, investment cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector is successfully developing with India; joint ventures have been created in the territory of the "Andijan-Pharm FEZ." Branches of the Indian universities "Amity" in Tashkent and "Sharda" in Andijan were opened to train IT specialists. In recent years, trade and economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan have begun to develop actively and the volume of exports of finished and agricultural goods has increased.

In the structure of Uzbekistan's exports to Pakistan, food products make up 81%, textile products 10.5%, services 3.5%. The breakdown of imports from Pakistan: pharmaceutical products 37%, food products (potatoes, citrus fruits, rice, etc.) 36%, transport services 10%, chemical products 4.5%. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is interested in expanding cooperation with Pakistan in the transport sector and joint implementation of the above project for the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif—Kabul—Peshawar railway line.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's trade in South Asia is mainly with Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and less with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In 2020, its foreign trade volume was more than \$2.3 billion—or 2.3% of Kazakhstan's total foreign trade turnover. At the same time, the largest trade volume between Kazakhstan and South Asian countries goes to India - \$1.9 billion — which is 80% of its trade with South Asian countries. Trade with Afghanistan is \$401.8 million (17%).

Kazakhstan mainly exports oil (about 50% of its export volume), chemical elements and their compounds (ferroalloys, titanium, phosphorus), as well as silver in the form of powder to India. Kazakhstan's imports from India include medical equipment, medicines, textiles, tea products, etc. Kazakhstan is also interested in the development of the north-south transport corridor and the use of the Iranian port of Chabahar to increase trade with India and other countries of South Asia. Kazakhstan is a major supplier of food products to

Afghanistan, such as grain and flour products.

Kyrgyzstan

Among the Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan has the lowest amount of foreign trade with South Asian countries at \$61 million—or 1.0% of its foreign trade turnover—which is mainly (84%) made up of imports from India. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan—together with Tajikistan—is interested in the implementation of a project for the delivery of electricity from Central Asia to South Asia through the CASA-1000 (Central Asia - South Asia) transmission line. The project plans to supply 2 billion kWh of electricity from Kyrgyzstan and 3 billion kWh from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan from April to October every year. In February 2021, Kyrgyzstan plans to begin the construction of power lines on its territory within the framework of this project. It should be noted that the total cost of the CASA-1000 project is about \$1 billion.

Tajikistan

The foreign trade turnover volume of Tajikistan with the South Asian countries amounted to \$185.2 million or 4.0% of its total turnover in 2020. Tajikistan's main trading partners in South Asia are Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Due to its geographical position, Tajikistan is interested in the development of alternative transport routes, including through South Asian countries, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan. The nearest seaport for Tajikistan is the Pakistani port of Karachi (2.7 thousand km), while the distance to the Iranian seaport of Bandar Abbas is 3.4 thousand km.

Another important project for Tajikistan in South Asia is the CASA-1000 transmission line project to export electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Within the framework of the CASA-1000 project, Tajikistan plans to export 75 billion kWh of electricity within 15 years. In 2021, Tajikistan plans to complete the laying of power lines on its territory within the framework of this project. Currently, Tajikistan annually exports to Afghanistan up to 1.5 billion kWh of electricity.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is also actively developing trade and economic ties with the countries of South Asia. In 2019, the trade turnover amounted to \$462.3 million or 3.4% of its total turnover. The main trading partners of Turkmenistan are Afghanistan, India and Pakistan among the countries of South Asia.

The main share (70%) of Turkmenistan's exports to Afghanistan consists of mineral products (oil products and natural gas). In October 2020, the following agreements were signed between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan:

- Memorandum of Understanding between Turkmenistan and AfganGaz Enterprise on the creation and development of a natural gas market in Afghanistan

- Agreement on the purchase of electricity by Afghanistan within the framework of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan power transmission line (PTL) project

An important project of Turkmenistan—with the participation of South Asian countries—is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, with a capacity of 33 billion cubic meters of gas per year. The consortium for the construction of TAPI includes the state concern TurkmenGaz (owns a controlling stake), as well as Afghan, Pakistani and Indian gas companies.

