



Played a pivotal role in facilitating essential discussions to propel the program's objectives forward

Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training
Madad Ali

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IT exports up by 39% in January, says Minister



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Dr Umar Saif has said that IT exports in January witnessed an increase of 39.4 per cent to \$265 million compared to \$190 million in the same month of the last fiscal year. "Pakistan's IT industry continues to grow and sets new records. IT exports in January are up by 39.4 per cent to \$265 million, compared to \$190 million in the same month in 2023," the minister posted on X. Additionally, the minister disclosed that IT exports during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (July-January) reached \$1.7 billion, marking a 13 per cent increase from \$1.5 billion in the corresponding period of the last year.

Pakistan criticizes UN Security Council's 'paralysis' following US veto on Gaza ceasefire resolution

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's top diplomat at the United Nations said on Wednesday the American decision to veto yet another resolution demanding a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza reflected the "paralysis" within the Security Council that had led to the killing of over 29,000 Palestinians, nearly two-thirds of them women and children. The draft resolution was prepared by Algeria and put to a vote a day earlier on Tuesday. However, the US became the only country to vote against it while the United Kingdom abstained. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Munir Akram, who previously described the conflict as "a war against the Palestinian people," regretted the development while pointing out it reflected weaknesses in the global governance system. Israel besieged the Gaza Strip and launched airstrikes after a surprise attack was initiated by Hamas last year in response to what it described as the deteriorating condition of Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation. However, its response to the killing of 1,200 Israelis was widely viewed as disproportionate by the international community after it flattened out much of the infrastructure in Gaza and led to the displacement of 80 percent of the area's population.

Madad Sindhi directs NAVTTC to increase quota for disables, transgenders



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhi on Wednesday directed the chairperson NAVTTC to increase the quota for disables and transgenders in all programs. He was chairing Steering Committee meeting of the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program (PMYSDP) at Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. The caretaker minister said that the meeting played a pivotal role in facilitating essential discussions to propel the program's objectives forward. He further said that this was the second meeting of NAVTTC steering committee under his tenure as minister. He pointed out that this is also the second meeting in five years. He highlighted the importance of this committee meeting. The caretaker minister said that in the last meeting, he had increased the quota for women which has been implemented in letter and spirit. Madad Ali said that domain of NAVTTC should be expanded to provinces to achieve the progress. He was of view that it would be prudent to include universities for increasing scope of NAVTTC in future. He took notice of the absence of Secretary Education Punjab and Sindh.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director NAVTTC/Secretary of the Committee, Muhammad Aamir Jan briefed the committee on the current status and progress of PMYSDP 2023-24 project, achievements and outlining future goals. A significant decision was made regarding the High-Tech IT and High-End IT Training Components. The committee endorsed the con-

solidation and strategic reallocation of seats, not only to enrich industrial training opportunities but also to lay the groundwork for a groundbreaking collaboration with esteemed universities like COMSATS, NUST, NUML, and NSU to facilitate the pilot project being implemented with the Federal Directorate of Education. This collaborative effort is crafted to launch High-Impact IT Training with 16 FDE Colleges, intending to bridge the gap between academia and industry. The initiative aims to provide cutting-edge IT skills to the youth, ensuring their relevance in the ever-evolving job market, he told. Waseem Ajmal, Secretary Ministry of Federal Education, endorsed the pilot program and emphasized that the modalities may be formulated with the help of Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) and Pakistan IT Industry Association (P@SHA). In a bid to streamline implementation, the committee sanctioned the exemption of Bank/Insurance Guarantee for TEVTA, PVTC, PWDs, and other public institutes excluding public sector universities. Furthermore, various courses under the program, spanning High-Tech IT, High-End IT Training Component, Hospitality, Languages, Care Workers, and Gym/Sports Trainer, will now confer international certification, thereby enhancing the global recognition of the program. Ms. Gulmina Bilal Ahmad, chairperson NAVTTC, expressed optimism about the program, and said, "We aspire for these 56,000 youth to become valuable assets for the country. Our initiatives are geared towards inclusivity, accommodating youth from all strata of society." APP



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi in a group photo with a delegation of military officers from friendly countries undergoing training at Command and Staff College Quetta, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Mineral sector achieving new development goals under SIFC: PM

