

Recent agitations in Iran reflective of Islamophobia

Most importantly, theocratic influences within education systems through a coordinated effort also added to the agitation as Iran was a country that had always cherished cultural heritage

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: More than 40 years had passed since the Revolution, and Iran had experienced protests through the years over a series of issues. However, this recent chaos had been the most longstanding agitation staged since the Revolution, said Ambassador Riffat Masood. She was addressing a Roundtable Discussion, titled, "Contemporary Socio-Political Dynamics in Iran", arranged by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), here on Friday. She said that considering a plethora of linguistic and cultural communities, Iran's cultural fabric had always been more overpowering than religious supremacy and that related, several concerns surrounding the recent agitation revolved around the cultural and religious identity of the deceased Mahsa Amini. The protests which had ensued following Amini's demise had triggered deep hatred against the conventional ruling elite in Iran. While the reasons were apparently different,

Amini's death had brought to the fore deep-rooted economic and political grievances that were so far concealed, she said. Ambassador Masood said that it was noteworthy that the recent agitations had turned into a major internal stressor pressurizing the regime survival, especially considering that 40 years of sanctions and a sustained campaign of repression by the IRGC and Basij had already made the regime unpopular, particularly among the 60 percent of youth and also, women. She stressed the expanding influence of the IRGC and the Basij, and said that the Iranians were done with the morality police and this was the main reason behind the longstanding persistence of the protests. Additionally, she said, social media regulations and controls had further exacerbated the situation leading to a state of suffocation among the public. Most importantly, theocratic influences within education systems through a coordinated effort also added to the agitation as Iran was a country that had always cherished cultural heritage. Ambassador Riffat added that it

was important to note that in order to address rampant poverty, unemployment, corruption and poor economic progress generally, alongside the inherent nationalism rooted in the Iranians, multi-dimensional major reforms were required. The only way that the Iranian government could come out of the current agitation was via providing some sort of concessions to the Iranian people either economically or politically. Syed Fraz Hussain Naqvi, Research Lead Iran Program at IRS commented on the longevity of the current protests and said that there were several reasons as to why the protests will not succeed and might fizzle out in time. Firstly, the movement was by and large a leaderless protest steering into convenient directions with altering momentums during different times. He said, that other reasons to believe that short life of the ongoing protests were factors such as fake news, western involvement, lack of support from within Iran, and Islamophobic element attached to the movement.



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah meets with World Bank team led by its Regional Director Mr John Roome at CM House. Country Director Najy Bensassine joined the meeting through video link. APP

KPCSW organizes training on anti-rape act

PESHAWAR: A five days Training of Trainers (ToT) on Anti Rape Act 2021 and Gender based Violence (GBV) was organized by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women KPCSW here Friday. It was supported by Global Affairs Canada funded project WEPP. Cowater and was held here for Police department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It was the first ever ToT on Anti-Rape Act 2021 in Pakistan which was attended by police instructors from Police Training Centers across the province. AIG Police (Training) Dr. Quraish Khan, was chief guest of the concluding ceremony, says a press release. Cowater International Team Leader, Ms. Shabina Gulzar, Gender Advisor Ms. Zulhra Luqman and Director Programs KPCSW Ms. Amna Durrani were among the speakers. The participants were made aware of the different levels of investigation, rights of the victim, duties and responsibilities of the police, the health department, the community and other stakeholders in providing justice to the victims under the Act. - APP

Pakistan, Sri Lanka vow to continue support in defence industry

ISLAMABAD: The third round of Pakistan-Sri Lanka Armed Forces Defence Dialogue (AFDD) was held in Expo Centre Karachi from November 16-17 where both sides agreed to continue to support each other at all regional and international fora. The Pakistan delegation was led by Secretary Defence, Lt General (R) Hamood uz Zaman Khan, Sri Lankan delegation was headed by Secretary Defence, General (R) Kamal Gunaratne, said a news release issued here Friday. The delegations also agreed that the cooperation in the field of defence industry, military training, and joint exercises high level

visits would continue. During the Dialogue, Pakistan and Sri Lanka reviewed the existing scope of bilateral military relations and expressed satisfaction on the progress achieved under the umbrella of AFDD. Both leader exchanged views on regional security and upcoming challenges. It was agreed that Pakistan and Sri Lanka would continue to support each other at all regional and international fora. The cooperation in the field of defence industry, military training, joint exercises high level visits will continue. In the end, it was agreed that next meeting of AFDD will be convened in Sri Lanka on mutually agreed dates 2023.

Peshawar to be made city of flowers

DNA

PESHAWAR: Mayor Peshawar Zubair Ali on Friday reiterated the resolve to make Peshawar the city of flowers and address all the issues including traffic problems through the involvement of stakeholders. Addressing the members of traders and business community, he said a 25-member committee comprising representatives of traders, health, education, police, PESCO, SNGPL and line departments would suggest measures to resolve the most issue on priority basis. He said a delegation of experts in traffic management from Punjab was invited to provide solution to traffic issues in Peshawar.

Muslim countries, a massive market for halal cosmetics

FAISALABAD: The 2nd International Conference on 'Dermal Sciences' was organised by the Department of Dermatology Sciences, The University of Faisalabad (TUF), here on Friday. Indonesian Ambassador to Pakistan Adam M Tugio attended the conference as the chief guest. The theme of the conference was skin and cosmetics, production, practice and regulations. Addressing the conference, the ambassador praised the efforts of Madina Foundation in educational and medical fields. He greeted TUF Board of Governors (BoG) Chairman Haider Amin for successfully achieving the significant rankings for The University of Faisalabad. About halal cosmetics, Adam M Tugio shed light on the scope available in economy for halal cosmetics, especially among Muslim countries. He said that more than 25 per cent of the global population comprises Muslims, which makes halal cosmetics markets a massive opportunity for investors. He emphasised that the expected volume in the economy for halal products would reach up to 6 trillion by 2024, so it must be the centre of attention

for all global investors. Discussing the demographic similarities between Indonesia and Pakistan, Tugio said that young influencers would play a vital role in promoting and marketing of halal cosmetics around the world, especially in Muslim countries. He admired the fact that halal cosmetics would certainly face some challenges such as Islamophobia and misconceptions regarding halal products but intense research and brainstorming by institutes like The University of Faisalabad would help in facing such challenges. Earlier, the envoy inaugurated the 2nd international dermal conference at Ali auditorium where head of department dermal sciences Tanzila Khalid briefed the chief guest and other dignitaries about the aims of dermal conference and opening session which focused on halal cosmetics. In welcoming remarks, BoG Chairman Haider Amin thanked the Indonesian envoy for his visit at the 2nd international dermal conference. He presented a memento to the Ambassador of Indonesia. Shields were also presented to Prof Dr Shaukat Parvez and Abiha Hamid. - APP

