



Islamabad POST

Thursday, January 27, 2022

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Karachi's business community invited to invest in Azeri AFEZ

Detailed News On Page-08

Pak reaffirms support for Kashmiris

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Babar wants to stick to his strengths

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Briefs

PTI fighting against mafia

RANA FARRUKH

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Hussain said on Wednesday that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government was fighting against the organized mafia. In a tweet, he said that the World Bank had confirmed Pakistan's 5.37 per cent growth rate and the government's policies to deal with coronavirus were being praised globally. He said it was strange that Transparency International's meaningless report hit the headlines, which has only claims and no reason mentioned.

EU envoy calls on KP minister

PESHAWAR: Ambassador of European Union (EU) to Pakistan, Androulla Kaminara Wednesday met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Relief, Iqbal Wazir and discussed various matters relating to North Waziristan. The minister informed the visiting dignitary about health, education and infrastructure projects in North Waziristan and said that government has taken result oriented steps to develop merged districts. Androulla Kaminara appreciated the steps of government and assured that cooperation would be extended to bring tribal areas in mainstream of development. - APP

Musaddiq replaces Shahzad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government has appointed the former director-general of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Brigadier (Retd) Musaddiq Abbasi as the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Accountability, media reported Wednesday. According to a notification issued in this regard, Abbasi will replace former adviser Mirza Shahzad Akbar who resigned from the post on January 24. I have tendered my resignation today to PM as Adviser.

Sehat Card launched for Islamabad

The Prime Minister says launch of such facility was a "landmark step"

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday launched the Naya Pakistan Qaumi Sehat Card, a phenomenal health insurance for the residents of Islamabad with facility of medical treatment up to one million rupees in a year. Under the scheme, all households of Islamabad, Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Tharparkar will be provided free medical treatment at government and private hospitals. The prime minister at an event held in Islamabad distributed the health insurance cards to the beneficiaries, terming the facility an ambitious programme to facilitate across the board population. Addressing on the occasion, he said the universal health coverage was available in a few countries across the world, where the government fully covered the

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COAS Bajwa meets PM Khan

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa called on Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday at the PM Office. During the meeting, professional matters pertaining to the Pakistan Army was discussed, the Prime Minister's Office said on its official Twitter account. The meeting at the Prime Minister's House was attended by the Army chief and the director-general of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Besides the military leadership, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Asad Umar and Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry also attended them eering.

Islamophobia issue in Britain

The survey found that Muslims were the UK's second least-liked group after gypsy and Irish travelers

NEWS DESK

LONDON: A UK Muslim leader said on Tuesday that the findings of a survey on Islamophobia had highlighted "the pervasive nature of the problem" in Britain. The study, conducted by researchers at the University of Birmingham, revealed that Islamophobia had passed the so-called dinner table test in being considered suitable for polite conversation and socially acceptable.

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UK Home Office defeated in court

LONDON: The latest stage of a UK Home Office strategy to strip Britons of their citizenship over terror offenses has been defeated in court. Following a legal challenge by a woman who had allegedly joined

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: PM Imran Khan distributing Naya Pakistan Health Card among beneficiaries. - DNA

Hungarian PM to visit Pakistan

It will be the first ever visit by a prime minister from either side

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador to Hungary Muhemmed Aejaz on Wednesday said Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban would visit Pakistan next month, on the invitation of Prime Minister Imran Khan. During the visit, the two leaders would discuss various bilateral and regional issues, particularly matters related to enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation. "The visit is historic and significant due

Continued on Page 06

Forces kill terrorist, recover weapons

DNA

SPINWAM: A terrorist has been killed on Wednesday after security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in North Waziristan's district Spinwam, a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. According to the military's media wing, a terrorist - identified as Saddam - was killed during an intense exchange of fire. "Weapons and ammunition have also been recovered from the terrorist," said ISPR. The statement further read that the terrorist "was an expert in planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and was involved in terrorist activities, target killings and kidnapping for ransom."

MoU signing to repatriate prisoners from Saudi Arabia

Interior Minister expressed these views in a meeting with Saudi ambassador



KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Malki called on Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed in Islamabad on Wednesday. Matters pertaining to bilateral relations and mutual interest were discussed in the meeting. The Interior Minister said visit of Saudi Interior Minister will create new dimension of bilateral relations. He hoped that after signing a mutual agreement with Saudi Arabia, early repatriation of Pakistani prisoners will be possible. In his remarks, the Saudi Ambassador said both the countries enjoy brotherly relations. He called for promoting tourism and trade between the two countries.

'Govt to create no hurdle for PDM's march'

BUREAU REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid here on Wednesday said that the government would not create any hurdle for the Pakistan Democratic Movement's (PDM) long march. Addressing the participants of a ceremony he said that the long march would result in political humiliation for the opposition alliance. He said that he had previously asked the PDM to change the date of its march to some other day, as the leaders from different Muslim countries would be in the capital to attend an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit on March 23 and also the Pakistan Day.

Continued on Page 06



KARACHI: Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov presenting a souvenir to Sarmad Ali President All Pakistan Newspapers Society, during his recent visit to Karachi. - DNA

Russia warns against sanctions on Putin

Taking questions from reporters on Tuesday, Mr Biden replied "yes" when asked whether he could see himself imposing sanctions on the Russian president personally

AGENCIES

MOSCOW: Russia hit back Wednesday at US threats of direct sanctions against President Vladimir Putin, saying moves against the Russian leader would be ineffective and hurt efforts to lower tensions over Ukraine. Officials from France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine were set for talks in Paris on Wednesday in the latest bid to ease a crisis sparked by fears that Moscow is preparing an invasion of its pro-Western neighbour. The West has warned Russia of severe consequences if it does invade, and on Tuesday, Washington said there could be sanctions personally targeting Putin. Mr Biden said there would be "enormous consequences" for the world if Russia made a move on the nation, which sits on its south-western border. Taking questions from reporters on Tuesday, Mr Biden replied "yes" when asked whether he could see himself imposing sanctions on the Russian president personally in the event of an invasion. Such a move across Ukraine's border would mean "enormous consequences worldwide" and could amount to "the largest invasion since World War Two", he said. Reacting to the news, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed the threats as worthless because senior Russian officials are barred from holding assets abroad. But such a move, he said, would do serious damage to diplomatic efforts to ease ratcheting tensions over Ukraine.

EU risks self-inflicted wound with sanctions

PARIS: Western powers may be united on imposing sanctions on Russia if it invades Ukraine, but they could be costly for Europe as it has vast economic ties with its bellicose neighbour. Russia is the European Union's third biggest source of imports after the United States and China, with the

Continued on Page 06

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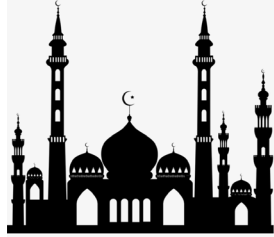
America's simmering Hindutva extremism problem - Page 05

Stage is set for Pakistan Super League 7 from today - Page 06

Riyadh and Bangkok restore ties, decades after gem theft - Page 07

Business community invited to invest in AFEZ - Page 08

SERVICES



Namaz Timings

Fajr.....	05:42 am
Zohr.....	12:20 pm
Asr.....	03:55 pm
Maghrib.....	05:33 pm
Isha.....	06:59 pm



Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....	111 133 133
Marriott.....	051-2826121
Monal.....	0334-5421812



Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....	8494949
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PIMS.....	9261170-79
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Shifa International.....	4603666



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Wapda Rawalpindi	111-309-309

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....	9209224
Potohar Town.....	9209224
Rawal Town.....	5773343

Wasa Water Tank	
Rawalpindi.....	0331-5022125

Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif App to empower millions

UNICEF Country Representative, Aida Girma said, "I would like to commend the Govt of Pakistan for prioritizing the Ehsaas programme"

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection, Senator Dr. Sania Nishtar Wednesday said Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif mobile app will empower millions of Ehsaas beneficiary families to self-register their children at their doorsteps. "This digitization is a result of massive hard work coupled with digital and reformative actions adapted over the last three years to ensure integrity and inclusion", she said while reflecting on the recent launch of Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif application.

Dr. Sania was speaking at a high-level panel discussion with country heads of international development partners to celebrate the launch of Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif app, hosted by Ehsaas.. The event was themed around, "Role of conditional cash transfers in improving Human Capital Development in Pakistan". Senator Dr. Sania Nishtar, SAPM chaired the event. Discussions profoundly resonated with the theme of International Education Day 2022, "Changing Course, Transforming Education". Expert panelists were—Dr. Christian Turner, British High Commissioner to Pakistan; Najy Benhassine,

Country Director, UNICEF; and Naveed Akbar, Director General, Ehsaas Conditional Cash Transfers. Secretary Ismat Tahira was also present on the occasion. Panelists shared their experiences in administering education conditional cash transfer programmes. The fully digital, Ehsaas School Stipends/Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif programme was widely lauded. Felicitating the successful launch of Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif app, Dr. Christian Turner, British High Commissioner stated, "What is happening with Ehsaas is quite extraordinary, groundbreaking and at speed with transformative intervention."