Turkmenistan planned to complete the construction of the TAPI gas pipeline on its territory in 2020, and in 2021 begin laying the pipeline in Afghanistan.

Main Trade Partners in Central and South Asia

Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are the main trading partners of Central Asian countries in South Asia. At the same time, the most active trade and economic cooperation of Central Asian countries is with Afghanistan, due to its geographical proximity as well as the great dependence of the Afghan domestic market on the imports of food and industrial products. Central Asian countries are actively cooperating with India and Pakistan also within the framework of the SCO. In addition, India is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with the EAEU, which includes Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and with Uzbekistan to conclude a Preferential Trade Agreement.

At the same time, the increase in trade with Pakistan and India largely depends on the creation of reliable routes for the delivery of goods. The project for the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif—Kabul—Peshawar railway occupies a special place and will significantly reduce transportation costs of cargo between the countries of the region. Therefore, the main promising areas of cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia are new transport corridors that will provide access for Central Asian countries to the southern seaports, cooperation in the energy sector (export of electricity, natural gas, oil products), encouragement of mutual investments, as well as the expansion and diversification of foreign trade.

It should be noted that Afghanistan, which is a bridge between the two regions, will contribute to the further development of economic cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia. In this regard, the implementation of transport and energy projects in the territory of Afghanistan will create conditions to expand opportunities for building up trade, economic and investment ties, and strengthening transport and communication interaction between the countries of Central and South Asia.

Author: Center for Economic Research and Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan

Mutilating Gaza

It is not surprising that the international community will to survive and resist. This time, they will be fighting an existential fight, on the rubble of their destroyed homes and the graves of their killed kin, with nothing left to lose. They will not accept their fate quietly.

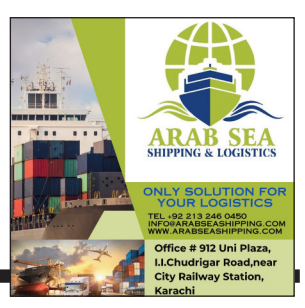
An unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe is in the making. Israel's collective punishment of the besieged population of Gaza has already killed more than 18,200 people, including at least 7,700 children. Israel's apparent plans to carve Gaza into pieces will only bring on more suffering, and violence. What should the international community do to put a stop to this disaster?

One can only hope that the world will not remain a passive spectator to this unprecedented, unlawful and egregious attack on an oppressed population for much longer and will

eventually be galvanised into action to stop this horrendous onslaught.

The United States and its Western partners, who are allowing and aiding Netanyahu's genocide in Gaza while disingenuously calling for a two-state solution, cannot be trusted to resolve this crisis and ensure the safety and dignity of the Palestinian people. Despite overwhelming support for the humanitarian ceasefire proposal at the UN Security Council — following the unprecedented invoking of Article 99 by Antonio Guterres — the US vetoed it. A few days later, the US found itself further isolated, voting, along with just nine other nations, against a similar UN General Assembly resolution.

Accepting to focus on the mere provision of the most urgent humanitarian relief, such as food, water and medical aid, to Gaza while allowing Israel to continue with its devastating assault on the enclave will achieve little other than giving Netanyahu's plans for Palestine another international seal of approval.



Governor Sindh Kamran Tessori invites Khurasan Razavi Chamber for investment in Karachi

By Diplomatic Correspondent

KARACHI: In a bid to enhance economic ties and foster investment opportunities, Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori extended a warm invitation to the Khurasan Razavi Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture, during his visit to Mashhad. The Governor's visit aimed at promoting bilateral economic cooperation and discussing potential investments in various sectors.

Members of the Khurasan Razavi Chamber accorded a warm welcome to Governor Sindh Tessori, engaging in discussions on trade delegations, investment prospects in the Sindh province, and other collaborative opportunities. Emphasizing the commitment to strengthening economic partnerships, the meeting focused on avenues in energy, health, agriculture, and additional sectors where Iranian investors could potentially contribute.