LB polls to be held in AJK as per announced schedule on Nov. 27



We have full confidence in the federal institutions that they will cooperate with the government

MIRPUR: Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sardar Tanveer Ilyas Khan has said that the scheduled November 27 local bodies elections would be held in Azad Jammu Kashmir on time "People are happy to see the local body's elections are being held after a break

of more than three decades", the PM said adding that he was sure that Pakistan government provide the required security to ensure holding of the polls in free, fair and transparent manner. During his informal chat at a private ceremony in Rawalpindi on Friday, the PM said that the government was committed to fulfill the commitment it had made with the people of the liberated territory. The Prime Minister said, "We have taken a clear position that the government will fulfill its responsibilities in this regard". He said that the decision to hold the polls as per the schedule has generated a lot of optimism amongst the people especially the youth who were actively participating in the election campaigns. "We have full confidence in the federal institutions that they will cooperate with the government respecting the wishes of the people of the state", he said. - APP

PU organises seminar on political polarisation

LAHORE: Punjab University (PU) School of Communication Studies (SCS) Friday organised a day-long seminar on 'Political Polarisation in Pakistan: Balancing voices Vs Journalists' Biases'. The seminar was held in collaboration with the SCS, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Chair, PU Web TV and Department of Communication & Media Research (DCMR), says a press release issued here. Director Prof Dr Noshina Saleem, Prof Dr Mian Hanan Ahmad, renowned journalists Rizwan Razi, Gohar Butt, Assistant Prof Dr Tanveer Hussain, Assistant Prof Dr Nasim Ishaq and students were present. In his keynote address, Rizwan Razi highlighted role of media in political polarisation in Pakistan besides shed light on its history and present practices in modern era. He said, after the emergence of new media, Pakistan's democracy had become polarised. - APP

PAF pavilion remained iconic at IDEAS

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The 11th Edition of International Defence Exhibition and Seminar, IDEAS 2022, concluded on Friday at Karachi Expo Center. On the 4th and final day of the exhibition, the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) being the most appreciated project of the show, continue to gather admiration from the visitors, said a news release on Fri-

day. The broad spectrum of the project and its national significance has made it the most successful project at the exhibition. The NASTP project as per CAS vision and his own initiative has materialized in record time. PAF pavilion with the static display of state of the art JF-17 Thunder and Super Muhshak Trainer Aircraft remained iconic in the mega event with keen interest shown in the indigenously developed aircraft by the visiting delegates and

senior military officials of different countries. Earlier, on the 3rd day of the event, PAF's legendary Mirage aircraft presented a breath-taking flypast at Karachi Sea view. The event also included a paratrooping show of PAF's Air Borne team jumping from the mighty C-130 Hercules. The Flypast was witnessed by several key officials and delegates from friendly countries. The excited crowd gathered at the venue were over joyed to see the power

packed performance of the PAF aircrew. Both NASTP and the JF-17 Thunder aircraft together will serve as the leading defence productions to attract foreign delegates for joint ventures. NASTP is all set to become one of the best Aerospace, Cyber and IT Clusters in the world and transform national landscape with design, R&D and innovation centers for emerging and disruptive technologies to foster research, innovation and devel-

opment in aviation, space, IT and cyber technologies, products and services to accrue maximum social, economic, security and scientific dividends for the country. The mega event on one hand provided an opportunity to Pakistan Air Force to showcase its aircraft and indigenous productions in front of the audience from around the globe while on the other will pave the way for future defence collaborations with friendly countries.



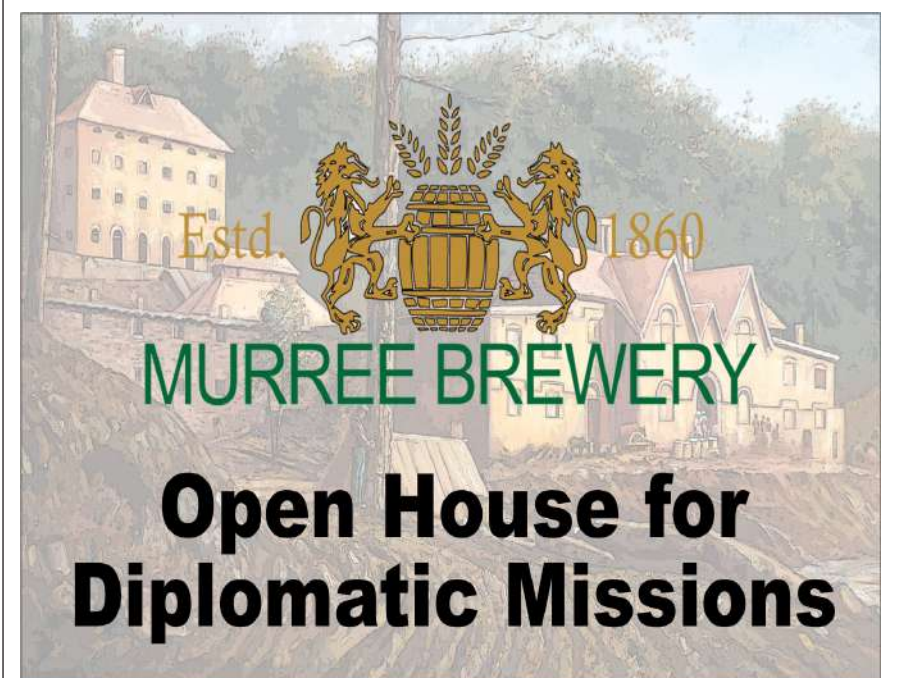
Govt to provide legal cover to street vendor program: Faisal Kundi