Country Director the World Bank, Najy Benhassine commended the Taleemi Wazaif of Ehsaas and said, "Our new strategy for Pakistan in the coming 5 years is targeted on girls' education. We support Ehsaas Taleemi

Wazaif, expansion of the conditional cash transfer programme and education system as a whole." "We are pleased to know that the Government is expanding the conditional cash transfer programme across the country", said Country Director ADB, Yong Ye. UNICEF Country Representative, Aida Girma said, "I would like to commend the Government of Pakistan for prioritizing the Ehsaas programme."

Government of Pakistan's Ehsaas Taleemi Wazaif aims at providing financial assistance to those at the bottom of the pyramid for the education of their children up to higher secondary level.



PM wishes Mahathir a speedy recovery

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday prayed for the speedy recovery of former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. "My prayers and good wishes go to my friend Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his speedy recovery," he said in a tweet. The former Malaysian prime minister is in stable condition after being admitted to a specialist heart hospital for the third time in just weeks, according to his daughter. The 96-year-old has been receiving treatment at the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur for the past two days, Marina Mahathir said.

Pak earns US \$228m from travel services

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan earned US \$228.991 million by providing different travel services in various countries during the first five months of the current financial year 2021-22. This shows the growth of 35.40 percent as compared to the US \$169.120 million same services were provided during the corresponding period of the last fiscal year 2020-21, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. During the month under review, the personal travel services increased by 35.42 percent, from the US \$168.400 million last year to the US \$228.051 million during July-November 2021. Among these personal services, the exports of personal expenditure rose by 111.76 percent while the education-related expenditure increased by 7.40 percent. - APP

IT Ministry supporting KJ Innovation League

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication is extending all possible support for the success of Kanyab Jawan Innovation League project. "Objective of the programme is to empower the youth of the country, the project Innovation Challenge will be held for students of universities and colleges across the country," said an official of the Ministry of IT. - APP

Committee on Diamer Basha, Mohmand Dams meets

ISLAMABAD: The implementation Committee on Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dams (ICDBMD) met on Wednesday here at ICDBMD Secretariat to review progress on these two multi-purpose mega projects. The ICDBMD was constituted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan way back in July 2018 for early commencement and timely completion of Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dams, said a press release. Since its inception, the Committee holds its meetings after regular intervals. The meeting was presided over by Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and ICDBMD Chairman Lt Gen Muzammil Hussain (Retd). In addition to the Ministry of Water Re-

sources Joint Secretary and ICDBMD Secretary Syed Muhammad Mehar Ali Shah, Joint Secretary (Budget) Finance, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Secretary Board of Revenue, NHA Member North Zone, Deputy Secretary Prime Minister's Office, Diamer Astor Commissioner and Planning Commission Deputy Chief attended the meeting on behalf of ICDBMD respective members. WAPDA Members, Secretary and senior officers were also present on the occasion. Welcoming the participants, WAPDA / ICDBMD Chairman said that the Implementation Committee has been tremendously contributing towards implementation of Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dams. Reiterating his com-

mitment for completion of the both projects as early as possible, he apprised the meeting that WAPDA is carrying out construction activities on the projects day in and day out to match the timelines despite COVID-19 pandemic that has negatively impacted the whole world. At present, construction work is continuing as many as 13 sites of Mohmand Dam and 10 sites of Diamer Basha Dam, he added. The Chairman also updated the participants of the impediments in the way to smooth execution of Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dams including COVID-19, financial flows, emerging security scenario, land acquisition and completion of critical stretch of relocated Karakoram Highway in case of

Diamer Basha Dam. Though the recovery plans are in place, the impediments, if not addressed to by the quarters concerned, may adversely affect the timelines set for completion of the projects, the Chairman concluded. Later, WAPDA Member (Finance) briefed the meeting of the matters relating to financial close of the two projects vis-vis foreign exchange component, as well as financial needs and financial flows. General Manager (Land Acquisition & Resettlement), General Manager (Diamer Basha Dam) and General Manager (Mohmand Dam) also made presentations to the participants about the progress and the issues regarding Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dams. - APP

National Metrological Institute Bill 2022 passed

ISLAMABAD: The National Metrological Institute Bill, 2022 was passed unanimously in a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Science and Technology on Wednesday held here. The meeting was chaired by Senator Afnan Ullah Khan and attended by Senator Fawzia Arshad, Senator Sana Jamali, Senator Muhammad Humayun Mohmand and senior officers of the Ministry Science and Technology, National Physical Research and Standards Laboratory along with all concerned. Minister for Science and Technology, Senator Syed Shibli Faraz was also present.

Reviewing the contents of the Bill, the Committee pointed out certain typographical errors; other than that there was consensus in principle that this Bill was overdue and it was a pity that it has been pending since a quarter century. The Committee was briefed that the National Physical Research and Standards Laboratory (NPSL) was established roughly four decades ago under Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR), through a project as a national apex body for the maintenance of primary and secondary standards of measurement

and for testing and calibration of standards and equipment. NPSL deals with the establishment of infrastructure of meteorology to implement and operate a unified and coherent national measurement system as per international requirements and practices for quality assurance and management system and to support legal metrology in Pakistan. The organization also caters to a limited number of fields of metrology i.e. the science of measurements which includes mass, length, time and frequency, electrical, thermal and pressure measurements. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Argentine Republic Leopoldo Francisco Sahores presents a football designed for the occasion of 70 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Argentina to Editor Daily Islamabad POST and CENTRELINE Ansar Mahmood Bhatti on the occasion of latter's visit to the Argentine embassy. - DNA

Locally assembled mobile phones reach record high

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has surpassed imports and achieved self-reliance in local assembling of mobile phones of almost all major brands. In calendar year 2021, local manufacturing plants produced 24.66 million mobile devices, compared to 13.05 million in 2020, marking an 88 percent increase. Commercial smartphone imports fell to 10.26 million in 2021, down from 24.51 million in 2020, according to official data from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). In December 2021, the number of locally manufactured/assembled smartphones climbed by 2.54 million, bringing the total production for the calendar year to 24.66 million. The production of mobile phones by local manufacturing plants has more than doubled against the import in the country during 2021. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) data the local manufacturing trend reflects a positive uptake on the PTA's Mobile Device Manufacturing (MDM) Authorization regulatory regime, with local manufacturing resulting in the production of 24.66 million phones in a short span of one year, including 10.06 million 4G smartphones. The successful implementation of the Device Identification Registration and Blocking System (DIRBS) along with conducive government policies including the mobile manufacturing policy has created a favorable environment for mobile handset manufacturing in Pakistan. - Agencies

NAB briefs PAC about total recovery

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Wednesday examined appropriation accounts for the year 2018-19 (grant no 81, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and NAB briefed the committee about its total recovery.

The meeting was held at the Parliament House under the chairmanship of MNA Rana Tanveer Hussain. The meeting was attended by committee members including Munaza Hassan, Senator Sherry Rehman, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Shahida Akhtar Ali, Mushahid Ali Syed, Syed Hasnain Tariq, Sheikh Rohale, Shibli Faraz, Syed Naveed Qamar and senior officials of relevant government departments. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that coronavirus was spreading widely so implementation of SOPs

should be ensured in PAC meeting. He said that the Chairman NAB had also contracted with coronavirus. He had asked to adjourn the meeting for 15 days. Director General NAB Hasnain Ahmed said that the Chairman NAB was ready to attend the meeting but unfortunately his test for coronavirus was found positive. The Committee was informed that NAB has recovered more than Rs 821 billion by October 2021, adding that more than Rs 26 billion was recovered voluntarily while more than Rs 50 billion was recovered under plea bargain. The recovery was made in the form of cash, land and other properties. More than Rs. 500 billion has been recovered directly from various departments. Earlier in the meeting, Fateha was also offered for the departed soul of father of PAC member Hina Rabbani Khar.

JANUARY 2022

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Briefs

Economy showing upward trends

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Farrukh Habib said on Wednesday that despite Covid-19, global high inflation and other economic challenges, Pakistan has sustainable growth rate of 5.37 per cent. In a tweet, the minister said exports, tax collection and agricultural produce showed upward trends. He said that the first half of the fiscal year, IT exports increased by 35.8 per cent, FBR tax recovery by 32.4 per cent whereas State Bank of Pakistan reserves by 31.8 per cent. Textile exports, he said increased by 26 per cent, services exports by 20.4 per cent, remittances increased by 13.3 per cent. Agriculture crops including cotton, rice, sugarcane, wheat and maize production increased which brought additional income of billions of rupees to the farmer community and their purchasing power has also increased. - APP

Rs 353.119 million for ANF academy

ISLAMABAD: The government has allocated funds amounting to Rs353.119 million to acquire two plots for construction of Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Academy in H-11/1 sector of the federal capital.