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday said Pakistan's mineral sector, valued in billions of dollars, was achieving new heights of development under Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). He was talking to a delegation of Miracle Salt Collective Inc which called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar here. During the meeting the prime minister hoped that the salt export from the country would increase after the signing of joint venture between Pakistan Mineral Development Cooperation (PMDC) and Miracle Salt. He said it will also further strengthen the trade ties with the U.S. "This joint venture is a manifestation of the fact that Pakistan has the most suitable destination for foreign investment," he added. He said Himalayan pink salt was the identity of Pakistan in all over the world and its export in international markets will be a welcome sign. He said during its short tenure, the caretaker government took several steps to promote foreign direct investment and to facilitate the businesses in the country which yielded positive results. The delegation of Miracle Salt thanked the government, especially the Special Investment Facilitation Council for its cooperation with the company. They told the prime minister that after the formation of the company in Pakistan, it will be listed on major stock



This joint venture is a manifestation of the fact that Pakistan has the most suitable destination for foreign investment,"

exchanges around the world, which will benefit the government of Pakistan and local investors. The delegation also apprised the prime minister about the plan of action prepared regarding economic improvement, education and health, and employment provision of the local population in the salt mining areas.

ist about the plan of action prepared regarding economic improvement, education and health, and employment provision of the local population in the salt mining areas.

Solangi grieved over demise of senior journalist Nazir Naji

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of renowned journalist, editor and columnist Nazir Naji. The minister, in a condolence message, prayed to the Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to the bereaved family to bear the loss with equanimity. Paying tribute to the late senior journalist, the minister said Nazir Naji had dedicated his whole life to journalism and service of the country. He was a seasoned journalist and analyst as well, who strived to bring a positive change in the society through his services in the field of journalism, he added. The analysis and columns of the late journalist were always informative and insightful, he said, adding it would be very hard to fill the void created in the field of journalism with Nazir Naji's demise. APP

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia agree to enhance bilateral trade

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday agreed to enhance bilateral trade between the two brotherly countries and improve investments in various sectors including construction, digital economy and infrastructure. The agreement was reached during a meeting of Caretaker Minister for Commerce, Gohar Ejaz with the Saudi Minister for Commerce, Dr. Majid bin Abdullah Al-Kassabi. Gohar Ejaz is leading a business delegation Saudi Arabia, according to statement issued by Commerce Ministry. The other delegation members visiting Saudi Arabia included Punjab Minister S.M. Tanveer and notable businessmen; Arif Habib, Muhammad Ali Tabba, and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) President Atif Ikram, according to statement issued by Commerce Ministry.



Highlighting the importance of enhancing trade with Saudi Arabia, Ejaz expressed Pakistan's commitment to making comprehensive efforts in this regard, noting ample opportunities for bilateral investment between the two countries. The Saudi Minister of Commerce praised the efforts to strengthen bilateral trade relations, the statement added. "Pakistanis are our brothers, and our doors are open to them," stated the Saudi Minister of Commerce, highlighting the vast employment opportunities available for Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia.

PNS Yamama launching ceremony held at Romania's DAMEN Shipyard Galati

RAWALPINDI: The launching ceremony of state-of-the-art 4th Offshore Patrol Vessel, PNS YAMAMA (Design being built for Pakistan Navy was held at DAMEN Shipyard Galati, Romania. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami attended the occasion as Chief Guest, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff underscored the importance of maritime security under the prevailing conventional and non-conventional maritime threats to energy and trade highways passing through Indian Ocean Region. In this context, he highlighted that Pakistan Navy had tremendous contri-



tribution in maintaining safe and secure sea environment for maritime trade. The Admiral expressed his confidence that induction of these multipurpose

and highly adaptive platforms; equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors will further strengthen combat capability of PN

Fleet in safeguarding maritime frontiers while ensuring Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region, especially in the Arabian Sea. Earlier during his welcome address, Chief Operations Officer of DAMEN Group Netherlands highlighted that DAMEN Shipyard and Pakistan Navy are enjoying historic relations since 1986. He highlighted that DAMEN would continue to deliver cost effective, technologically advanced and potent ships to PN to meet their operational requirements. The launching ceremony was attended by high ranking officials from Romanian Government and Navy, Pakistan Navy, DAMEN and notables from Pakistani community in Romania. PR