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi Friday announced that the present government will provide legal status to the street vendors program. He was presiding over a briefing on providing an enabling environment for street vending. Mr. Zia Bandy, senior fellow Pakistan Institute for Development Economics (PIDE) and focal person of street vendors' program, gave a detailed presentation on the ongoing program in Islamabad, its challenges and future roadmap. The meeting was attended by Mr. Nadeem Afzal Chan, Former PPP MNA and high officials of the ministry along with representative street vendors. Faisal Kundi said that street vendors are an important part of society and by recognizing them through legislation and regulations we can build our economy. Zia Bandy apprised Faisal Karim Kundi about the challenges faced by street vendors. The previous government didn't provide legal status

to Rehri Ban project due to which such a useful scheme had to face a closure in the initial stages, said Faisal Karim Kundi. The present government will provide legal status to the project, he added. Street vendors discussed their fears and expectations of the vendor's community with Faisal Karim Kundi. Kundi assured them full support for the welfare of street vendors. He said that vendors will only welcome this project if legal grounds are provided to the project. This project must be extended to the provincial level, he added. It was elaborated in the meeting that in comparison to other developing countries, street vendors remained a much neglected segment in Pakistan. It is left to fend itself on the cost of perpetual squeezing by predators from both private and public entities. Based upon a PIDE research survey, the street economy of urban Pakistan is conservatively estimated at around PKR 900-1000 billion with up to a million street vendors operating. This is an overwhelmingly cash,

unrecorded and informal economy with little graduation opportunities for Bottom of Pyramid (BoP) street vendors. Deprivation of legal status constraint effectiveness of street vending as a viable tool for poverty alleviation, job creation and livelihood for urban poor. In 2021, Ministry of Poverty Alleviation launched a street vendors' initiative at limited scale for formalization and financial inclusion of street vendors. Program components enabled over 200-street vendors to acquire eco friendly carts, micro-finance loans and vending licenses. Participating street vendors have organized themselves in an association. It is now facilitating digitalization of street vendors through their digital onboarding, bookkeeping, online payments, lending and ecommerce with engagement with tech companies. Mr. Nadeem Afzal Chan mentioned that ground realities of street vending demand a holistic engagement between political leadership and researchers for a sustainable solution. PPP has a long history

of struggle for the emancipation of poor and it is willing to expand the intervention footprint for street vending across the country. Participating street vendors also talked about their problems, where they are primarily facing problems of non-issuance and non-renewal of vending licenses. Their relief under the government program is under peril due to eviction threats from Municipality officials. They have requested Mr. Kundi to intervene in this matter. SAPM has shown his resolve in addressing the street vendors' issues in earnest. He mentioned that the government will be engaging all stakeholders in first getting the street vendors' law promulgated and then oversee its implementation across the country. He recognized street vendors as an integral part of the urban economy, who have a legitimate socioeconomic role to play. He emphasized that the ministry of poverty alleviation will play a lead role in the provision of an enabling environment for street vendors in the country. - APP



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For further information please contact the following.

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Mobile: 0300 8553342

**World
Children's
day to be
celebrated
on Nov 20**

ISLAMABAD: World Children's Day will be marked on November 20 (Sunday) across the globe including Pakistan to promote international togetherness and awareness among children worldwide.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, promotes and coordinates this special day, which also works towards improving children's welfare.

The day promotes the welfare of and understanding between children.

The theme for this year's International Children's Day is, "Inclusion, for every child". This theme means that every child belonging to any society, community or nationality is entitled to equal rights. It also emphasizes on the eradication of discrimination among children of various civilizations. Many schools and other educational institutions make a special effort to inform children of their rights according to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teachers stimulate their pupils to think about the differences between themselves and others and explain the idea of "rights". —APP

**Karandaaz
leads con-
versation on
climate-smart
housing in
Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD: Karandaaz Pakistan held a webinar to launch its latest study on the potential of Climate-Smart, Low-Income Housing in Pakistan. Industry leaders and stakeholders came together to deliberate on the housing needs in Pakistan and the impact green initiatives can have in meeting the needs of populations especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Between 2000 and 2019, Pakistan was found to rank eighth amongst the top ten countries most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change, according to a press release issued here on Friday. This vulnerability became starkly evident earlier this year, as one-third of the country was flooded as a result of unprecedented rainfall and glacier melt. As estimated by Karandaaz, over 33 million people were displaced, and one-seventh lost their homes due to the floods of 2022. With an ever-increasing frequency of severe climate-related events, depleting energy resources, and a population growth rate that far outpaces the provision of housing, this webinar was arranged as a platform to bring together a wide set of stakeholders, including architects, urban planners, financiers, and funding providers, etc. to discuss Pakistan's housing needs. —APP

**ANF seizes
over 148 kg
drugs, in six
operations;
arrests four**

RAWALPINDI: Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan on Friday seized over 148 kg drugs, arrested four accused, including a foreigner while conducting six counter-narcotics operations throughout the country. According to an ANF Headquarters spokesman, ANF North in an operation at Islamabad International Airport recovered 73 hero-in-filled capsules from a passenger, resident of Khusab going to Bahrain on flight no GF-771. In another operation near Islamabad Motorway Sangjani Toll Plaza, ANF recovered 90 kg charas and over 40 kg opium from the possession of an Afghan national. ANF Punjab in an operation at Lahore International Airport, recovered four cocaine-filled capsules from the possession of a female who came from Nagaria via flight no QR-628. The spokesman informed that ANF recovered 1.7 kg heroin, seven kg charas, a pistol.—APP

**Begum Alvi for maximum
awareness on breast cancer**
Begum Samina Alvi said that every woman should spare 5 minutes for health and self-examination

DNA

ISLAMABAD: First Lady Begum Samina Alvi said that one out of nine women in Pakistan is diagnosed with breast cancer and fifty percent patient of this disease die due to late diagnosis and stressed for creating maximum awareness in women about this issue to reduce its death rate in the country. She said that many countries have achieved 99 percent recovery rate and 80 percent survival rate of breast cancer patients by creating better awareness in society and we have to work on similar lines to cope with this issue. She said that awareness sessions on breast cancer should be organized throughout the year instead of just in October so that maximum women can be sensitized about the causes and treatment of this disease. She said this while addressing as Chief Guest at an awareness session on breast cancer organized by Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was attended by a large number of women from various walks of life.

Begum Samina Alvi said that every woman should spare 5 minutes for health and self-examination. She said that she has been patronizing this campaign for the last 4 years



due to which increasing number of breast cancer patients are now coming forward for checkup during the first and the second stage of this disease. She said that the society should support the breast cancer patients, which is very important for recovery. She said that 13 hos-

pitals in Karaachi, 8 in Punjab, 5 in KPK are providing free treatment to breast patients and more are needed to make its treatment affordable for low income patients. She thanked the private sector, medical universities, media and others for supporting awareness campaign

on breast cancer. Samina Alvi appreciated ICCI for arranging health awareness session besides dealing with day-to-day business issues. She said this huge gathering of ladies in the awareness session indicates the important role of ICCI in eradicating the cancer and other diseases.