The federal government has earmarked Rs489.393 million in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP 2021-22) for the projects being executed by the Narcotics Control Division. Out of total, the government has so far released Rs244.697 million funds. As per the official document, the government has also allocated Rs4.5 million for the acquisition of land for the construction of ANF Police Station at Hub, Balochistan. Rs131.774 million would be spent for construction of Model Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Center (MATRC) in Islamabad. - APP

Pakistan Railways retrieve land

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has retrieved land worth Rs 4725.796 million from the illegal occupants during the last one year in operation against the land grabbers across the country. "The encroachment operation is launched with the assistance of railway police and district administration of the provincial government," an official in the Ministry of Railways said. He said Pakistan Railways has retrieved over 502 acres precious land worth billion of rupees from illegal occupants under its anti-encroachment operation across the country during the present government tenure. Giving details, the official said the department retrieved 258 acres land in Punjab, 129 acres from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 97 acres from Sindh and 18 acres from Balochistan. To a question, he said that more than 5,000 acres of Railways' land was under encroachment in Sindh and currently in the use of different individuals, groups and even business organisations. - APP

Tanzara Gallery to organize exhibition

ISLAMABAD: Tanzara Art Gallery would organize an exhibition titled 'Being and Becoming' by Zaam Arif, an American-Pakistani contemporary artist residing and working in Houston, Texas on Thursday. Noshi Qadir, Tanzara Gallery official said that the works in Zaams first solo exhibition titled "Being and Becoming" at Tanzara are far more than a series of portraits. Each work is a deep exploration of the ontological existence of the human by the societal systems. He confronts it with a penetrating interpretation of human nature, transforming it into a visceral reality. The 21 oil and canvas paintings on display, explore much of the same ground. Zaam expresses his understanding of the contemporary human condition along with insights garnered. - APP

ISSI organizes workshop on cyber technologies, AI

The second day was opened with remarks by Dr Cécile Aptel, Deputy Director, UNIDIR, who said that Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) are at the heart of the discussion at the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Arms Control & Disarmament Centre (ACDC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised a Two Day Online Workshop on "Cyber Technologies, Artificial Intelligence and International Security" in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Geneva on January 24-25. The theme of the second day of the workshop was "Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy." The second day was opened with remarks by Dr Cécile Aptel, Deputy Director, UNIDIR, who said that Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) are at the heart of the discussion at the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). It is important to discuss the legal and ethical implications of

developments in the field of LAWS. She highlighted the technical complexities that states have to grapple with LAWS and autonomy, the importance of discussing the dual-use nature of the technology and its implications for international security. Session I on "Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy 101" was moderated by Ms Ioana Puscas, Researcher, UNIDIR. Speakers included Dr Yasar Ayaz, CPD/Chairman at National Center of Artificial Intelligence (NCAI) & Professor of AI & Robotics at NUST, Islamabad, and Dr Giacomo Persi Paoli, Head of Programme, UNIDIR. Mr Paoli explained key concepts involved in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and autonomy. AI systems range from deterministic that are fully predictable to Non-Deterministic that are less predictable. Talking about the role of humans in AI he said that it ranges from full direct



control i.e. no autonomy, to humans in the loop where humans need to validate and humans in the loop where humans intervene if necessary. Dr Ayaz spoke on how can AI be used for the benefit of humans. It is already been used widely in finance, judiciary and medical science in Pakistan. He underscored how it is a transformative technology with immense economic benefits. AI software market revenue worldwide was over US\$34 billion

and 11 guiding principles were adopted in 2019. She identified two distinct positions that have emerged at the UN - one that endorses the need to develop specific law in the contest of Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS) and the second position endorses non-legally binding instruments. While there is agreement on the need for compliance with international humanitarian law, no consensus was reached over substantive matters of the 2021 GGE meeting. Ms Rafiq discussed the way forward based on the 11 principles that have been adopted at GGE. She highlighted the need for implementation mechanisms and proposals for implementation at the UN like the national legal reviews and establishing links between national and international regulations. Session III on "Black Box Unlocked: Predictability and

Understanding of AI Systems" was moderated by Dr Giacomo Persi Paoli, Head of Programme, UNIDIR. Speakers were Major General (Retd.) Ausaf Ali, Advisor Strategic Plans Division, Pakistan, and Dr Pascale Fung, Director, Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research, Professor, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Maj. Gen. Ali in his presentation stated that predictability and understandability are widely held to be the vital qualities of AI systems and represents an important point among the many different parties to the debate on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS and other forms of military AI. He also raised concerns regarding the AI system including extensive use in military applications, absence of legal framework, open-source access to AI system and third party risk amongst others.

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Health coverage biggest achievement of PTI govt

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) Senator Faisal Javed Khan on Wednesday said that universal health coverage was the biggest achievement of the PTI government, even country like USA could not provide this facility to its citizens. In a statement, congratulating people of Islamabad on issuance of Health Card, he said that after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, every family in Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Balochistan and Tharparkar would now have access to free medical treatment up to one million rupees. Faisal Javed who is also Chairman of Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting, said that Sindh government was also offered cooperation, but they do not care about the people. He expressed the hope that PTI would come to power there and would give health card to every family in Sindh province.

Nosham technical report in final phase

ISLAMABAD: The geological experts have completed mapping of Nosham area of Balochistan under a coal exploration and evaluation project, and now "the compilation of geological maps and technical report is in progress and near completion." "Initial study of maps, topographic, aerial photographs and satellite imagery has been completed and the data has been transferred from aerial photographs/satellite imagery onto topographic maps," according to an official report available with APP. The Rs42.318 million project titled "Exploration and Evaluation of Coal in Nosham and Bahlol Areas, Balochistan" had been approved in 2017. As per the project update, drilling of three borehole at Nosham area, Barkhan District has been completed to the cumulative depth of 778 meters, where coal seams encountered at different depths. Making advancement in the project, the experts have also completed geological logging of exploratory borehole/logs, besides concluding geophysical survey (Resistivity) in the project area. The experts have measured five stratigraphic sections, following which compilation of the field data, analyzed and integrated at field labs items to prepare the required geological maps, was initiated. - APP

Shah Alla Ditta caves attract visitors

The caves were also known as the "Sadhu ka Bagh", "Losar Baoli" or Stepwell nearby way up in the Margalla Hills The site present number of small spots to see, it is a nice place also for family picnic

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Shah Allah Ditta a centuries old Buddhist caves located at the foothills of the Margalla Hills in federal capital was attracting a large number of visitors. The Buddhist caves were believed to be hundred years old and were used as route to Gandharan City of Taxila. Karim Ahmed, a visitor said that this place is very peaceful and calm, adding that he always enjoy visiting here with his family. The fresh water spring is also close to the caves which further increase the beauty and attraction of the site. Few food outlets were also available near the caves which facilitate the visitors with fresh snakes and foods. A food outlet owner said that people are coming to Shah Alla Ditta caves and particularly on weekend more people visit this place. According to Capital Development Authority (CDA), relics of the Buddhist era dating back to the 8th century can be found here along with burnt diyas and trees with amulets tied to them. These caves are next to the shrine and tomb of Shah Allah Ditta. The caves were also known as the "Sadhu ka Bagh", "Losar Baoli" or Stepwell nearby way up in the Margalla Hills. The site present number of small spots to see, it is a nice place also for family picnic. Archaeological evidence indicates that the caves and the platform-like formations surrounding the area were first used for meditation by Buddhist monks and later by Hindu Sadhus before Muslim ascetics took over during the Mughal period. The caves were surrounded by the great Margalla hills which increase the beauty of this area.



ISLAMABAD: Ahmed Ameen Rabaie, Ambassador of Palestine received Prof. Dr. Muhammad Farooque Hassan Vice Chancellor of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Sakrand at the Embassy. The visit was very fruitful as the ambassador and Vice chancellor discussed very important matters of bilateral relations. - DNA

RTA accelerates operation against SOPs' violators

RAWALPINDI: Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Rawalpindi on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Tahir Farooq, has accelerated its ongoing operation against Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) violators. According to Secretary, RTA Rawalpindi Rashid Ali, the authority on the directives of the DC had launched a campaign to ensure implementation of the SOPs to control spread of Covid-19 cases. He said the teams of the authority were conducting raids and checking implementation of the SOPs at different routes, while those found indulged in violations of the SOPs were fined and the vehicles were also being impounded. Mobile squads were also performing duties at different public transport terminals and at various routes to facilitate the people, he said adding, the operation would

continue and the vehicles found involved in violating the SOPs would be imposed fines or impounded. RTA teams inspected various buses and public transport vehicles (PSVs) at different routes and impounded 24 vehicles in violation of Corona virus SOPs besides imposing fines amounting to Rs 32,000 during last three days. He urged the citizens to follow the SOPs and adopt all possible precautionary measures against coronavirus. It is pertinent to mention here that despite a surge in Covid-19 cases (fast-spreading Omicron variant) in Rawalpindi district, the public transport, especially the van and Suzuki pick up based transport, poses a serious threat to the residents due to non-compliance with the SOPs as social distancing for prevention of coronavirus pandemic are being violated despite warnings and fines by the authorities concerned.