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The reserved seats dilemma

HAFIZ AHSAAN AHMAD KHOKHAR

According to the 1973 constitution and the Election Act 2017, political parties are allotted reserved seats for women and non-Muslims based on the priority lists they submit to the Elections Commission of Pakistan (ECP) prior to the general elections and as per election schedule. These seats are distributed in proportion to the number of general seats each party wins in a direct contest for the National Assembly and the provincial assemblies. Although party heads are allowed by law to nominate anyone for these seats, this discretion has primarily been abused to give quotas to friends and family, with legitimate workers either overlooked or assigned serial numbers that are unlikely to be elected to parliament. According to Articles 51 and 106 of the constitution respectively, in the National Assembly, there are currently 60 seats set out for women and 10 for non-Muslims, and 14 seats set aside for women and non-Muslims in the Balochistan Assembly, 30 in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, 74 in the Punjab Assembly, and 38 in the Sindh Assembly. Independent returned candidates can lawfully join any political party within three days of the names of the returned candidates being published in the official gazette, and they will be included in the total number of general seats won by a political party. In accordance with Section 104(1) of the Election Act of 2017, in order to contest for seats in an assembly designated for women and non-Muslims, political parties must submit separate lists of their candidates in priority order for the designated seats to the ECP, the provincial election commissioner, or another commission-authorized officer within the time frame the ECP sets for nomination paper submissions. The ECP will then promptly publish these lists for public consumption. The parties lists mentioned in sub-section (1) can include as many names of additional candidates as a political party deems necessary to contest seats reserved for women and non-Muslims, to provide for any disqualification of candidates during the scrutiny of nomination papers, or to fill any vacant seats during the term of an assembly, in accordance with Section 104(2) of the Election Act. This section further specifies that a candidate seeking a seat designated for women or non-Muslims must file their nomination papers by the deadline for filing nomination papers for the election within the election schedule. The nomination papers will be examined in a manner similar to that of candidates seeking general seats, as per Section 62. Therefore, the following legal principles will be considered and implemented to achieve the aforementioned provisions for reserved seats for both women and non-Muslims as per Articles 5, 106 and 224 of the constitution read with Section 104 of the Election Act, 2017 and Rules 92, 93 and 94 of the Election Rules, 2017. Within the election schedule, the head of the political party or a representative designated by him/her will submit to the ECP a list of priority for reserved seats for women and non-Muslims. The proportional representation system of political party lists of candidates will be used to elect members to fill seats for women and non-Muslims in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. This system will be based on the total number of general seats that each political party has won in the National Assembly or, if applicable, in the provincial assembly. According to Section 104 of the Election Act, the ECP is not permitted to consider any new party lists for the distribution of reserved seats beyond the election schedule. When the deadline for submitting nomination papers has passed, a political party's list cannot be altered or changed, either in terms of priority, by adding new names to the list, or by removing any names under the Election Act. When an independent candidate applies to become a member of a political party under Article 51 of the constitution, the party leader notifies the ECP of the candidate's application and provides the candidate's consent, which must be properly attested by an Oath Commissioner appointed under the Oaths Act, 1873 (X of 1873) or a notary appointed under the Notaries Ordinance, 1961 (XIX of 1961). It is mandatory by law to follow the election schedule issued by the ECP even for reserved seats. Accordingly, no party is allowed to file a new list of priority lists for women and non-Muslim reserved seats under Section 104 of the Election Act read with Rule 92 of the Election Rules. The distribution of reserved seats for women and non-Muslims following the general election is only available to political parties that are represented in the assembly by their own election symbol. If a political party does not have elected representatives, independent returned candidates are not permitted by law to join that political party. This is in accordance with Articles 51, 106, and 224 of the Constitution as well as Section 104 of the Election Act, 2017 and Rule 92 of the Election Rules. The proportional representation system used to elect members to fill the seats designated for women in each province will depend on how many general seats each political party has won in the provincial assembly. The political parties will share the seats designated for women and non-Muslims according to their percentage share, as determined by sub rule (2), and according to the order of precedence of the candidates' names on the party list. The provisions of subsections (1) and (2) of Section 104 shall, to the greatest extent possible, apply to fill any vacancy that may arise after the party list is exhausted. However, the list submitted by a political party shall not be subject to modification or alteration, either in terms of priority or by adding new names to the list or removing any name after the deadline for submitting nomination papers has passed. That in the event that a political party fails to submit a list to the ECP in accordance with Section 104 of the Election Act 2017 by the specified deadline and it has representation in parliament, no new list can be submitted at a later date for the purpose of allocating reserved seats because the time of submitting the list has expired. As a result, the proportionately reserved seats would remain vacant in the respective national and provincial assemblies and cannot be later awarded to a political party.

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Syed Asad Ali Shah

Reinventing basic education

hindering sustainable progress. Governance is hampered by bureaucratic red tape, outdated manual communication methods and a complete lack of accountability. Centralized decision-making processes, coupled with ineffective communication systems, stifle innovation and policy implementation.