In his welcome address, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that breast cancer is spreading rapidly in Pakistan due to which 40,000 women die of this disease every year. He urged the government should set up a national cancer registry to collect data at the national level for better prevention of the disease. He said the basic health units in rural areas lack staff and facilities for this disease and demanded that the government should provide women medical staff and other facilities in rural health units for screening of breast cancer. He further said that the government in collaboration with private hospitals should launch a national screening campaign for the eradication of the disease across the country. He assured that ICCI would continue to conduct such awareness programs in future to create awareness among more women.

Dr. Faryal Razzaq highlighted the importance of emotional stability, family support and avoiding suppression of emotions to cope with breast cancer issue as emotional trauma is one of the major causes of breast cancer. Amna Salman Butt, a breast cancer patient shared her experience how to cope with breast cancer disease.

**Consulting
Services
Contract
Signed for
King Salman
Hospital**

ISLAMABAD: A ceremony was held on Friday in Islamabad, Pakistan, for the signing of a consulting services contract for the King Salman Hospital project and the Government College of Home Economics and Management Sciences project in Islamabad.

The two projects come from a grant provided by the Kingdom through the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), with a total of \$ 26 million.

The signing ceremony took place at the headquarters of the Pakistani Ministry of Economic Affairs, in the presence of representatives from the Kingdom's embassy in Pakistan, and several Pakistani officials. The Pakistani side expressed thanks to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and HRH the Crown Prince for their keenness and generous support for Pakistan, highlighting the positive and economic impact of such development projects on the Pakistani people.

The King Salman Hospital project in the suburb of Tarlai aims to provide high-quality health services to the residents of Islamabad and its suburbs, while the Federal Government College of Home Economics and Management Sciences for females in Islamabad aims to raise the level of higher education.—APP

**Mobile
import
decreases
64.94% in 4
months**

ISLAMABAD: The import of mobile phones witnessed a decrease of 64.94 per cent during the first four months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. Pakistan imported mobile phones worth US \$226.051 million from July-October (2022-23) as compared to the imports of US \$644.672 million during July-October (2021-22), showing a decline of 64.94 per cent, according to the latest data released by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Meanwhile, on a year-to-year basis, the import of mobile phones also dipped by 56.06 per cent during the month of October 2022, as compared to the same month of last year.—APP

**RCCI fears 30,000
poultry farms
to be closed: Saqib**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has cautioned the Government that due to non-availability of soybean meal, there is fear of scarcity of chicken, meat and food security across the country.

RCCI President Saqib Rafiq said in a statement that 130,000 tonnes of soybeans worth 22 billion rupees are lying in the open sky at the port. Due to the lack of timely



clearance, there is a fear that 30,000 poultry farms will be closed, more than 300 feed mills will be directly affected and the investment of about 1200 billion will be stopped in this sector.

He said that the poultry industry accounts for 50% of the meat demand in the country, and more than 1.5 million people are employed in the poultry industry. Non availability of soybean meal across the country has started to have an impact, increasing the price of chicken, and making it unaffordable for the common man, he said. He informed that Soybean meal is the main ingredient of any feed without which the production of feed is not possible due to which the entire feed industry will shut down. Your poultry farmer, fish farmer and dairy farmer will be ruined due to unavailability of feed, he cautioned.

Saqib Rafiq further added that in the next two weeks, not only chickens, eggs will not be available in the country, but there will also be a shortage of milk and meat in the entire country. This should be considered as an SOS call, he said. He demanded that the authorities should realize the seriousness of the issue and immediately release the soybean seed at the port so that there is no food security in the country.

**Afghan faculty
meet HEC chief**

Faculty members appreciated HEC's initiative for capacity building of Afghan teaching staff and showed interest in future collaborative research and projects

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman HEC Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad held an interactive session with 30 Afghan faculty members who are attending a three-week capacity building programme at the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) under HEC Afghan Project. The Chairman urged the Afghan faculty members to act as master trainers and further delegate their key

learnings gained through capacity building programme to their colleagues at universities and other academics to continue the learning process.

The faculty members appreciated HEC's initiative for capacity building of Afghan teaching staff and showed interest in future collaborative research and projects. While appreciating e-library facilities in Pakistan, Afghan faculty was interested in learning how to improve digital access of their li-

braries in Afghanistan, for which Chairman encouraged and assured support and facilitation.

Acknowledging commitment and resilience of the Afghan nation, Dr. Mukhtar encouraged Afghan faculty to establish people-to-people contact for enhanced research collaboration, policy input through South Asian Forum and spread positive message among Afghan youth to strengthen Pak-Afghan bilateral relations through higher education.

**Food commodities
valuing 1.432
billion exported**

ISLAMABAD: Food groups' exports from the country during the first four months of the current financial year increased by 4.27 per cent as different food commodities valued at \$1.493 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$1.432 billion in the same period of last year.

During the period from July-October, 2022 the commodities which witnessed positive growth in their respective exports included fish and fish preparations 39.65 percent as 50,859 metric tons of fish and fish products worth \$134.596 million exported as against the exports of 30,088 metric tons valuing \$96.384 million of the same period last year, according to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

Meanwhile, over 378,826 metric tons of vegetables worth 107.460 million were exported during the last four months as compared to the exports of 199,119 metric tons valuing \$68.154 million in the same period last year.

The exports of leguminous vegetables (pulses) witnessed a 100 increase as 48 metric tons of pulses valuing \$0.047 million were exported as against the same period of last year. The exports of tobacco grew by 55.79 percent as 6,980 metric tons of tobacco valuing \$17.792 million were exported as against the exports of 1,907 metric tons worth \$11.429 million in the same period last year.

During the period under review, about 26,747 metric tons of meat and meat products worth \$129.197 million were exported as compared to the exports of 24,256 metric tons valuing \$104.558 million in the same period last year, recording a growth of 23.56 percent increase.

On the other hand, the imports of food commodities into the country during the last 04 months also grew by 9.71 percent as the country spent \$3.431 billion on the import of edible commodities as against the imports of \$3.127 billion in the same period last year.

The commodities that contributed to the growth of the import bill included wheat, which grew by 96.14 percent, soybean oil by 365.90 percent, palm oil by 23.68 percent, and pulses by 25.82 percent.

During the period from July-October, 2022, 1.098 million tons of wheat costing \$460.596 million were imported, besides importing 985,872 metric tons of palm oil valuing \$1.406 billion and soya bean oil valuing \$111.732 million to fulfill the local requirements.

Besides, about 77,898 metric tons of tea valuing \$129.474 million, and 23,107 metric tons of dry fruits, and nuts costing \$13.430 million were also consumed in the country during the first four months of the current financial year.