The district administration is taking actions against the transporters, shopping plazas, marriage halls, restaurants and other public places for not following all the precautionary measures. A large number of vehicles were being inspected and fines were imposed by RTA Rawalpindi but still, the transporters, drivers, and passengers are not fully following the SOPs which may cause danger to the health system. The majority of the citizens are not observing social distancing in the local transport and the transporters are just concerned about earning money through accommodating maximum passengers in a van or Suzuki pickups. Hundreds of vans and Suzuki pickups are plying as public transport and hundreds of passengers have no options except for using these over-crowded vehicles on different routes. - APP

Pakistan Science Expo postponed

ISLAMABAD: The two-day Pakistan Science Expo earlier scheduled to be arranged by Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) from January 28 has been postponed due to the NCOC latest guidelines to avoid the spread of COVID-19. According to an official of PSF, the foundation is continuously in coordination with NCOC and will announce the new dates of the expo soon. The preparations for the expo were completed by PSF including the registration of around 120 stalls carrying innovative science and technology related products. The expo was aimed at encouraging collaboration among the government, industry and academia through providing a platform for organizations to showcase their accomplishments in the field of Science, Technology and Innovation. - APP

Role of women inevitable in civilized society's construction

Ashrafi said the parents should not underestimate their daughters as they were being called 'Bushra' (good news) in the holy Quran

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's aide on interfaith harmony Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi Wednesday said the role of women in the construction of a civilized society was inevitable. He was addressing a seminar for female on 'The Role of Aalimat in Creating Peace in the Society' organized by Shari'ah Academy of International Islamic University Islamabad as a 'guest speaker'. Ashrafi termed Hazrat Khadijah Kubra as role model for women because she was the first lady who testified the Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as the Prophet of Allah Almighty. He said there was no need for the women to be confined within the four walls of the house as Hazrat Khadijah Kubra was a dominated figure in the business community of Makkah and the Holy Prophet happily tied the knot



with her. He urged the women to come ahead and prove your mettle in all spheres of life as neither Islam forbid women from education nor trade. Further shedding the light on the significance of women in the Islamic history, he said the four caliph of Islam - Hazrat Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and

Ali used to consult with Syeda Fatima, Hafsa and Aysha over certain issues. Ashrafi quoted a living example from his private persona of life and said my strength was my daughters. He said at a certain juncture of his 37-year political and religious life, he wanted to leave all his activities but his daughters raised his morale saying they did not want to see him a coward man but a bold person. He said, "Those words infused a new spirit in my life and today, what I am, it is because of my mother, wife and daughters," he added. Ashrafi said the parents should not underestimate their daughters as they were being called 'Bushra' (good news) in the holy Quran. Moreover, Allah Almighty had revealed a complete chapter 'Suratul Nisa' about women in the divine command, he added. - APP



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Fertiliser shortage protests

IN its attempts to pile on pressure on the ruling government, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has announced that it would stage a sit-in outside Karachi Press Club on Jan 30 to protest against massive hike in the prices of essential products, including petrol and electricity, and also against shortage of gas and fertiliser in the country. This announcement was made during the Kissan March which was held in Karachi and other parts of Sindh on the appeal of PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to protest against urea shortage and other economic hardships faced by the growers in the country. The agricultural sector has been suffering in recent years and especially during the pandemic as Pakistan faces serious food insecurity challenges. Compounding these issues are the effects of climate change as crop yields have been adversely affected. The situation is made more severe by already strained water availability that is expected to worsen over the coming decades. The PPP is attempting to spin the narrative that the PTI government is insensitive to the plight of farmers and is responsible for the current urea shortage. Leaders of the PPP have stated that these protests along with the farmers will continue in the province till February 27 when Mr Bhutto-Zardari would lead a long march from the city to Islamabad against the government.

The grievances of the farmers are legitimate as they claim that they have not been getting adequate prices for their produce and are now being forced to stand in lines and pay high prices for sourcing fertiliser. This strategy could work well for the PPP in terms of applying further pressure on the PTI government given the street power farmers possess. Perhaps the opposition party is also taking inspiration from the protests that took place across the border.

The government must look into how these grievances of the farmers can be addressed. Attempts at gaslighting the victims or shifting blame on them—as was witnessed in a recent National Assembly session last week—will not do the ruling government any favours and will only further inflame the situation.

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Pakistan railways' initiatives

THERE have been three significant developments this month, with regards to Pakistan Railways. Firstly, and more recently, a freight train service has been launched to link Karachi port with the rest of Pakistan. The details of the freight train service include the commissioning of a 3.7km, high-tech train track laid at the Hutchison Ports Pakistan connecting the facility to the rest of the country through the Pakistan Railways extensive network spread throughout the country. The second development took place in early January, with the inauguration of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) freight train at Margalla railway station, where ambassadors of Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan were present on the occasion. Thirdly, on January 11, Pakistan Railways launched the country's first reefer freight train, aiming to provide economical and environment-friendly freight solutions. These are significant developments. The establishment of the ITI track is a promotion of Pakistan's foreign policy goal of regional connectivity and is an important milestone for the friendship of three for three Muslim countries Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. It is also a stepping stone for international trade for Pakistan and paves the way for more such international tracks to be built. The linking of the Karachi port with the rest of the country is also highly important—Karachi, as any port city is for all countries, is imperative for all business, commerce or trade. A freight track linking the port to other business centres of the country, like Lahore, Multan and Faisalabad, is an absolute necessity, and should have been in place sooner. While these developments were much needed, it is regrettable that they did not take place earlier. Now that these milestones have been reached, it is important that the government keep a check to ensure they are being carried out properly. There are several issues with the functioning of Pakistan Railways—long-distance freight and passenger trains have considerable delays. The signaling system is insufficient for the current operations, and neither is the telecommunication system. There is low night visibility, restricted train speed, and no backup system. These issues must be fixed if any of these initiatives are to be successful.

America's simmering Hindutva extremism problem

CJ Werleman

Narsinghanand is not only the head priest of the Dasna Devi temple in Uttar Pradesh, but is also widely considered a leader of the Hindu nationalist or Hindutva movement

SUNDANCE'S 'powerful' doc 'Jihad Rehab' is US propaganda 20 years too late. The Biden administration, whether aware or not, is aiding and abetting the reach and influence of Hindu nationalist groups through associated charity organisations. After nearly a full month of domestic and international pressure, Yati Narsinghanand, one of the Hindu extremists who organised an event in Haridwar, India, that called for the genocide of Muslims, was arrested by authorities, following intervention by the Supreme Court.

Narsinghanand is not only the head priest of the Dasna Devi temple in Uttar Pradesh, but is also widely considered a leader of the Hindu nationalist or Hindutva movement. He routinely spews venomous hate towards religious minorities, saying in 2019, "Islam should be eradicated from Earth," and "all Muslims should be eliminated".

On the eve of the deadly 2020 Delhi Riots, which left more than 50 Muslims hacked, burned and shot to death, he urged supporters to "finish off Islam".

Narsinghanand, and the Hindutva movement he supports and leads, is why human rights experts, including Dr Gregory Stanton, founder of Genocide Watch, have warned that the "preparation for genocide is underway in India and Kashmir". He recently described the Haridwar conference as an "incitement to genocide".

But the arrest of Narsinghanand not only has implications for India but also the United

States, where Hindu nationalist groups have been allowed to operate freely and prosperously as tax-exempt religious and charity organisations.

One such organisation is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) – the US-based informal affiliate of India's VHP, which operates as the religious wing of the Hindu nationalist paramilitary outfit Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a million-member army that draws its inspiration from Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party and other European fascist movements of the 20th Century. In 2018, the CIA identified the VHP as a "religious militant organisation," responsible for extremist violence.

Last year, the VHPA invited Narsinghanand to be its keynote speaker for an online event, as part of a series of speeches and sermons to celebrate the Hindu festival of Chaitra Navratri. His invite was later cancelled, after Hindus for Human Rights collected hundreds of signatures, calling upon "people of conscience to stand up to Hindutva and all hate perpetuated in the name of religion".

Rutgers University Professor Audrey Truschke, a scholar in Hindu-Muslim relations in South Asia, slammed the VHPA for inviting Narsinghanand, saying: "Hosting someone who calls for genocide is unacceptable for US-based non-profits." She called the would-be event: "Another step – a somewhat extreme step – in the acceleration of #Hindutva hate by US organisations."

So how are these Hindu extremist organisations flying under the radar in the United States, especially given that the Biden administration has made countering "domestic extremism" a top national priority?

Last year, Biden unveiled an unprecedented national strategy to counter domestic extremism, which included a priority to confront "the longstanding drivers of domestic terrorism: racism and bigotry". Yet somehow, Hindu nationalist groups calling for the genocide of religious minorities as a means to transform India into a Hindu-only country, have escaped his attention.

Worse – the Biden administration is either unwittingly or knowingly aiding and abetting

the reach and influence of Hindu nationalist groups, as revealed in a recent investigation by journalist Raqib Hameed Naik. He discovered that the US government doled out nearly \$1 million in Covid-19 relief aid to five organisations tied to the Hindu nationalist movement, including the VHPA, which received more than \$170,000 in US taxpayer-funded assistance in 2020. In other words, the US government handed \$170,000 to an affiliate of an organisation that the US has accused of extremist violence.

Each of these organisations has either direct or informal ties with the RSS, whose founder, MS Golwalkar, accused Muslims and Christians of being "traitors" and "internal threats", while suggesting that they should be "purged" from India, the same way Hitler ethnically cleansed Jews from Germany.