The existing archaic system of budgeting and release of funds, with no linkage to performance or outcomes, results in a huge waste of resources. There is absolutely no system of accountability, whereby the political leadership and bureaucrats are held to account for poor outcomes or for not meeting even reasonable targets and conversely rewarding better performance.

There have been several education policies and plans, but the results have rarely matched targets, and despite non-performance, no one has ever been held accountable. The customers (parents and students) have no choice or say in the system, and are ignored in policy- and decision-making.

Clearly, if Pakistan has to progress, it must aim to substantially improve its learning outcomes in basic education to ensure that its youth is well-equipped to progress and compete in the new world. For this, we have to accept the reality that business-as-usual which has not worked for over seven decades will not work. Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that the existing business-as-usual approach to education will not deliver any tangible results.

In order to bring about a positive change for moving towards universal education that leads to significant improvement in the quality of our human capital, the most important asset of the country, and to achieving targets of UN sustainable development goals on education, the following strategy is proposed for consideration of new governments that are about to be formed post February 8 elections:

Charter of education: A national consensus among political parties is imperative to declare an education emergency, prioritizing funding and focusing on improving learning outcomes. This would signify a critical commitment to elevate education as a national priority, akin to the Charter of Democracy already signed between two major political parties. Raising budget allocation to 5.0 per cent of the GDP: Gradually raise budget allocation for education from the current low of 2.0 per cent to 5.0 per cent of the GDP over five years,

starting at 2.5 per cent in year 1 and incrementally increasing each year. This incremental approach is necessary to accommodate the country's economic realities while signalling a firm commitment to enhancing focus and resources for education.

Public funding private execution: It is proposed that all expansion in basic education should be through successful public-private partnership models like the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), which have demonstrated improved outcomes and cost-effectiveness.

The basic concept of these models entails payment of the cost of education by the state to private schools only if such schools are providing quality education to the children with robust monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, the investment is made directly in learning outcomes, rather than paying salaries to teachers and other staff irrespective of learning outcomes. There are two major benefits of adopting this strategy: a) cost per child under this system reduces significantly to one-fourth in the case of Sindh and one-third in the case of Punjab. For instance, in the case of the SEF, the cost per child per month comes to Rs1,200 compared to over Rs4,800, and b) learning outcomes of private schools funded by the SEF were found to be 100 per cent better than that of the schools run by the Sindh government's school education department, and the same principle applies in the case of the PEF in Punjab.

Leveraging this public-private partnership approach can enhance efficiency and innovation in delivering quality education, given the right governance and robust accountability mechanisms which must be established in such organizations.

Education departments, due to the inherent limitations described above, are the root cause of the poor state of education. Consequently, governance in education needs a radical overhaul by transforming school education departments into corporate entities named basic education organizations (BSOs).

These BSOs should be overseen by a board comprising appropriately qualified and dedicated individuals, including independent professionals, education experts, corporate leaders, and government officials. BSOs must be guided by a clear objective of enhancing learning outcomes in public-sector schools, utilizing necessary human capital and enabling technologies, and employ-

ing professional management practices that include appraisal systems and oversight of schools and teachers. This structural overhaul is essential to break free from bureaucratic inertia and foster a culture of performance-driven governance.

Developing a comprehensive five-year national education plan with quarterly targets, publicly reporting outcomes, and updating the plan annually based on experience and emerging technologies is necessary. This iterative approach ensures adaptability and responsiveness to evolving educational needs and challenges.

Furthermore, there should be periodic third-party audits and reviews of governance and outcomes of aforementioned institutions undertaken by reputed organizations which must be made public.

Finally, the most critical reform needed to enhance learning outcomes is to increase investment in teachers. This includes ensuring merit-based recruitment, offering market-based salaries, implementing continuous professional development programmes, fostering innovation in teaching methodologies, leveraging enabling technologies, and establishing accountability measures for outcomes.

However, these reforms are unlikely to be effectively implemented by education departments alone due to the inherent limitations outlined earlier. Therefore, governments should explore the options of leveraging the private sector and remunerating based on outcomes, a concept referred to as public funding for private execution.

Models such as the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), which are widely recognized as exemplary public-private partnership models, are well-suited to achieve these objectives.

Improving basic education is pivotal for Pakistan's progress in the 21st century. By embracing bold reforms and prioritizing learning outcomes, Pakistan can chart a path towards achieving universal education and enhancing the quality of its human resources, thereby laying the foundation for sustainable development and growth.