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Working the room to foster solidarity

As an important platform for global coordination on economic and development policies, the G20 Summit brings together the leaders of the most influential economies in the world. The G20 members represent two-thirds of the world population, account for more than 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product and 75 percent of international trade. Hence, by shoring up shared political will, the G20 leaders can make concerted efforts to jointly and effectively respond to the pressing challenges facing the world and work together to secure a global economic recovery and prosperity, as was demonstrated during the global financial crisis.

That the necessary unity has been found wanting in the past few years has allowed some of the global ills to intensify and others to fester and suppurate. President Xi Jinping's intensive diplomacy in Bali this week was a rallying call for the G20 countries, and the international community as a whole, to stand together and face the risks and challenges. Conducting intensive meetings with an array of world leaders on the sidelines of the summit, he has sought to bridge differences, foster mutual understanding and create a more enabling atmosphere for cooperation.

While Xi's meeting with US President Joe Biden on Monday, their first in-person talks since the latter took office in January 2021, naturally grabbed global attention given the tensions between the world's two largest economies, the Chinese leader was very active in talking to other attendees at the summit in an effort to foster agreement on affirmative action to replace division with unity, confrontation with cooperation, and exclusion with inclusiveness. In the process, Xi made clear China's stance on the Ukraine crisis, which has been subject to some distortion, stressing the urgency for de-escalation, a cease-fire and peace talks, and the imperative of preventing any use of nuclear weapons.

Deepening economic cooperation among Asia-Pacific countries has featured prominently in Xi's conversations with leaders from the region, including Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. And Xi's diplomatic overtures over the past few days have either cemented old friendships or struck up a rapport to ease previously troubled relations, which has renewed confidence that regional stability can be maintained.

It is evident that all countries are having a hard time to a greater or lesser degree in the face of the current headwinds. Xi's message was that by rejecting beggar-thy-neighbor practices and the building of small yards with high fences and by joining hands instead, the world can find ways to tide over difficulties and create the prospects for a brighter future.



Utilizing resources for success

MUHAMMAD OMAR IFTIKHAR

Gone are the days when people had to walk miles to read books in a library. Now they don't even have to travel as books and literature is available over the Internet. The youth of today has the resources to achieve success. Unlike their predecessors who had to perform manual labor, the youth of today can access all forms of content online. The need of the hour is to find a purpose and direction. With changing times, the youth needs to become aware of their society. They cannot live in isolation. The example of hundreds and thousands of freelancers working across Pakistan is an example. They actively share insights and discuss opportunities on social media. This creates a congenial environment for learning.

The youth should be made aware of the learning opportunities available online. They should enhance their skills to earn while gaining experience. This experience will help them to strengthen their skills, capitalize on their ability to solve problems and earn a side income. Interaction with clients and peers also creates new contacts.

Indeed, the world is moving towards a remote-work culture where companies will be increasing their dependencies on remote employees who do not need to show up at the office. This first experimented during the lockdown in 2020. The concept of freelancing was also accentuated during this period when more skilled individuals began selling their services online. The youth of Pakistan should learn how to use their available resources to achieve maximum output. They need to first identify their interest and develop a skill set that complements this interest. They then need to determine how to use social media to market their services and attract clients. The world is gearing for the fourth industrial revolution and much of it has already begun. This new era will require the youth to be agile to changing trends, be adaptive to the market's needs, and be focused on bolstering their skills.

US slow walks punitive measure against Saudi Arabia as tension spills into Qatar WC

James M. Dorsey

In the six weeks since the cut, Saudi Arabia has made several conciliatory gestures, including a vote in the United Nations General Assembly in favor of a resolution declaring Russia's annexation of swaths of eastern Ukraine illegal, and significantly increased humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The gestures failed to persuade Mr. Biden, buoyed by his Democratic Party's dashing Republican hopes, to take time out from this week's Group of 20 summit to meet with Mr. Bin Salman on the sidelines. However, that didn't stop the Biden administration from simultaneously seeking to bolster fledgling confidence in its commitment to the kingdom's defense by flying two B-52 bombers over the Middle East in a show-of-force message to Iran.

Recent Saudi efforts to appease the Biden administration in the wake of the kingdom's backing of last month's OPEC+ oil production cut take on added significance in the wake of this week's US midterm elections that have strengthened Joe Biden and weakened former President Donald J. Trump. Saudi insistence on a two million barrel a day cut in the wake of Mr. Biden's failed effort to persuade Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to delay the cut, if not increase production, in advance of the elections, was widely seen in Washington as an effort to bolster Mr. Trump's Republican Party.

If that was the Saudi strategy, it backfired. Mr. Biden's Democratic Party fared far better in the elections by holding onto control of the Senate and losing the House of Representatives to the Republicans by a much smaller margin than expected. Saudi Arabia has consistently denied the allegation, insisting the cut was economically prudent and constituted neither an attempt to sway US voters nor support Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine. In the six weeks since the cut, Saudi Arabia has made several conciliatory gestures, including a vote in the United Nations General Assembly in favor of a resolution declaring Russia's annexation of swaths of eastern Ukraine illegal, and significantly increased humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The gestures failed to persuade Mr. Biden, buoyed by his Democratic Party's dashing Republican hopes, to take time out from this week's Group of 20 summit to meet with Mr. Bin Salman on the sidelines. However, that didn't stop the Biden administration from simultaneously seeking to bolster fledgling confidence in its commitment to the kingdom's defense by flying two B-52 bombers over the Middle East in a show-of-force message to Iran.

The demonstrative act was intended to deter Iran from acting on alleged plans to attack Saudi Arabia to distract attention from two months of anti-government protests that Iran claims were instigated by the kingdom, the United States, and Israel. The overflight also followed reports that Saudi Arabia had broken off Iraqi-sponsored talks with Iran designed to prevent differences between the two regional rivals from spinning out of control. It remains unclear whether the US demonstration has deterred Iran. Moreover, it has not stopped tensions between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel and

Iran's domestic strife from potentially spilling into the Qatar World Cup.