The failure of the US government to identify and condemn Hindu nationalist organisations has blinded the American public into misbelieving that they are representative of the Hindu religion or Indian secular democratic values, despite some of these groups, including the HAF, openly declaring that: "Hindutva is not the same thing as Hinduism." Last year, then-Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey pledged \$2.5 million to Sewa International as part of a \$15 million donation for coronavirus relief efforts in India, while internal communications at Google and Microsoft reveal management at the two tech giants encouraged employees to donate to the Hindu nationalist "charity".

Do they know that Sewa International was stripped of its charity registration in the United Kingdom, after an investigation revealed it raised money from British donors in 2002 for earthquake relief, but instead funnelled funds to Hindu nationalist organisations responsible for the 2002 Gujarat Riots, which left up to 2,000 Muslims dead?

It seems that a big part of the problem is that Western audiences have never heard of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism, which means that the US government has a responsibility to identify, condemn and strip these groups of their tax exempt status.

– Courtesy: TRT World

The brotherhood of Guantánamo Bay

Mansoor Adayfi



In 2010, when we were transitioned to communal living in Camp 6, our bond deepened. Interrogators and guards were fewer, camp rules were relaxed to give us more freedom, and we began to interact more with each other, as well as the camp staff

I was raised in a family that emphasised strong religious values such as brotherhood, compassion and kindness. I also observed these morals practised throughout my small village in Yemen. At home and school, I was taught to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and especially loved his saying, "I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting the highest morals." Years later, it was only through my interactions with fellow detainees at Guantánamo that I fully understood what this meant. Through our shared faith, we developed a bond that could not be broken, even as we suffered the most horrendous torture and abuse. In the autumn of 2001, I was travelling in Afghanistan when I was kidnapped by local warlords, presented to US forces as a "senior Egyptian al-Qaeda operative" and sold to them. I was just 18 years old. Shortly after, in February 2002, I was transferred to Guantánamo. Like the other detainees, I did not know where I was, why I was there, or why there were constant beatings and shouting. I was confused, terrified, angry, and would often rebel against the constantly changing rules. Being imprisoned for 14 years, I essentially grew up in Guantánamo. I would often recall the lessons I was taught in my childhood and even during the relentless abuse, would reflect on the Prophet's tradition and teachings about moral character. After living together for years, being transferred from one camp within Guantánamo to another, from makeshift cells to solitary confinement to prison cells, we, the prisoners developed a close-knit community. We had a shared life, culture, and memories. We went through it all together, for better or worse, and became a family. In 2010, when we were transitioned to communal living in Camp 6, our bond deepened. Interrogators and guards were fewer, camp rules were relaxed to give us more freedom, and we began to interact more with each other, as well as the camp staff. Instead of praying in separate cages, we were able to pray collectively in rows like we would in mosques. Instead of eating on our own, we were able to enjoy meals together just like we would at home with our families. Instead of playing with a foot ball alone, we were able to play in teams just like we would outside of prison. And instead of talking to the same neighbours every

day in the cages, we now could talk to tens of prisoners in different blocks. We did not have much, but we had each other. When the prisoners would call each other, they would say "our Afghan brothers", "our Yemeni brothers", and so on. We taught and learned from each other about many different topics and cultural traditions. We borrowed the best traits from each other's cultures. Arabs started behaving like Afghans and Afghans started behaving like Arabs.

Unsurprisingly, the interrogators would try to turn us against each other. There were prison blocks where the majority of the detainees were either Arabs or Afghans. One day, when the interrogators wanted to isolate me, they moved me to an Afghan block, thinking that my life would be harder because there were no Arabs I could speak to.

Little did they know that if you ended up in a block with a group that is not your own, you would actually be lucky. You would be treated as their guest as long as you were there, and they would try to comfort you in any way they could. And this is what happened to me. The Afghans treated me like a family member. I ended up teaching Arabic to an illiterate Afghan prisoner and listening to the beautiful poetry of another – an Afghan poet and singer in his 60s who wrote two books of poetry in Pashto at Guantánamo. He always sang his poetry for the block and would sing for me as well. With Arabs making up the majority of detainees at the camp, many were involved in protests and resistance against the torture and the abuse there. In the beginning, most of the Afghans and prisoners of other nationalities tried not to get involved. The camp administration took that as a sign of fear and tried to exploit it to create divisions.

One day, a Pashto translator came to distribute sheets of paper just for Afghan prisoners. Written on it in Pashto and Dari was the word "hypocrites" with some Arab prisoners' photos. The first Afghan prisoner who received that paper threw it at the translator and spat at him. Interrogators really did not understand our brotherhood. They were deluded into thinking they could change us. The longer we stayed together the stronger our bond grew.

Guards and other camp personnel were surprised by our behaviour. They were told that they would meet the worst of the worst – killers, "terrorists", monsters who were capable of snapping their necks in a second. When the guards started to work with and talk to us, their views completely changed. Many prisoners and guards developed strong friendships, and some of the guards even converted to Islam.

The bonds we formed and the good moral character I witnessed in each of my fellow prisoners showed me the power of the Prophet's teachings. Islam is based on perfecting the relationship between us and our Creator (Allah), but also the relationship with ourselves, our families, neighbours, and all who may surround us – including our enemies. These bonds are interconnected, interdependent, and shape who we are and who we become. They challenge us, nurture us, and strengthen us even in times of hardship. I learned that even when we cannot control what happens to us, even when others shed their humanity, we must do everything in our power to preserve ours. We still have the power to embody a high moral ethic as individuals and our relationships with one another. In Guantánamo, we practised the Prophet's precepts every day.

(The Writer is an activist and former Guantánamo Bay prisoner)
–Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Settler terror against Palestinians a ticking bomb

Osama Al-Sharif



Seven Israeli human rights activists were injured during a settler attack near the Palestinian village of Burin

THEY have been called "subhuman" and "terrorists" and their actions described as being similar to those of "terror organizations." Those being called out are the radical Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank and the labels were slapped on them not by Palestinians, but by key Israeli figures, including former army officers. Last week, seven Israeli human rights activists were injured during a settler attack

near the Palestinian village of Burin. The activists were there to show solidarity with Palestinian farmers whose orchards had previously been damaged by Jewish settlers. According to Israeli press reports, about 15 masked assailants came from the nearby illegal outpost of Giv'at Ronen. They attacked the activists, hurling stones at them and setting one of their cars on fire. They fled the scene before the Israeli army arrived. Footage of the attack went viral, but this was not an isolated incident. For years, radical settlers have been getting more daring and more provocative in their attacks against hapless Palestinian villagers; uprooting olive trees, burning cars, attacking Palestinian children, setting houses on fire and, most recently, running down innocent pedestrians.

While the international community looked the other way as these attacks became the norm for Palestinian villagers, a growing number of key Israeli figures are now warning of the damage the settlers are doing to the country's image and the dangers they pose to Israeli society itself. Others have warned that such brazen attacks are making the West Bank "a ticking bomb" that could explode at any minute.

Retired general and former deputy military chief Yair Golan described settlers as "sub-human" because of their attacks on Palestinians. Now a legislator with the Meretz party, he told the Associated Press last

week: "You can't have a free and democratic state so long as we are controlling people who don't want to be controlled by us." He had previously prompted a backlash with comments that likened the atmosphere in Israel to that of Nazi-era Germany. His criticism of "fascistic trends in modern-day Israel similar to Nazi Germany" had cost him his job in the military.

Most of the attacks come from what Israel calls unauthorized or illegal outposts – settlements that have not been approved – with the settlers carrying out almost daily campaigns to terrorize Palestinian residents; killing their cattle, shooting at their windows and uprooting their olive trees. Such acts will continue to build up pressure inside the West Bank and it would only take one major incident to ignite the Occupied Territories. Meanwhile, the Israeli government continues to authorize more illegal housing units in defiance of international law.

These terrorist acts by Jewish settlers will continue to divide Israeli society, which is leaning further to the right, with waning support for a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians. At some point, there will be an outbreak of violence and the crisis will put pressure on Israel internally, across the region and beyond. Bennett must be wary of the ticking bomb in the West Bank.

– Courtesy: Arab News

Briefs

Lebanon signs power deal with Jordan

BEIRUT: Power-starved Lebanon signed an agreement Wednesday to import electricity from Jordan via Syria with the aim of reducing chronic outages and heeding international calls for reform. The agreement signed by Energy Minister Walid Fayad with his Jordanian and Syrian counterparts is expected to give Lebanon two extra hours of mains electricity a day, doubling the supply currently provided by the cash-strapped government which has struggled to afford fuel imports for its power plants.

"This is an important, historic moment for Lebanon... not because of its impact but because of its symbolism," Fayad told a news conference. He described the deal as a "modest but very important agreement for the Lebanese people, who need every extra hour of electricity."

Lebanon has not had round-the-clock electricity since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. But an unprecedented financial crisis has led to power cuts lasting 22 hours a day, forcing most Lebanese to rely on expensive private generators.