Governor Tessori affirmed that all necessary facilities would be extended to Iranian investors, demonstrating the province's dedication to facilitating a conducive environment for business growth. The discus-



sions also touched upon the significance of enhanced connectivity, with Governor Tessori highlighting the positive impact of Taban Air flights on bringing people from both countries closer. He noted that this connectivity would not only benefit ordinary citizens but also ease the travel for pilgrims visiting Mashhad.

Expressing gratitude for the hospitality extended during his visit, Governor Tessori highlighted the potential for mutually beneficial collaborations. Members of the Chamber commended the welfare measures implemented by Governor Sindh and expressed their appreciation for the proactive efforts to encourage

economic ties between Sindh province and Khurasan Razavi. As the Governor's visit fosters diplomatic and economic relations, the invitation to the Khurasan Razavi Chamber signifies a step towards increased cooperation and investment opportunities between the two regions.

Both PML-N, PTI running away from polls, asserts PPP

News Desk

KARACHI: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) spokesperson Faisal Karim Kundi claimed on Friday that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were running away from the general elections.

Expressing his thoughts in Islamabad, Kundi said: "We want timely elections in the country, irrespective of the fact, whether there exists a level playing field or not. Why not have the election schedule announced if the ordinance can be issued at night?" He maintained: "Will

the role of the Election Commission of Pakistan have to be performed by the Supreme Court (SC)? It has been proven that the PML-N and PTI are on the same page. It is up to the masses to decide the country's fate."

Read Also: Siraj sees 'political uncertainty' in country "The officers had been removed and hired on the instructions of the PML-N in Punjab. The transfers and postings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) had been done on the instructions of Pervaz Khattak," Kundi said.

PML-N senior leader Marriyum Aurangzeb made it clear on Friday that her party

was ready for the general elections on February 8.

Expressing his thoughts, Marriyum said: "The political parties are depending on the PML-N's preparations for the general elections."

"Those who led the country towards political instability cannot be forgiven. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is staging a conspiracy in a bid to halt the elections in the country," she said.

She stated: "The Election Commission Pakistan was having its preparations for holding the elections, but everything had happened to sabotage the elections in the country."

PML-N gears up for polls on Feb 8, avers Marriyum Aurangzeb

PML-N blames PTI for staging 'conspiracy' to halt elections

News Desk

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Marriyum Aurangzeb made it clear on Friday that her party was ready for the general elections on February 8.

Expressing his thoughts, Marriyum said: "The political parties are depending on the PML-N's preparations for the general elections."

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Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Hafiz Hamdullah said on Friday that his party was ready for the general elections on February 8.

Expressing his thoughts, Hamdullah questioned: "What is the need for creating doubts in holding the elections? The decision regarding the elections had already been made."

He took a jibe at the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying, "The PTI has a negative role to play in this regard. The PTI wants to get some time ahead of the general elections. The PTI's politics revolve around hypocrisy." Maulana Fazlur Rehman wants the supremacy of the parliament even today. We are ready to uphold the constitution and democracy and lead the country towards political stability," Hamdullah said.

Ready to hold elections on Feb 8: ECP

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) secretary stated on Friday that the electoral watchdog is ready to hold the elections on February 8.

The ECP's legal team reached the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SC). On the occasion, the ECP secretary said: "We are filing an application against the verdict of the Lahore High Court (LHC). With the blessings of the higher power, everything will be alright."

Earlier it was reported that the SC was expected to hear the case related to the general elections on Friday (today).

Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja appeared before the SC today, where he had a crucial meeting with Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa. Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan was also present during the meeting.

On this occasion, SC Justices Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan were also present.

Following the meeting, Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan left the SC premises.

The ECP on Thursday announced that it has successfully finalised all arrangements for the upcoming elections scheduled for February 8.