Israel this week advised the up to 20,000 Israelis expected to attend the World Cup in a country that generally refuses to grant them entry to exercise caution, in part because of Iranian participation in the tournament. The expected presence has also sparked the ire of some Qataris because of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. Former Qatari race driver Hamad Al-Suwaidi sparked outrage on social media by declaring that Israeli fans would be welcome as "brothers" in Qatar, which is "also their country." The outrage raised questions about what kind of reception Israelis can expect. Mr. Al-Suwaidi made his remarks shortly after becoming a media sensation in Qatar because he had installed a gigantic stone replica of the World Cup soccer trophy outside his home in Doha. In response, Ahmed Al Binali, a Qatari national, tweeted that "recently, there have been some lone voices calling for normalisation with the Zionist entity and welcoming settlers to visit Doha! Since when was Qatar their country? Since when were they our brothers and friends? We neither welcome nor will be friends with those who kill the people and children of Palestine." For his part, Carlos Queiroz, the Iranian football squad's manager, insisted that players would be allowed to protest. Some Iranian footballers, including the squad's star player Sardar Azmoun, have supported the anti-government protests in Iran. More than 300 protesters are believed to have been killed in the past two months in brutal efforts by security forces to squash the unrest. Breaking with FIFA's fictional separation of politics and sports, Mr. Queiroz said that "players are free to protest as they would if they were from any other country as long as it conforms with the World Cup regulations and is in the spirit of the game." Meanwhile, in a bid to prevent tensions from spinning out of control and appease Iran, Qatar has refused to accredit the London-based, Saudi-backed satellite television broadcaster, Iran international, for the World Cup. Iran has accused the broadcaster of inciting the protests. The Islamic republic warned in September that Iran International would "pay the price" for carrying footage of the demonstrations. "I warn the Saudi regime to control your media, or the smoke will go in your eyes," said Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The commander added, "this is our last warning because you are interfering in our inter-

national affairs through these media. You are involved in this matter and know that you are vulnerable." Last week, Iran International asserted that British police had warned two of its British-Iranian journalists about a "credible" Iranian plot to kill them. Ironically, the crackdowns in Iran and Saudi Arabia share similar goals.

They aim to avoid risks inherent in what political scientist Barbara F. Walter describes as anocracy, a regime that is neither fully autocratic nor fully democratic. Ms. Walter noted that "civil wars almost never happen in full, healthy, strong democracies. They also seldom happen in full autocracies. Violence almost always breaks out in countries in the middle." The political scientist was discussing domestic tensions in the United States, but her insights are equally valid for Iran and Saudi Arabia. The recent harsh sentencing of Saudi and US nationals to decades in prison for their tweets was widely seen as a way for Mr. Bin Salman to poke a finger in Mr. Biden's eye after he warned that the oil production cut would have consequences for the already strained US-Saudi relationship. In recent months, Mr. Bin Salman's escalating crackdown on dissent has sent two women to respectively 34 and 45 years in prison and a 72-year-old American who was returning to his native Saudi for a vacation to 16 years behind bars for tweeting critically about the regime. Additionally, Saudi authorities recently detained a 34-year-old American woman, Carly Morris, after she posted on Twitter that she and her young daughter had been lured to the kingdom and trapped there since 2019. If Ms. Walter is correct, the repressive legal moves may have more to do with Mr. Bin Salman's sense of regime survival than with a shadow boxing match with Mr. Biden. Even so, Mr. Biden may feel he is winning the match on points. A senior US official asserted that "our displeasure has already been clearly stated and has already had an impact. We've seen the Saudis react in ways that are constructive." As a result, the administration is slow-walking efforts to make Saudi Arabia pay the price for the oil production cut. This week, the administration has told a US court that Mr. Bin Salman should be granted sovereign immunity in a civil case involving the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The advice effectively ended a last-ditch attempt to hold the crown prince legally accountable for the killing in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul. "We don't need to be in a hurry," said US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby.

Strategic location of Pakistan: Challenges and opportunities

Imtiaz Gul



Pakistan has to face challenges with respect to its strategic location. As it is present at the epicenter of the international political arena, so it was bound to play certain roles in various political and military related episodes for example SEATO, CENTO, the erstwhile USSR invasion in Afghanistan, and the 9/11 incident. On its eastern front, there exists India, its eternal enemy.

Pakistan about 75 years ago came into being at the transit route of three ancient great civilizations i.e. Indus, Persian, and Chinese civilizations. It lies between 30.3753° N and 69.3451° E as far as latitude and longitude extents are concerned. It is surrounded by four countries and a sea; China in the North, Afghanistan, and Iran in the West, India in the East, and the Arabian Sea in the South. China is emerging as a superpower and believes in the multi-polarity of the world. India recently becomes the fifth largest economy in the world. Iran is under sanctions imposed by the western world but it has an immense treasure of oil and gas. Our neighbor Afghanistan is full of precious minerals and other untapped natural resources. Gwadar Port in Balochistan can contribute protecting our vital interests. The strategic location of Pakistan is a challenge and an opportunity for it at the same time.

Pakistan has to face challenges with respect to its strategic location. As it is present at the epicenter of the international political arena, so it was bound to play certain roles in various political and military related episodes for example SEATO, CENTO, the erstwhile USSR invasion in Afghanistan, and the 9/11 incident. On its eastern front, there exists India, its eternal enemy. Pakistan remains in a state of constant risk from the said front but our nuclear capability i.e. deterrence is working day and night silently, according to DG ISI. Pakistan enjoys friendly relations with China in the north. China always has helped Pakistan. Pak-China friendship is deep-rooted and eternal. Afghanistan

stan has suffered immensely over four decades of wars and conflicts Millions of Afghans from the last three generations were displaced from their homes and forced to live in exile, some with formal refugee status and many with illegal status in a number of neighboring countries, including Pakistan. There exists always a troublesome on our western border. In the Middle Eastern region, Pakistan has to maintain a balanced posture between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Major Powers have their own interests in this region. The United States of America wants to exercise its own hegemony in South Asia. It always pushes India to contain the progress of China. By 2025, the trade volume between India and Russia will be 30 billion USD. International powers are trying to sabotage the CPEC. Gwadar is a priceless gift bestowed upon us by nature. It can serve our vital interests but this is not acceptable to such powers. So the strategic location of Pakistan becomes a curse.