Jordanian Energy Minister Saleh al-Kharabsheh said the step comes as "our brothers in Lebanon face sensitive and difficult circumstances". Lebanon and Jordan also signed an electricity transit agreement with Syria, which said that it stands ready to connect its power grid. - APP

Backlash in Greece over snow storm 'fiasco'

ATHENS: Outrage against the government and transport operators grew in Greece on Wednesday after a major snow storm stranded thousands of motorists on the country's most modern motorway, which remained blocked for a third day. As Greek dailies headlined with a "fiasco" and the chief executive officer of the private company running the Attiki Odos ring road resigned, work crews struggled to free hundreds of immobilised vehicles abandoned by their drivers around the capital.

"A government buried in snow," said leftist Efsyn daily, while even pro-government Eleftheros Typos daily spoke of "mistakes that brought chaos."

The snow storm also knocked out power in over a dozen Athens neighbourhoods, with repairs still ongoing on Wednesday as snow continued to impede access to some areas.

"We haven't slept all night, our (fingers and toes) feel like they are about to fall off," a woman in the southern Athens suburb of Alimos, who said she had no electricity for over a day, told Star TV. On Tuesday, the army was brought in to help police, fire and state crews extricate some 3,500 stranded motorists. - APP

Sino-Pak ties new dimensions are emerging

BEIJING: The friendship between Pakistan and China has not only proved to be trustworthy in every difficult time but also its new dimensions are emerging, says a report published by Gwadar Pro on Wednesday. While CPEC is an extraordinary economic project and hearts are getting closer after its inauguration, its agricultural sector has a fundamental importance in Pakistan's economy. Since the consolidation of CPEC, there have been tremendous opportunities for trade in agricultural commodities between Pakistan and China. Last year, an MoU on onion trade was signed between Pakistan and China to make such a possibility a reality. The MoU was signed between Pakistan's Department of Plant Protection and China's General Administration of Customs China. Through this MoU, it was decided that the Department of Plant Protection would conduct a world-class pest control survey during the onion production season, which would enable Pakistan to supply world-class onions to China. - APP

Riyadh and Bangkok restore ties, decades after gem theft

The two countries announced in a joint statement late on Tuesday "the full re-establishment of diplomatic relations" during a visit by Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to Riyadh

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia and Thailand have announced the resumption of diplomatic ties, after more than three decades of frozen relations linked to the theft of jewels from a Saudi palace. Thai-born janitor KriangkraiTeachomong stole \$20 million worth of precious gems in 1989 from the home of a Saudi prince, triggering a spate of murders in Bangkok and a feud between the countries dubbed

the "Blue Diamond Affair". The two countries announced in a joint statement late on Tuesday "the full re-establishment of diplomatic relations" during a visit by Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to Riyadh. "This historic step is the result of long-standing efforts at different levels to re-establish mutual confidence and friendly relations," the joint statement

added, following a meeting between the Thai premier and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The two countries agreed to appoint ambassadors in the near future. Saudi Airlines meanwhile announced that flights to Thailand would resume in May. The Thai government said the Saudis had flagged that they were seeking eight million skilled workers, including in hotels, healthcare and

construction projects. Thailand indicated it had a ready supply of skilled workers to help fill the need, RachadaDhanadirek, a Thai deputy government spokeswoman, said in a statement. Thailand had repeatedly sought to restore ties, in part to benefit its crucial tourism industry. Saudi Arabia had long accused Thai police of bungling their investigation into the jewel theft, with allega-

tions that the stolen gems were snapped up by senior officers. Thai police later returned some of the jewels but Saudi officials claimed most were fakes, while the whereabouts of the most precious gem - a rare 50-carat blue diamond - remains unknown. Riyadh sent a businessman to investigate in 1990 but he disappeared in Bangkok days after three Saudi diplomats were shot dead in the city.

In 2014, due to a lack of evidence, a case was dropped against five men, including a senior Thai policeman, accused of involvement in the Saudi businessman's murder. Thai government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said Prayut had expressed regret over the 1989 and 1990 incidents and promised to reopen investigations if any new evidence came to light. - APP

NATO finalising written proposals for Russia

BRUSSELS: NATO is close to completing its written proposals for Moscow after Russia issued a raft of security demands, and should deliver them this week, alliance diplomats said Wednesday. "Many of the Russian demands are unacceptable or unrealistic, but the response identifies a number of issues on which it is possible to work on their concerns," a Western diplomat told AFP. "The question is whether this is what the Russians want." Moscow blindsided the West by publishing two draft treaties for the United States and NATO in December that would see Washington's influence rolled back in eastern Europe. - APP



BRUSSELS: Members of Kashmir Council Europe holding a demonstration in front of the Indian embassy in Brussels. - DNA

Uzbek-Pakistani cooperation is actively moving forward

NEWS DESK

TASHKENT: Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov held talks via videoconference with Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on trade and investment Abdul Razak Dawood. The agenda of the negotiations included a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation in such areas as investment, mutual trade, industrial cooperation and the transport and logistics sector. The implementation of the agreements reached during the visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to Uzbekistan in July 2021 was substantively reviewed. The progress achieved in the promotion of joint projects and initiatives was discussed, the existing issues in each direction were considered and worked out. Commitment was expressed to close cooperation in order to accelerate the implementation of agreed projects.

The success developed by the two states in increasing trade turnover was noted: at the end of 2021, the volume of mutual trade increased by 46 percent compared to the previous year. In this context, the progress of work on the draft Preferential Trade Agreement was studied. The parties agreed to intensify joint work in this direction in order to agree on the document and accelerate its signing during the current year. The Uzbek side welcomed Pakistan's ratification of the Transit and Trade Agreement. It was discussed that in the near future negotiations will be organized between the leadership and experts of the transport and customs departments of the two countries in order to agree on the mechanisms for the practical implementation of the Agreement.

In a separate order, proposals were considered to deepen investment cooperation, strengthen ties between the business circles of the two countries, as well as establish cooperation in the banking sector. An agreement was

reached to organize a visit by a delegation of the leadership of Pakistani companies and commercial banks in February this year to discuss promising areas of cooperation and the implementation of mutually beneficial projects. Issues related to the implementation of joint projects in the transport and logistics sector were also considered. In particular, further steps were discussed on the practical implementation of the Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway construction project. In addition, the relevance of intensifying bilateral passenger and freight traffic between the two countries was noted. The dialogue also made it possible to discuss preparations for a number of planned bilateral events, including a regular meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, as well as a business forum with the participation of representatives of the private sector of the two countries.

Dr. Ashfaq for achieving revenue target of Rs 8trl

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) DrAshfaq Ahmed on Wednesday hinted for achieving revenue target of Rs 8 trillion by 2023 as it would set the country's economy in a new direction. He said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has his own vision for revenue collection and economic development in the country, in which, achieving revenue target of up to Rs 8 trillion is one of top priorities. Chairman expressed these views while talking to the journalists here. DrAshfaq said that in cur-

rent FY 2021-22, "Our revenue target is Rs 5.830 trillion which is expected to increase till Rs 6 trillion by June 2022. We have collected Rs 300 billion more revenue than our target till December 31." He expressed his hope that this year, the FBR would achieve all its revenue targets and would further play its role in the country's economy. Replying to a question, he said that Pakistan Customs was the protector of economic borders of the country and that they have always been playing its role for trade promotion. He said that Pakistan Customs was playing its best role in enforcing

trade laws at Chaman and Torkham borders. He said that transparent trade brought prosperity and development in the country. He vowed that, "we would digitalize every FBR's agency". He said that FBR currently has the largest data portal which is in a dire need of digitization. This data can be very important in the trade and economic development of the country. He said that at present, the role of FBR was very important in all three trade corridors including Chaman and Torkham, which would be strengthened with China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Urgent need for Pak to benefit from Chinese tech

ISLAMABAD: Union of Small and Medium Enterprises (Unisame) President ZulfikarThaver said that there was an urgent need for Pakistan to seek Chinese technology, collaborations, partnerships and joint ventures under the multi-billion-dollar CPEC. According to a report published by Gwadar Pro, "It should be in the most essential items on CPEC agenda (for Pakistan). The (Pakistani) government should aim to create self-sufficiency in food and chemicals to reduce dependency on drastically increasing imports," he remarked in a statement issued here. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan Mustafa Yurdakul called on Minister of State & Chairman BOI Muhammad Azfar Ahsan & Secretary BOI FareenaMazhar. Both sides underscored the importance of Turkish investments for Pakistani market & discussed avenues for mutual cooperation. - DNA

Omicron risk remains very high: WHO

GENEVA: The risk level related to the Omicron variant remains very high, the WHO said late Tuesday, with the numbers of new Covid-19 cases hitting another record high last week. "Over 21 million new cases were reported, representing the highest number of weekly cases recorded since the beginning of the pandemic," the World Health Organization said in its weekly epidemiological coronavirus update. The UN health agency said the number of new infections increased by five percent in the week to Sunday - compared to the 20 percent rise registered the week before. "A slower increase in case incidence was observed at the global level," the WHO said. Nearly 50,000 new deaths were also reported, it added - a similar figure to the week before. The report said Omicron continued to increase its dominance globally over the other variants of concern.