The writer is a former managing partner of a leading professional services firm and has done extensive work on governance in the public and private sectors. He tweets/posts @Asad_Ashah

Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect The Asian Telegraph's point-of-view

Today in History

History of Pakistan



Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah countered that there was a third force in South-Asia constituting the Muslims. The All-India Muslim League, under his gifted leadership, gradually

and skillfully started organising the Muslims on one platform. **TOWARDS A SEPARATE MUSLIM HOMELAND**

The 1930s witnessed awareness

among the Muslims of their separate identity and their anxiety to preserve it within separate territorial boundaries. An important element that brought this simmering Muslim nationalism in the

open was the character of the Congress rule in the Muslim minority provinces during 1937-39.

To be continued....

Showbiz

Salma Hayek shows love for stepdaughter Mathilde on 23rd birthday

Salma Hayek and François-Henri Pinault tied the knot in Paris in 2009

Salma Hayek took to social media on Tuesday to celebrate her stepdaughter Mathilde Pinault's 23rd birthday with a heartfelt message and adorable photos. Hayek shared a series of pictures on Instagram, including sun-soaked selfies with Mathilde from their vacations and a heartwarming image of Mathilde embracing her father, François-Henri Pinault. In the caption, Hayek revealed Mathilde's sweet nickname, writing, "Happy Birthday Tildie Tildie, we love you and are so proud of the woman you've become." The post quickly garnered love from fans and followers, who left their birthday wishes for Mathilde in the com-



ments section. This display of affection highlights the close bond between Hayek and her stepdaughter. This isn't the first time Hayek has publicly expressed her love and support for Mathilde. The actress has previously shared photos of them attending exclusive events and fashion shows together. Hayek's dedication to her family extends beyond her stepdaughter. She recently celebrated her 15th wedding anniversary with François-Henri, sharing a loving tribute on social media. Hayek's message not only celebrates Mathilde's birthday but also serves as a testament to the strong and supportive family unit they have built together.

Tech

Ancient DNA reveals first cases of Down's syndrome in 5000-year-old skeletons

In a historical breakthrough, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) from ancient skeletal remains has found six cases of Down's syndrome, the Miami Herald reported. The autosomal DNA of 9,855 remains that span millennia throughout Earth was tested using a statistical technique called the "Bayesian method". The results were published in the Journal of Nature Communications on Tuesday.

Researcher Adam Rohrlach said: "While we expected that people with Down syndrome certainly existed in the past, this is the first time we've been able to reliably detect cases in ancient remains, as they can't be confidently diagnosed by looking at the skeletal remains alone."

According to the study, the first case of Down syndrome was found in the skeletal remains of a six-month-old girl from between 2898 and 2700 BC in southern Bulgaria. She was found buried in a "ceramic vessel" under the floor of an early Bronze Age home. Another baby girl, aged between 12 and 16



months, was found buried in a section of yard belonging to a home on the island of Aegina, Greece, and lived between 1398 and 1221 BC. Her remains were discovered with a necklace made with beads of many colours and sizes. The researchers reported that these babies were "buried with care" and according to the traditions and practices of the time. "These individuals were buried according to either the standard practices of their time or were in some way treated specially. This indicates that they were acknowledged as members of their community and were not treated differently in death," Rohrlach said.

You may suffer cardiovascular disease if you consume this vitamin in excess

It remains unclear how much niacin is unhealthy and will be ascertained in future research

Newly-published research has raised alarm for those people who consume higher amounts of a specific vitamin found in meat, nuts, fish, bread, etc, that may cause a deadly disease in the human body. The research published in the journal Nature Medicine Monday underlined the risk of damage to the blood vessels, risk of inflammation, and heart diseases by taking high levels of niacin — vitamin B.

As per the experts, the recommended intake is 16 mg per day for males and 14 for non-pregnant females.

The author, Dr Stanley Hazen, who is heading car-

diovascular and metabolic sciences at the Cleveland Clinic's Lerner Research Institute, said: "About 1 in 4 Americans has higher than the recommended level of niacin."

It remains unclear how much niacin is unhealthy and will be ascertained in future research.

Dr Hazen said: "The average person should avoid niacin supplements now that we have reason to believe that taking too much niacin can potentially lead to an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease."

"Americans consume much of niacin in their diet as scientists revealed in the 1940s that low levels

of the nutrient may lead to a fatal condition called pellagra," Dr Hazen noted.