ECP's statement comes in response to allegations made by the Chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which the commission dismissed as a failed attempt to mislead the public.

Wahaj Ali tops UK publication's list as leading Pakistani celebrity of 2023

LONDON: In a remarkable achievement, Pakistani actor Wahaj Ali has been crowned as the top celebrity of 2023 by a prestigious UK showbiz publication, securing the ninth position globally in the coveted Top 50 Asian Celebrities In The World list.

Published by the renowned Eastern Eye newspaper, the list recognizes individuals who have excelled in various fields, including film, television, music, literature, and social media, based on their outstanding work, positive impact, breaking boundaries, fan attention, and inspirational contributions throughout the year.

Wahaj Ali, the only Pakistani in the top 10, outshone global celebrities across industries, including Hollywood and Bollywood, for his dedicated and exceptional performances. The hardworking actor expressed his gratitude, saying, "Even though it's nice to be recognized, my main focus continues to be giving my best every time for my fans."

The list, curated by Entertainment Editor Asjad Nazir, is a testament to Wahaj Ali's significant contributions to the entertainment industry, particularly highlighting his stellar performance in the record-breaking drama serial "Tere Bin," which garnered acclaim from diverse audiences worldwide.

Asjad Nazir praised Wahaj as the biggest surprise package of 2023, noting that he represented his country admirably with his exceptional work. "Wahaj Ali showed that he is one of this generation's finest Pakistani actors with strong performances throughout the year," stated Nazir. "He has laid the foundation for fantastic work in the future."

Global icon Shah Rukh Khan secured the top spot on the list, adding to his year of stunning achievements with blockbuster hits like "Pathaan" and "Jawan." Nazir highlighted Khan's transformative effect on the declining Hindi cinema industry, stating, "The history-making superstar eclipsed everyone else with his brilliance and reminded global audiences what escapist Bollywood cinema is capable of."

Violence Escalates in Northwest Pakistan: Police and Soldiers Killed in Attacks

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: A surge in violence continues to grip northwest Pakistan as armed men targeted a police station and an army outpost, resulting in casualties among police officers and soldiers. This marks the second attack this week on security forces in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The attacks unfolded on Friday morning in the Tank district of the province's Dera Ismail Khan division, extending a wave of violence in former Taliban strongholds along the Afghanistan border. The assault on the police station resulted in the death of two officers, with three others wounded. Reports indicate that three attackers were killed during the incident, two by police and the third through a suicide explosion.

An unexploded suicide jacket was discovered at the scene, prompting a police operation to secure the compound. "Our force on guard

engaged them in a gun battle for hours," stated police official Ifthikhar Shah. The wounded police officers are undergoing treatment, and an operation is underway to search for any remaining armed individuals in the area.

An armed group identifying itself as Ansar-ul-Islam claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement released from the report. However, conflicting reports from the local media mention a group called Ansarul Jihad claiming responsibility. Police have not officially verified the authenticity of these claims.

Simultaneously, a military post was targeted on Friday morning, resulting in the death of two soldiers and injuring five others, according to local police official Salim Khan.

The recent attack follows a similar incident on Tuesday, where armed men targeted a military post in Daraban, located approximately 60 kilometers from Dera Ismail

Khan city. The attackers utilized a vehicle laden with explosives to breach the main gate of the police station, followed by a suicide bombing. The Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistani group claimed responsibility for Tuesday's attack, believed to be an offshoot of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has witnessed a notable increase in violence throughout the year, with several deadly attacks reported.

The region remains a focal point for security concerns, as militant groups continue to pose threats to peace and stability.

Authorities attribute the emboldened insurgents to their presence in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover in 2021. The situation underscores the challenges faced by the government in combating militancy and maintaining security in the volatile region.

LHC verdict: PPP, IPP, PML-Q, PML-N to become parties in RO case

LAHORE: Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Istehkame-Pakistan Party (IPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Friday decided to become parties against the Lahore High Court's (LHC) verdict regarding the returning office (RO).

PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif and PML-N president Shehbaz Sharif had given the party a green light. The PML-N's legal team had prepared the petition in this regard.

The Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) had also decided to become the party in the LHC general election case. BAP President Nawabzada Khalid Magsi had instructed the legal team to file the petition in this regard. Meanwhile, the SC is expected to hear the case related to the general elections on Friday (today).

Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja appeared before the SC today, where he had a crucial meeting with Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa. Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan was also present during the meeting. On this occasion, SC Justices Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan were also present.

Ghee & oil prices slashed across Pakistan

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Utility Stores Corporation (USC) has announced major reduction in prices, focusing on essential cooking ingredients, to alleviate financial burdens on consumers across Pakistan.

The corporation announced a substantial cut in the prices of branded ghee

and cooking oil at all its outlets nationwide.

The spokesperson for the Utility Stores Corporation highlighted the considerable reductions, stating that the price of ghee has been slashed by Rs 17 per kilogram. The initial rate of ghee, previously set at Rs 499 per kg, has now been adjusted to a more affordable Rs 482.

Pakistan fight back as Imamul Haq shows resistance against Australia

Nathan Lyon inches closer to 500-wicket milestone

Sport Desk

KARACHI: Australian spin maestro Nathan Lyon inched closer to the prestigious 500-wicket club during the second day of the opening Test in Perth, as Pakistan resiliently stayed in contention at the Perth Cricket Stadium on Friday.

At the close of play, the visitors were 132-2, trailing by 355 runs. Imam-ul-Haq held his ground at 38, not out, supported by night-watchman Khuram Shahzad at seven, following the late dismissal of skipper Shan Masood.

The battle unfolded slowly, with Pakistan's runs accumulating over 53 overs, courtesy of Aamer Jamal's debut heroics, claiming 6-111 to dismiss the hosts for 487. Mitchell Marsh played a pivotal role with a score of 90, complementing David Warner's defiant 164 on day

one. Responding to Australia's innings, Abdullah Shafique fell victim to Lyon, who secured his 497th Test wicket on the journey to the illustrious 500-wicket milestone, a feat achieved by only seven other players.

Imam-ul-Haq showcased resilience against the relentless bowling onslaught from Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, and Pat Cummins on a lively pitch. It took him 85 deliveries to register his first boundary, steering one finely off his hip. Skipper Shan Masood contributed 30 runs before being caught behind by Alex Carey off Starc just 10 minutes before the close.

The visitors kept their hopes alive for a historic Test win in Australia, last achieved in 1995, by dismissing the hosts early in the second session. Marsh's dismissal for 90 on the first ball back marked the beginning

of a swift collapse in the tail, with debutant speedster Aamer Jamal making significant contributions.

Australia, resuming at 346-5 after a dominant opening day, faced an eager Pakistan side looking for an early breakthrough. On a scorching T20 captain, showcased his prowess with consecutive boundaries. However, Shahzad shattered his hopes after lunch, dismissing him as he attempted a big drive.

Jamal's impact continued as he swiftly removed Cummins and Lyon, both caught by Agha Salman. Wicket-keeper-batsman Carey, aiming to solidify his Test spot, fell victim to Jamal, concluding a promising 90-run partnership with Marsh. In a testament to Jamal's skill, he also claimed Starc's wicket, reinforcing Pakistan's position in the contest.

SC issues notice to ex spy chief Faiz Hameed in judge dismissal case

SC did not issue notices to former COAS Qamar Javed Bajwa, three others

By Our Court Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) five-member judge Friday issued notice to the former chief of the country's top spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lt Gen (rtd) Faiz Hameed, in a case of dismissal of ex-IHC judge Shaukat Siddique.

Supreme Court Chief Justice of Pakistan (SCP) Qazi Faez Isa issued notice to former spymaster Lt Gen (rtd) Faiz Hameed and others allowing responding to serious allegations leveled by the Shaukat Siddique.