"The current global epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 is characterised by the dominance of the Omicron variant on a global scale, continued decline in the prevalence of the Delta variant, and very low-level circulation of Alpha, Beta and Gamma variants," the WHO said. "Countries that experienced a rapid rise in Omicron cases in November and December 2021 have been or are beginning to see declines in cases. - APP

Second NY cop dies after gun battle in Harlem

NEW YORK: A New York policeman wounded in an exchange of gunfire last week died Tuesday, raising the toll in the tragedy to two, officials said. The death of Wilbert Mora, 27, as a result of the gun battle Friday night in Harlem was announced by police commissioner Keechant Sewell. "He was murdered in the line of duty - fighting until the very end," read the Twitter account NYPD News.

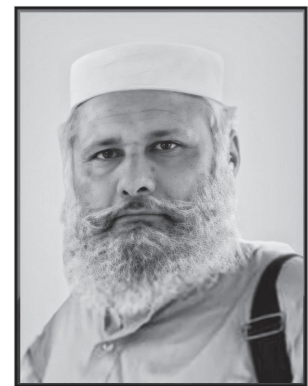
Mora and his partner were responding to a report of a domestic disturbance in an apartment in Brooklyn after a woman called to say her son was acting violently.

The colleague, 22-year-old Jason Rivera, was shot and killed by the suspect, a 47-year-old man who was also shot in the exchange and died Monday of his wounds. Three other police officers have been shot and wounded since January 1, when former cop Eric Adams took over as mayor of the city of nine million people. Adams vowed Monday to rid New York of guns, including by deploying plainclothes police on the streets, after the recent spate of violence. - APP

US approves \$2.56 billion in military sales to Egypt

WASHINGTON: The US State Department approved Tuesday two major military equipment sales to Egypt of transport aircraft and radar systems, despite ongoing concerns in Washington over Cairo's human rights record. The sale of 12 C-130J Super Hercules transports and accompanying equipment is worth \$2.2 billion. The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency said the sale, still not finalized, "will improve Egypt's capability to meet current and future threats by providing airlift support for its forces by moving supplies, equipment, and people." The aircraft can also be used for maritime patrol and rescue missions, it added. In a second deal, Egypt can buy ground-based air defense systems worth \$355 million to help it fend off air threats. The deals come despite ongoing unease in Washington over Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's tough treatment of political opponents, with rights groups estimating that Egypt holds about 60,000 political prisoners. In September, the State Department put a hold on \$130 million in military aid already budgeted for Egypt because of lack of improvement in the human rights situation in the country. And in early November, Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Egypt in bilateral talks to make "tangible and lasting improvements" on human rights. But for fiscal year 2022, which began on October 1, 2021, the Biden administration budgeted \$1.4 billion in bilateral assistance - most of it military related - for Cairo, the same as the previous year. - Agencies

CONDOLENCE



APNS expresses profound grief over the sad

demise of

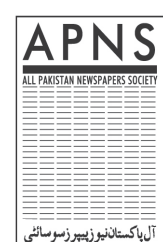
Syed Shams-ud-Doha Shah

Chief Editor

Daily Al Falah, Peshawar.

May Allah the Almighty rest his soul in eternal peace

and grant courage to the family to bear the loss.



All Pakistan Newspapers Society

Briefs

Romania ready to host NATO presence

BUDAPEST: Romania is in talks with the United States and France over ways to enhance their troop count in the country and was ready to host an increased NATO military presence, President Klaus Iohannis said on Wednesday. The U.S. Department of Defense said on Monday it put about 8,500 American troops on heightened alert, awaiting orders to deploy to NATO's eastern flank should Russia invade Ukraine. France has also offered to send more troops if needed. "I have been constantly saying we are ready to host an increased allied presence on our territory," Iohannis said. "Following the announcements made by the United States and France we are in contact with the two allies to establish concrete ways to realise their military presence." Iohannis was speaking after a meeting of Romania's supreme defence council to address security concerns after Russia massed tens of thousands of troops near Ukraine's borders. He said diplomatic talks were key to de-escalate tensions. On Wednesday, the defence council assessed the potential impact of a conflict on businesses and the energy and banking sectors, Iohannis said. EU member-state Romania was also preparing for potential refugee inflows from Ukraine, with which it shares a 600 kms border. NATO has a multinational land force of up to 4,000 troops in Romania, a member since 2004. The United States also has soldiers stationed at separate bases in Romania and in Bulgaria. "The current crisis proves once more that ... consolidating allied presence on the eastern flank including in our country is very important," he said. "The measures NATO has taken until now to reinforce its military presence on the eastern flank are an eminently defensive response to the rising security challenges in the region." - Agencies

Pak reaffirms solidarity with Kashmiris

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: As India observed Republic Day on Wednesday, Pakistan reaffirmed its "unshakable resolve" to continue to raise its voice and extend all possible support for the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir, who marked it as a black day. "Today, when the Kashmiris in IIOJK (Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir) around the world mark 26th January as a black day against India's oppression, the government and people of Pakistan reaffirm their unshakable resolve to continue to raise their voice and extend all possible support for the right of self-determination of the people of IIOJK," the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a statement. He said it was deplorable that in the past few days, the Indian occupation forces had further intensified the military siege already in place in the occupied territory for more than seven decades. The spokesperson said coercing innocent Kashmiris to hoist Indian flags on the Republic Day was typical of India's high-handedness to project a false sense of 'normalcy' and a hopeless attempt at masking its systematic and widespread oppression. He said the Indian government's decision to award so-called gallantry awards to the personnel of its occupation forces was yet another affront to the dignity of the countless victims of India's state terrorism. He said the Indian occupation forces had been making the people of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir subject to gross human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, suspension of fundamental freedoms, rapes, and the use of draconian laws such as Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Public Safety Act with complete impunity.

IATA wants curbs removed for vaccinated

LONDON: The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has urged governments around the world to employ their two years of Covid-handling experience to do away with travel restrictions, which it said were "a mess". Calling for the adoption of "unique solutions" to manage global travel, IATA Director General Willie Walsh, in a statement on Tuesday, urged governments to accelerate the relaxation of travel restrictions for fully vaccinated passengers with a WHO-approved vaccine as Covid-19 continued to evolve from the "pandemic to endemic stage". Walsh said it was the need of the hour to remove all travel barriers, including quarantine and testing, for fully vaccinated individuals as "with the experience of the Omicron variant, there is no mounting scientific evidence and opinion opposing the targeting of travellers with restrictions and country bans to control the spread of Covid-19." - APP

Business community invited to invest in AFEZ

Azerbaijani Ambassador further pointed out that a total of 2137 Pakistani companies were registered in Azerbaijan covering key sectors including industry, trade, services, construction, transport and telecommunication

DNA

KARACHI: The Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov, while highlighting the potential, opportunities and incentives being offered to foreign investors, invited the business and industrial community of Karachi to look into the possibility of investing in the Alat Free Economic Zone (AFEZ) where no value added tax, withholding tax or any other corporate tax was applicable and there was no restriction on foreign ownership. Exchanging views at a meeting during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry, the Envoy added that Pakistani investors by setting up their business units in Azerbaijan, in addition to availability of complete infrastructure, tax exemptions and other incentives, will experience a business-friendly environment due to reduced red tape and ongoing reforms in the macroeconomic environment, human capital & labor market, infrastructure & utilities, investor protection, foreign trade facilitation and technology & innovations. President KCCI Muhammad Idrees,



Senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Naqi, Vice President Qazi Zahid Husain, Chairman of Diplomatic Missions & Embassies Liaison Subcommittee Zia ul Arfeen, Former President KCCI Majid Aziz, Second Secretary of Azerbaijan Embassy, Shahbala Karimov, Third Secretary/Media Attaché Azerbaijan Embassy Elchin Mehdiyev and KCCI Managing Committee Members attended the meeting. Azerbaijani Ambassador further pointed out that a total of 2137 Pakistani companies were registered in Azer-

baijan covering key sectors including industry, trade, services, construction, transport and telecommunication while the overall investment by Pakistani companies in Azerbaijan stood at US\$4.2 million during the period from 1995-2021. "Azerbaijan with a population of 10.1 million, GDP per capita of US\$3693 and foreign direct investment of US\$14.8 billion in the non-oil sector can offer profitable investment opportunities to the business community of Karachi in the agriculture, construction, petrochemicals, renew-

ables, transport, mining, digital economy and tourism sectors", he added. Highlighting the business opportunities between the two countries, he said that Pakistani businessmen can export clothes and other textile products, optical and medical equipment, pharmaceutical products, rice, mangoes, bananas and other tropical fruits while Azerbaijan can export cotton & cotton yarn, polymers of ethylene or propylene, black fermented tea, tomatoes, hazelnuts, strawberries, berries, vegetables, fruit juices, sauces etc.