Before the statins used for lowering blood cholesterol, niacin supplements were prescribed to improve cholesterol levels. In the research, experts found the existence of a substance in those blood samples containing excess amounts of niacin. It was revealed that the breakdown product of the niacin may cause future risk of heart attack, stroke, and death in the participants. According to Dr. Robert Rosenson, director of metabolism and lipids for the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, the findings were fascinating and important. "This research may pave the way for developing medicines for such diseases. Dr Rosenson — who was not part of the study — expressed hope that the food industry will bring down the levels of niacin in products like bread.



Health

Businessmen call on DG Transit Trade, suggest measures for improving Pak-Afghan trade

PESHAWAR: Businessmen dealing in Pak-Afghan trade have suggested amendments to the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTITA) 2010 through consultation with the stakeholders. The suggestions were made during the visit of a delegation of businessmen to the office of Director General Transit Trade, Wajid Ali here at Custom House. The delegation was led by Coordinator Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi and comprised of Directors PAJCCI, Imtiaz Ahmad Ali, Khalid Shezad, former SVP Sarhad Chamber, Engr Manzoor Elahi, Central Vice Chairman All Pakistan Custom Agents Association, Farooq Ahmad and Vice President Khyber Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muhammad Haroon.

DG Transit Trade was accompanied by Director Transit Trade, Arbab Qaiser Hameed, Additional Director Transit, Dr. Wajid Ali and Deputy Director Transit, Ms. Maliaka Ahmad.

Speaking on the occasion, Zia Sarhadi said APTITA 2010 has several lacuna as a result of which 70 percent of transit trade has been shifted from Karachi port to Bandar Abbas in Iran.

He also demanded the revival of Goods in Transit to Afghanistan (GITA) service through lost cargo via train between Peshawar to Karachi and from Karachi to Chaman. For this purpose, he continued, the SRO 121 be repealed for allowing GITA services through containers and loss cargo as well.

The documentation (DG) of all this cargo under GITA should be held under WeBOC at Azhakhel dry port so that custom clearing and forwarding agents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should also benefit from this trade. Zia Sarhadi said in October 2023, the Ministry of Commerce through issuing SRO 1380 imposed a ban on 14 items of Afghan Transit Trade which in a larger context constitute around 212 items, besides enforcement of a 100 percent bank guarantee.

The cargo goods were already covered under insurance guarantee and all the goods were going safely to Afghanistan for the last 13 years. He demanded the revoking of a 100 percent bank guarantee and the revival of the old insurance guarantee system.

He said instead of the imposition of a ban on transit trade items, concentration should be given to improving monitoring and vigilance on the border to curb smuggling.

Coordinator PAJCCI said hundreds of trucks are illegally bringing different items including petroleum production, and food items from Iran daily which needed to be stopped. The measures taken for imposition of restriction on Pak-Afghan transit trade are hurting commerce in the region, he opined.

Zia Sarhadi also shared data on Pak-Afghan trade and mentioned a decline in volume during the last several years, a reduction to 1400 million dollars.

Both the countries, he continued, have set the target of increasing trade volume to dollar five billion which in prevailing circumstances looks impossible. The delegation members apprised DG Transit Trade that around 40,000 heavy vehicles are lying idle due to a reduction in business and owners are facing losses in millions of rupees. Whereas thousands of companies dealing in custom clearing forwarding and transportation have been closed. APP



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication, Dr Umar Saif chairing meeting regarding Spectrum Availability.

Pakistan desires JVs, partnerships with foreign firms for economic uplift: President Alvi



VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said that Pakistan desired to build mutually beneficial partnerships with foreign firms by building joint ventures and attracting foreign investment in multiple sectors. The president, in a meeting with a delegation of Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc, a USA-based salt mining and processing company here, said Pakistan was fully focused on

boosting its exports to improve its economic condition.

In the meeting, the president was briefed about the company's performance in salt mining, processing and marketing.

President Alvi said that Pakistan could make value addition to its salt products through better processing, packaging and marketing. Reaffirming the government's commitment to facilitate the investors, the president appreciated Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc for its investment in Pakistan as well as its joint ven-

The president was briefed about the company's performance in salt mining, processing and marketing

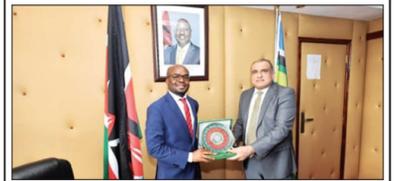
ture agreement with Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation.

The delegation members apprised the president of the potential of Pakistan's salt mines to earn foreign exchange saying that Pakistan was the only country rich with quality and mineral salt that was also high in quality and low in price.