The SC five-member bench heard the case and also issued notices to former IHC chief justice Anwar

Kasi, Supreme Court registrar Arbab Arif, and Brig Irfan Ramay. Chief Justice Isa remarked that the court heard the name of General (rtd) Qamar Javed Bajwa, but Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui had not directly spoken about Bajwa, so the notice was issued to retired COAS.

Earlier, former judge of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui filed a miscellaneous application with the Supreme Court along with the case related to his dismissal from office. The former judge has requested to make former army chief Gen (rtd) Qamar Javed Bajwa and former ISI head Faiz Hameed parties in the case related to his suspension.

A five-member Supreme

Court bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa, and comprising Justice Aminuddin, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi, and Justice Irfan Saadat, on Thursday heard an appeal against the suspension of Justice Siddiqui from office.

Earlier, the Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa asked advocate Hamid Khan, in Shaukat Siddique's dismissal case, to make former ISI director general Faiz Hameed party to the case or the learned council client should take back all accusations against the former spymaster.

The case hearing has now been adjourned till Friday (tomorrow) at 10:30 am.

The CJP remarked when he inquired how the petitioner could accuse Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as an institution for allegedly meddling in the affairs of the judiciary and superior judges to make the bench of ISI choice—as claimed by the IHC former judge Shaukat Siddique in a speech.

A 5-member larger bench headed by the CJP heard the case at 11:30 in courtroom number 1, which was broadcast live on the Supreme Court's website and YouTube channel. 'Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui says he was fired without hearing and now do you also want a decision without hearing Faiz Hameed and others,' inquired CJP.

LUMS Energy Institute launches report on energy-efficient buildings

Press Release

LAHORE: The LUMS Energy Institute (LEI), a research and capacity-building centre with a focus on Pakistan's energy sector, unveiled a report titled "Sustainable Architecture: Advancing Energy Efficient Buildings".

The report addresses the acute energy challenge and how adopting energy-efficient practices in residential construction

can drastically reduce loads. While addressing policymakers, regulatory bodies, and key stakeholders, Dr. Fiaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director, LUMS Energy Institute, said, "Pakistan's expenditure of nearly USD 100 billion on power plants, predominantly for summer cooling loads, is unsustainable. By adopting energy-efficient practices, we can reduce cooling loads by at least 50%, saving

billions of dollars." The seasonal variation in electricity usage, pronounced by cooling loads during hot summer months, necessitates an additional 18,000 MW of power plant capacity.

This extra capacity, largely underutilised for the rest of the year, imposes a staggering cost of nearly \$100 billion on the national economy. This operational inefficiency has led to capacity

payment obligations surpassing PKR 2 trillion, a financial burden bearing down on a sector that contributes minimally to the country's GDP growth.

The report demonstrates how adopting energy-efficient practices in residential construction can drastically reduce these loads. Through a comprehensive exploration of locally available materials, Building Information Modelling (BIM) results, and

cost-benefit analysis, the report provides a roadmap for stakeholders, homeowners, the construction industry, and regulatory bodies to embrace sustainable practices.

The publication provides an exhaustive analysis across 5 Marla row houses, 10 Marla semi-detached houses, and 1 Kanal fully detached home. The study evaluated the cooling loads, revealing that energy-effi-

cient building insulation is fundamental to keeping electricity usage in the hot summer months at reasonable levels.

For instance, energy-efficient fans can reduce load by 60%, and energy-efficient appliances can cut energy consumption by 27%. The integration of air conditioning systems with geothermal solutions offers a further 19% reduction in load. The study emphasises the substan-

tial benefits of powering houses with solar panels, particularly in energy-efficient homes, where installation costs could be 50% lower than standard homes.

A large gathering of policymakers, regulatory bodies, and key stakeholders related to the energy and construction sectors witnessed the momentous ceremony and commended the efforts of the LUMS Energy Institute.