But challenges always come up with opportunities. They are closely interrelated with each other. Challenges can be converted into opportunities. It can be seen over the period of our own history. In 1974, when India tested its nuclear devices, apparently it was a challenge for Pakistan to survive with a nuclear capable neighbor but later it became an opportunity to develop our own nuclear program to deter our eternal adversary. Eventually, we came up with an unshakeable defense. Today, Pakistan must have to convert the aforesaid challenges into opportunities. According to estimates, there

exists a potential of about 20 billion USD in trade between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan where Pakistan will serve as a transit corridor. Pakistan can enhance its bilateral trade relations with Central Asian countries by utilizing Wakhan Corridor. It can boost the pace of CPEC Projects under BRI. Paperwork for foreign investment in SEZs can be minimized by digitalization. Maximum benefits can be gained from regional connectivity. Gwadar Port is situated near the Strait of Hormuz (International Oil Highway), witnessing roundabout seventy percent (70%) of world oil transportation and 100,000 shipments of annual trade transportation. This port has the ability to accommodate approximately 200,000 tons of supertankers. Pakistan can actually influence its neighbors through economic linkages. Ultimately, regional connectivity will turn Pakistan into an economic hub. For the effective utilization of such a vibrant strategic location requires honest, sincere, rational, and wise leadership that can formulate a unified, stable, specific foreign policy in accordance with "popular will" to protect the national interest across borders. The policy shift from geo-politics to geo-economics by Niazi's regime will be fruitful for Pakistan. We must avoid such intentions as placing Pakistan nearby Iceland as intended by a high ranked official. Foreign policy will serve as means and economic prosperity and progress will be the ends.

The author is a student of Strategic Studies at National Defence University, Islamabad.

Briefs

Flood again pushed country towards default: FM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto has said that Pakistan had narrowly avoided default, but the flood again pushed it in that direction. Addressing a press conference on Friday, he said that the country was facing default when they assumed the government. "We saved the country from default after establishing relations with all countries. So far as the US conspiracy narrative is concerned, Imran Khan himself has taken a U-turn over it," he added. The minister said that Pakistan needs relations with the United States on the basis of equality. "We want good relations with all neighbouring countries, including India. Our focus is to advance the interest of Pakistan," he maintained. Bilawal Bhutto appealed to the world to help the flood victims. "China helped Pakistan in difficult economic conditions. The work on the CPEC has expedited. Cooperation with the US against terrorism has also increased," he added.

India launches first privately made rocket

DNA

NEW DELHI: India successfully launched its first privately developed rocket, the Vikram-S, on Friday, a milestone in the country's effort to create a commercial space industry and to compete on cost. The 545kg rocket, developed by space startup Skyroot, took off from the Indian space agency's launch site near Chennai and hit a peak altitude of 89.5 kilometres. The rocket has the capability of reaching Mach 5 – five times the speed of sound – and carrying a payload of 83kg to an altitude of 100km, the company said. The Skyroot team had set a target of 80km for its first launch, a benchmark some agencies define as the frontier of space. The Karman line – set by an international aeronautics body as defining the boundary between the Earth's atmosphere and space – is at 100km altitude. Video footage showed the rocket taking off from the space centre, leaving a plume of smoke and fire in its trail. It splashed down in the Bay of Bengal about 5 minutes after launch, officials said. "I'm happy to announce the successful completion of Mission Prarambh, the beginning," said Pawan Goenka, who chairs the Indian government agency that coordinates private-sector space activities. Skyroot, which was started by Pawan Chandana and Bharath Daka, has set a target of cutting development costs by up to 90 per cent versus existing platforms to launch small satellites.

MBS has immunity in Khashoggi lawsuit: US

"Jamal died again today," Khashoggi's ex-fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, said on Twitter minutes after the news became public. She added later: "We thought maybe there would be a light to justice from #USA But again, money came first. This is a world that Jamal doesn't know about and me..!"

DNA

WASHINGTON: The Biden administration ruled on Thursday that Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has immunity from a lawsuit over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, drawing immediate condemnation from the slain journalist's former fiancée. Khashoggi was killed and dismembered in October 2018 at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, an operation which US intelligence believed was ordered by Prince Mohammed, who has been the kingdom's de facto ruler for several years. "Jamal died again today," Khashoggi's ex-fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, said on Twitter minutes after the news became public. She added later: "We thought maybe there would be a light to justice from #USA But again, money came first. This is a world that Jamal doesn't know about and me..!" A spokesperson for the Saudi consulate in Washington could not be reached for comment on Thursday evening, after business hours. "This is a legal determination made by the State Department under longstanding and well-established prin-

ciples of customary international law," a spokesperson for the White House National Security Council said in a written statement. "It has nothing to do with the merits of the case." The spokesperson referred further questions to the State and Justice Departments. In a document filed in US District Court for the District of Columbia, Justice Department attorneys wrote that "the doctrine of head of state immunity is well established in customary international law." Justice Department lawyers said that the executive branch of the US government, referring to the Biden Administration, had

"determined that defendant bin Salman, as the sitting head of a foreign government, enjoys head of state immunity from the jurisdiction of US courts as a result of that office." In late September, Saudi King Salman named Prince Mohammed bin Salman as prime minister in a royal decree which a Saudi official said was in line with responsibilities that the crown prince was already exercising. "The Royal Order leaves no doubt that the Crown Prince is entitled to state-



cus-based immunity," lawyers for the prince said in an Oct. 3 petition requesting a federal district court in Washington dismiss the case, citing other cases where the United States has recognised immunity for a foreign head of state. Biden was criticized for fist-bumping the crown prince on a visit to Saudi Arabia in July to discuss energy and security issues. The White House said Biden had told Prince Mohammed that he considered him responsible for Khashoggi's killing. The prince, known by his initials MbS, has denied ordering Khashoggi's killing but acknowledged later that it took place "under my watch." Khashoggi had criticised the crown prince's policies in Washington Post columns. He had travelled to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to obtain papers he needed to marry Cengiz, a Turkish citizen. "It's beyond ironic that President Biden has single-handedly assured MBS can escape accountability when it was President Biden who promised the American people he would do everything to hold him accountable. Not even the Trump administration did this," Sarah Lee Whitson, a spokeswoman for Democracy for the Arab World Now, said in a written statement.