The delegation viewed that Pakistan could take advantage of the huge salt market across the world by ensuring value addition through responsible mining, processing and marketing. It was told that the company would invest in the salt mining sector of Pakistan and would utilise modern technology for mining and processing to ensure minimum wastage during the processes.

President Alvi also emphasised the promotion of environment-friendly and responsible mining in the country.

Pak delegation visits Kenya to explore inter-agency coordination frameworks in immigration & border



ISLAMABAD: A high-level Pakistan delegation in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Pakistan and IOM Kenya, embarked on a comprehensive study visit to Kenya from Jan 22 to 26. The purpose of the visit was to exchange information and knowledge about border management, specifically on developing and operationalizing inter-agency coordination frameworks, said a press release. The study visit drew upon Kenya's proven successes and best practices in migration and border management and provided GOP firsthand insights on effective national and regional cooperation frameworks on border management.

Led by Khushal Khan, Additional Secretary Internal and Foreigners Security, Ministry of Interior (MOI) Pakistan, the delegation from Pakistan included officials from the MOI, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). During the visit, the delegation visited key stakeholders in Kenya's immigration and border governance sector, such as the Ministry of Interior and National Administration, Kenya Coastguard, and Kenya Airports Authority. The delegation also met with senior officials such as the Principal Secretary of Internal Security and National Administration, the Principal Secretary of Immigration, the Secretary Border Management Secretariat, the Director General Kenya Coastguard, and the General Manager of Kenya Airports Authority.

The delegation gained valuable insights into Kenya's strategies for effective immigration and border governance through facilitated exchanges of knowledge and experiences during meetings with Kenya's Border Management Secretariat, responsible for managing border operations at a technical and operational level. Furthermore, the delegation visited three significant border crossing points of Kenya—the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi; Namanga One Stop Border Post, Namanga; and Kilindini Seaport, Mombasa. These site visits provided the delegation with firsthand insight into the operational aspects of border management and allowed them to observe the joint operations of all agencies involved in the respective border crossing points.

Reflecting on the visit, Khushal Khan outlined the importance of the study visit to Kenya and highlighted the valuable insights gained into Kenya's inter-agency coordination frameworks, such as the establishment of the Border Control Operations and Coordination Committee (BCOCC), which aims to bring stakeholders together in managing border operations for the country. "The learnings during this visit will inform Pakistan's efforts to strengthen immigration and border governance in Pakistan. We extend our sincere appreciation to IOM Pakistan and IOM Kenya for facilitating the experience," expressed Khushal Khan.

Political parties urged to forge national accord to steer country out of crises

ISLAMABAD: Religious scholars and leaders on Wednesday urged political parties to forge a national accord requiring collective efforts to steer the country out of crises.

In the joint declaration adopted at the "Convention for Pakistan Accord", the scholars and leaders from all religious schools of thoughts emphasized the necessity for all stakeholders, including state institutions, and political and religious parties to jointly formulate a covenant for the betterment of the nation.

The covenant, named the Pakistan Accord, should outline the trajectory for the country's next 25 years addressing both internal and external challenges and finding effective solutions for economic crisis and combating extremism, terrorism, and youth radicalization, they added.

The convention organized by the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) was chaired by its Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi.

They said it should outline a unified plan for steering beloved country for the next 25 years. The Ulema and scholars urged the political parties to accept one another's mandate and

resolve their electoral disputes as per the Constitution and law.

They emphasized that economic stability was intricately linked with political stability. "As Pakistan faces several challenges, which can be addressed through cooperation from all democratic forces," they added.

The religious scholars and leaders stressed the importance of fostering an environment of tolerance and mutual respect among all political leaders, aiming to eliminate past animosities. They proposed that Pakistan's foreign policy, along with improving relations with friendly countries, should also focus on alleviating poverty and unemployment through a plan for youth rehabilitation, aiming to eliminate extremism and terrorism.

They concluded by asserting that all stakeholders must come together to formulate a consensus national policy, which should be implemented by the government in a coherent manner.

The Ulema and scholars lauded the services of Pakistan Army and security agencies in maintaining peace and security during the general elections. INP

World Bank delegation visits T-5 project Tarbela to review progress

TARBELA: A delegation from the World Bank (WB) conducted a thorough inspection of the ongoing work at the Tarbela Dam T-5 extension project aimed at enhancing the dam's capacity. During the visit they received a detailed briefing regarding the project's progress, highlighting its significance in generating 1530 megawatts of electricity upon completion. The World Bank delegation inspected the site of the fifth extension project of Tarbela Dam, GM Tarbela Anwar Shah and Chief Engineer T-5 Wasim Raza gave a detailed briefing to the delegation about the project's progress and achievements thus far.