FS, OIC Secy Gen discuss Pak-OIC cooperation

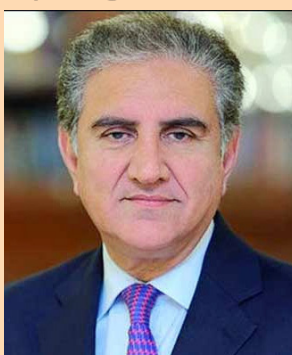
JEDDAH: Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood called on Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Hissein Brahimi Taha at the OIC Secretariat in Jeddah and highlighted Pakistan's role as a founding member of OIC & its steadfast espousal of Ummah's causes. The Foreign Office in a tweet said the meeting focused on issues including Pak-OIC cooperation, IIOJK, situation in Afghanistan, Islamophobia and preparations for 48th OIC-CFM in Pakistan. During the meeting, the Secretary-General congratulated Pakistan on its chairmanship of the 48th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers and wished it every success, a news report at the official website of the OIC said. Both sides reviewed the ongoing preparations for Pakistan's hosting of the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Bajwa calls on Prime Minister Imran Khan. - DNA

Economic stability crucial to achieve foreign policy goals

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday said for Pakistan to achieve its foreign policy objectives, putting its 'economic house in order' was crucial. Addressing the launch of the Report on 'Leveraging Private Investment for Pakistan's Sustainable Development' here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he said the government was working towards a more hospitable investment environment to help bolster the confidence of investors. The foreign minister said Pakistan was committed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations' Agenda 2030 to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth. He emphasized that Agenda 2030 and SDGs needed to become a global framework to encourage the private sector to capture the benefits and tradeoffs of sustainable development. He recalled that the country had achieved an encouraging growth of 5.37 percent despite the fact that the macro-economic indicators pointed in the wrong direction in August 2018 when the government assumed power. Qureshi said with a country like Pakistan still being in the IMF programme, achieving the objectives of sustainable development was a challenge. In this regard, he said, Pakistan needed to be innovative and think out-of-the-box solutions to spur growth. He said the government's priority had changed with the recent launch of a new national security policy focusing on economic policy that encompassed food and water security. The foreign minister said linking sustainable growth to development was the goal of the government and expressed confidence that the report would set guiding principles for inclusive and sustainable development. He said the Foreign Office had a lead role to play in this regard and encouraged the diplomats to get out of the concept of working in silos and rather focus on a coordinated approach. Resident Representative UNDP Pakistan Knut Ostby said the global development financing sector was at the crossroads with many countries struggling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. He said the UNDP was providing policy advisory and technical assistance to Pakistan and proposed the government adopt a holistic policy framework. - DNA



Kazakh Envoy urges exchange of real information

The govt of Kazakhstan would do all it can to decrease the gap between rich and poor and move towards equitable distribution of wealth and resources

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Yerzhan Kistafin, Kazakhstan's ambassador to Pakistan has stressed upon the need to exchange proper and authentic news exchanges reflective of ground realities between the two countries, for much needed mutual understanding. For this purpose, he has reiterated his proposal for closer collaboration between the ministries of information of Pakistan and Kazakhstan. He was speaking at a special online session "Understanding Recent Happenings in Kazakhstan" organized by the Eurasian Century Institute (ECI), Islamabad. The envoy gave a detailed briefing to researchers and experts of international relations on this month's troubling events in his country, candidly explaining the context as well as forward linkages of these protests. He noted that the chaos created with

these protests that resulted in huge loss of lives and property besides threatening the stability of the state was essentially a coup d'état aimed at toppling the government. He shared that while the issues of socio-economic inequality and grievances of people are a reality, and a large number of people were on streets to express their discomfort, but the people's rightful expression was misused and mislead by forces with vested agendas. He noted that evidence of foreign involvement has already emerged in investigation until now and it would be made public in due course of time. Mr. Yerzhan highlighted that his country is back on the stable trajectory, and the government has announced sets of much-needed economic, socio-economic and political reforms that would be implemented in months and years ahead. The government of Kazakhstan would do all it can to decrease the gap between rich and poor and move towards equitable distribution of wealth and resources. He made it clear that interests of local and foreign investors would be safeguarded at all costs. The envoy made it clear that his country has a close strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, and the help of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in dealing with this chaotic situation only strengthens this partnership.

Gov't successful to jack-up growth rate at 5.37%

"This (growth) was not expected by anybody but it happened," the federal minister said while addressing a press conference here adding that all sectors of economy including manufacturing, agriculture and services witnessed growth during the period

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Shaukat Tarin said Wednesday that despite four big crises the country had to face during past three-and-half years, the economy has been heading on right direction as it grew by 5.37 percent during fiscal year 2020-21 and is expected to grow by 5% during the current year. "This (growth) was not expected by anybody but it happened," the federal minister said while addressing a press conference here adding that all sectors of economy including manufacturing, agriculture and services witnessed growth during the period. He said, that earlier the growth for the last year was expected to hover around expecting 3.94, but since the large scale manufacturing witnessed considerable growth in June 2021, which jacked up overall growth fig-

ures for the year. He expressed the hope that growth during the current year is expected at 5 percent as overall revenue collection has witnessed tremendous growth, with electricity utilization increasing by 13 percent exports on rise and bumper crops expected. Enumerating four big crisis the incumbent government had to face during the past three and half years, the minister said, when the incumbent government took over, it had to pay around \$29 billion as there were \$20 billion current account deficit whereas payments of around \$9 billion were also due. He said the Prime Minister went to friendly countries and collected dollars, however the country had to go



into IMF programme later, which was the toughest one following which the government had to increase discount rate, make currency devaluation, enhance utility prices to overcome deficit. He said the second crisis was spread of Covid-19 pandemic, which he called was 'once in a century crisis' that had affected the country as well as the whole world. He added, the third crisis the government had to face was commodity price cycle which was recorded at 20 years' high and resultantly countries' four big imports increased from 85 to 100 percent. He clarified that the imports went up more due to price hike than increase in commodity. He said, the fourth crisis was created

due to situation in Afghanistan than United States left and frozen reserves of the neighboring country and impacted Pakistan's currency market. He said when Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, the Prime Minister took tough decision and opted for smart lock-down to ensure businesses run. In addition, he provided incentives for enhancing exports, particularly textile sector, injected money in agriculture to reduce dependence food imports and accorded priority to construction. He said the Covid-19 was handled successfully adding the Economist Normacy Index kept the country at first three position for three consecutive times, adding that now even advanced countries were following Pakistan's smart lock-down strategy. He said that owing to prudent policies, the exports from the country increased by up to 29% whereas the remittance also witnessed a considerable growth.

Positivity rate still higher than 10%

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's COVID-19 positivity ratio remained above 10% for the seventh consecutive day, the National Command and Operation Centre's (NCOC) data showed Wednesday morning, with the government mulling over more restrictions for cities with high positivity rates. The country recorded a positivity rate of 10.17% as 5,196 new coronavirus cases were recorded after 51,063 tests were conducted across Pakistan in the last 24 hours, NCOC's figures showed. The overall positivity rate and daily COVID-19 case count, however, has registered a minor decline in the last two days, as per the NCOC stats. With the detection of new cases, the number of total cases have jumped to 1.386 million, while 15 more patients have succumbed to the virus, taking the death toll to 29,137, the official stats showed. The federal government has decided to control the COVID-19 situation before allowing citizens to get back to their normal routine and impose further restrictions in cities with a positivity ratio higher than 10%. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), in a notification late last night, issued directions to the airport staff across the country to wear masks amid the rise in cases due to the Omicron variant. The notification said staff members and passengers would not be allowed inside the airport premises without wearing masks.

Police use tear gas to disperse MQM-P protesters

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Protests by MQM-P workers and leaders erupted on Wednesday on Shahrah-e-Faisal against the controversial local government bill. The protesters, who had gathered in large numbers in the afternoon hours, attempted to reach the Chief Minister House for a sit-in. As a result, the flow of traffic was severely affected on the road considered to be the city's main artery. The police, however, baton-charged the crowd and used tear gas shells in an attempt to dissuade it from entering the red zone. MQM-P representatives said several women and children participating in the protests sustained injuries, while the police arrested several MQM-P leaders and activists. Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Sadaqat Hussain was also injured because of the baton charge. However, the police have successfully cleared the area near CM House, the report said. Contingents of south police were deployed to the site of the protest to disperse the demonstrators. According to the traffic police, the Shahrah-e-Faisal road started to become choked and as protesters continued to advance forwards, therefore, they had no choice but to use force and fire teargas shells. The protesters, however, insisted that they were staging their protest peacefully, but the police went ahead and used force to disperse them, the report said. Per reports, the police have cleared the area and roads have been cleared for the commuters, while five people have been arrested so far from the area near CM House. MQM-P leaders and workers have left for the press club where the top leadership is expected to hold a press conference in order to decide on an action plan. Commenting on the action of the police to disperse the protesters, former mayor of Karachi Wasim Akhtar said that the "worst form of state force was used against the protesters," adding that several workers and leaders were injured because of the baton charge.

Karot Power Company wins NEPRA CSR stalwart award



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of China to Pakistan Nong Rong Wednesday expressed gratitude over the NEPRA's CSR Stalwart Award to the Karot Power Company, the entity for Karot hydro power project under the umbrella of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In a tweet, the Chinese envoy said the company was awarded for its unwavering commitment to community development. "By joint contribution, extensive consultation and shared benefits, CPEC is win-win cooperation", he added. Karot hydro power plant is among the early-harvest high-priority projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative. The run-of-river project has iconic importance being a source of sustainable, low-cost, clean and green energy. The \$2 billion project has entered the commissioning phase as over 95% civil and electromechanical works of 720 megawatts Karot hydro power plant have been completed. The project is expected to become fully operational by June this year. - APP