Pakistan committed to universal values of tolerance: Envoy

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Masood Khan said that Pakistan was committed to the universal values of tolerance, inclusivity and respect for people of all faiths. He highlighted this in his interaction with the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Los Angeles, said a press release issued by Pakistan Embassy in Washington on Friday. During the conversation, Ambassador Masood Khan briefed them on the positive momentum in the bilateral relations and noted that while both countries coordinate on strategic issues, it was the close people-to-people ties that form the foundation of this strong partnership. He appreciated the philanthropic work as well as investments in Pakistan, es-

pecially in healthcare by the Church of Latter-Day Saints and thanked them for donating US\$ 2 million to support relief and recovery efforts in the flood affected areas. The Ambassador also noted that the Church's outreach to the diplomatic community in the U.S. was an effective way of creating understanding between the peoples of different faiths. Mathew Ball, Director Public and International Affairs of the Church briefed the Ambassador on the humanitarian initiatives taken by the Church in Pakistan. He said that since 1995, the Church had implemented 107 humanitarian projects in Pakistan. In response to recent flooding in Pakistan, the Church has worked with local NGOs on 9 humanitarian projects, including the provision of emergency housing, clean water, medical supplies, water purification kits and food. The projects were implemented in all flood affected provinces and benefitted an estimated 230,000 individuals. – APP

North Korea fires ICBM, lands near Japan

SEOUL: North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile on Friday in one of its most powerful ever tests, with Japan saying the weapon may have had the range to hit the United States mainland. The missile was believed to have landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said as he blasted the launch as "absolutely unacceptable". The launch is Pyongyang's second in two days and part of a record-breaking blitz in recent weeks, which North Korea – and some allies including Moscow – blame on the US boosting regional security cooperation, including joint military exercises. The missile flew 1,000 km (621 miles) at an altitude of 6,100 km, South Korea's military said, only slightly less than the ICBM Pyongyang fired on March 24, which appeared to

be the North's most powerful such test yet. US Vice President Kamala Harris convened a meeting on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok to discuss the launch with regional leaders. North Korea has fired scores of ballistic missiles this year – far more than any other year on record – and recent launches have been increasingly provocative, including firing a missile over Japan last month, triggering a rare air raid warning. On November 2, Pyongyang fired 23 missiles, including one which crossed the de facto maritime border and landed near the South's territorial waters for the first time since the end of hostilities in the Korean War in 1953. Seoul called it "effectively a territorial invasion". The next day, North Korea fired an ICBM – although Seoul said it appeared to fail mid-flight. – APP



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Defense Production Muhammad Israr Tareen reveals logo of Ideas 2024 at closing ceremony of Ideas 2022. – DNA

After ultimatum, Twitter employees start exiting

CALIFORNIA: Hundreds of Twitter Inc employees are estimated to have decided to quit the beleaguered social media company following a Thursday deadline from new owner Elon Musk that staffers sign up for "long hours at high intensity," or leave. The departures highlight the reluctance of some of Twitter's 3,000 or so employees to remain at a company where Musk earlier fired half of the workforce including top management, and is ruthlessly changing the culture to emphasize long hours and an intense pace. Musk took to Twitter late on Thursday and said that he was not worried about resignations as "the best people are staying." The billionaire owner also added: "We just hit another all time high in Twitter usage..." without elaborating. Musk met some top employees on Thursday to try to convince them to stay, said one current employee and a recently departed employee who is in touch with Twitter colleagues. The company also notified employees that it will close its offices and cut badge access until Monday, according to two sources. Security officers began kicking some employees out of one office on Thursday evening, one source said. – APP

Magnitude 6.9 quake strikes off W. Indonesia

JAKARTA: A 6.9-magnitude earthquake struck off western Indonesia late Friday, the United States Geological Survey said, but there were no immediate reports of damage. The offshore quake hit just after 8:30 pm (13:30 GMT) at a shallow depth about 212 kilometres (132 miles) southwest of the city of Bengkulu, the USGS said. The Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in India said the quake may be capable of generating a tsunami affecting the Indian Ocean region "based on historical data and tsunami modelling". "IOTWMS-TSP INDIA will monitor the situation to determine if a tsunami was generated and will issue further bulletins as information becomes available," it said in an emailed warning. But the IOTWMS in Indonesia said on their website there was "no tsunami threat". The epicentre was placed near the small outlying island of Enggano. Residents in Bengkulu reached by AFP did not feel the quake or said it was felt weakly. "Strangely I did not feel anything at all. I was still outside, talking to my neighbour and we were not aware there was an earthquake at all," Hendri Tasparrillo, 34, told AFP. Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. A 6.2-magnitude quake that shook Sulawesi island in January last year killed more than 100 people and left thousands homeless. – APP

Ergogan sends condolences to Palestinians

ISTANBUL: The Turkish president on Friday conveyed his condolences to the "friendly and brotherly Palestinian people" over the death of 21 Palestinians after a fire ripped through a building in the Gaza Strip. "We are deeply saddened by the death of 21 Palestinian brothers, including children, in the fire disaster in Gaza," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Twitter. Erdogan wished a speedy recovery to the injured. The fire erupted Thursday at a building in the Jabalia refugee camp where residents were attending a party. Reports said the fatalities included women and children, while many other people were injured. A statement by Palestinian Presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said President Mahmoud Abbas declared a period of national mourning Friday. Jabalia is one of eight refugee camps in the area, which is home to 2.3 million people and is one of the world's most densely populated locations. – APP

Russia wants US prisoner swap for arms trader

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Russia said on Friday it hoped to clinch a prisoner swap with the United States to return convicted Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout, known as the "Merchant of Death", in an exchange that would likely include U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner. Amid the deadliest war in Europe since World War Two, Russia and the United States are exploring a deal that could see imprisoned Americans including Griner return to the United States in exchange for Bout. "I want to hope that the prospect not only remains but is being strengthened, and that the moment will come when we will get a concrete agreement," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying by Interfax. "The Americans are showing some external activity, we are working professionally through a special channel designed for this," Ryabkov said. "Viktor Bout is among those who are being discussed, and we certainly count on a positive result." For the two former Cold War foes, now grappling with the gravest confrontation since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the exchange would mark one of the more extraordinary prisoner swaps in their history. The distinctly upbeat remarks from Ryabkov, the foreign ministry's point man for the Americas and arms control, contrast

with previous statements from Moscow which have cautioned Washington against trying to engage in megaphone diplomacy over the prisoner swap. The possible swap includes Griner, facing nine years behind bars in Russia after being convicted on drug charges, and Paul Whelan who is serving a 16-year sentence in Russia after being convicted of espionage charges that he denies. Various dubbed "the merchant of death" and "the sanctions buster" for his ability to get around arms embargoes, Bout was one of the world's most wanted men prior to his 2008 arrest on multiple charges related to arms trafficking. For almost two decades, Bout was one of the world's most notorious arms dealers, selling weaponry to rogue states, rebel groups and murderous warlords in Africa, Asia and South America. But in 2008, Bout was snared in an elaborate U.S. sting. Bout was caught on camera agreeing to sell undercover U.S. agents posing as representatives of Colombia's leftist FARC guerrillas 100 surface-to-air missiles, which they would use to kill U.S. troops. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested by Thai police. Bout was tried on the charges related to FARC, which he denied, and in 2012 was convicted and sentenced by a court in Manhattan to 25 years in prison, the minimum sentence possible. Ever since, the Russian state has been keen to get him back.

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