The project's completion is advancing at a rapid pace, promising to deliver 1530 megawatts of electricity upon its culmination. It is anticipated that electricity production from the project will commence by August 2025, substantially increasing the total electricity output from the Tarbela Dam from 4888 megawatts to 6418 megawatts.

General Manager Tarbela Dam Anwar Shah, Chief Engineers T-5 Wasim Raza and T-4 Taurish Kumar, Consultant Chief T-5 Mark Gill, Director T-5 Electrical Aziz Sumro, Director T-5 Faisal Hayat, and AD Public Relations Tarbela Dam Javid Iqbal were present during the visit of WB delegation. APP

British Council announces International Collaboration Grants for artistic & cultural projects in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The British Council on Wednesday announced the opening of applications for its International Collaboration Grants, – a \$1 million grant programme – designed to foster innovative artistic and cultural collaborations between the UK and Pakistan.

Artists from Pakistan can apply for grants of up to \$75,000, for projects that enable genuine international collaboration between the UK and partner countries, said a news release. Projects can address any theme, and each project, supported by the International Collaboration Grants is required to include at least one UK-based organisation and one organisation based in Pakistan.

The International Collaboration Grants support new international partnerships, offering substantial support to the organisations and artists in the development of creative projects.

"Culture is central to the UK-Pakistan relationship. That's why we are proud to be supporting new creative partnerships between artists from both countries through our International Collaboration Grant Programme," said Country Director British Council Pakistan, James Hampson. "We want to help artists from the UK and Pakistan to showcase their talents on the international stage by working together, transcending borders and enriching the world with new work." APP



LAHORE: Australian High Commissioner, H.E Neil Hawkins with Embassy delegation visiting stall during visit to the shrine of Bibi Pakdaman. APP

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The covenant, named the Pakistan Accord, should outline the trajectory for the country's next 25 years addressing both internal and external challenges and finding effective solutions for economic crisis and combating extremism, terrorism, and youth radicalization, they added.

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electoral disputes as per the Constitution and law. They emphasized that economic stability was intricately linked with political stability. "As Pakistan faces several challenges, which can be addressed through cooperation from

all democratic forces," they added. The religious scholars and leaders stressed the importance of fostering an environment of tolerance and mutual respect among all political leaders, aiming to eliminate past animosities.

They proposed that Pakistan's foreign policy, along with improving relations with friendly countries, should also focus on alleviating poverty and unemployment through a plan for youth rehabilitation, aiming to eliminate extremism and terrorism.

They concluded by asserting that all stakeholders must come together to formulate a consensus national policy, which should be implemented by the government in a coherent manner.

The Ulema and scholars lauded the services of Pakistan Army and security agencies in maintaining peace and security during the general elections.

Pakistan's Chromium ore export to China increases

ISLAMABAD: Chromium ore and concentrates have seen an increase in exports to China from Pakistan in recent years. In 2023, exports increased by 32%, reaching \$117.68 million, compared to \$89.28 million the previous year, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Wednesday quoting sources from the Commerce Ministry. Ikram Ul Haq Sulehri, an economic expert, told CEN that the Pakistani government is keen to boost chromium ore exports to China. He also mentioned that Pakistan's exports of chromium ore to China have been increased recently due to good quality and competitive prices. There has been a huge demand in China in recent years.

"Pakistan has taken proactive measures to ensure the quality and consistency of its chromium ore exports. Stringent quality control standards, adherence to international regulations, and certification processes have enhanced the market reputation of Pakistani Chromium Ore, making it a preferred choice for Chinese

manufacturers," he stated. Sources also mentioned that China's total chromium ore import in 2023 was \$5.033 billion, while Pakistan's share in the total import was over \$117.68 million. This is due to increased investment by Chinese companies in collaboration with local Pakistani companies and the rising demand for chromium ore products in China post-COVID-19.

This trend is expected to persist as both countries stand to gain from enhanced economic cooperation. "Pakistan has been actively seeking foreign investments, particularly from huge Chinese companies, to add value and produce more valuable products for the global market. Having Chinese companies invest in Pakistan would not only provide a boost to the country's economy but also open doors for advanced technologies and expertise. This would enable Pakistan to enhance its manufacturing capabilities and produce high-quality, value-added products that can meet international standards", Ikram added. DNA