

Alia Bhatt looks stunning with mesmeric attire at Met Gala 2024

Saturday 11 May 2024

Add election tribunal LHC registrar restrained from fixing Raja's plea

PEAK POINT

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court has restrained the registrar from fixing for the hearing a petition filed by Salman Akram Raja, a senior lawyer and top PTI leader, seeking the formation of additional election tribunals.

LHC's Justice Shahid Karim took up Raja's plea for hearing on Friday.

During the course of proceedings, the judge observed that his name had also been proposed for the tribunal, so how he could hear this case.

At this, Raja remarked that this was not a personal matter of a judge and that the court could hear this case.

Later, the court sought a response from the Election Commission for not appointing judges as tribunal judges.

Salman Akram Raja had approached the Lahore High Court seeking the formation of additional tribunals. He had made the chief election commissioner a party in his petition.

In inquiry-level cases new SOPs introduced for parliamentarians' arrest

SEHRISH NAZ

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has taken the initiative to introduce major changes in its standard operating procedures (SOPs) concerning parliamentarians' arrest and interrogation.

According to media reports, under these revised procedures, in case of any complaints against a member of parliament, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairman of the Senate will be notified.

Furthermore, members of parliament will not be detained during the inquiry process as mere allegations will not constitute an arrest of the parliamentarians.

The sources said the violation of these SOPs by officials could result in imprisonment of up to one year and a fine of Rs one million.

The sources said NAB has sought assistance from the Speaker of the National Assembly to formalize these new SOPs into law.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on Trade related matters.

PM orders urgent steps to make country's exports more competitive

ARIF MEHMOOD KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered the authorities concerned to formulate trade policies with a core objective of facilitating the business sector, calling for urgent measures to enhance the competitiveness of the country's exports. Chairing a meeting on the trade sector at the PM House in Islamabad on Friday, Shehbaz Sharif called for steps to promote exports of non-traditional goods and instructed for immediate payment of the certified duty drawback of the exporters. Highlighting the significance of the private sector, the prime minister instructed to ensure consultation with them during the policy-making and implement the deletion policy to uplift the auto sector. Shehbaz directed the relevant ministry to devise a comprehensive strategy to scrutinize the

performance of trade and investment officers posted in Pakistan's missions abroad, by rewarding the good performers and removing the incompetent ones. He told the meeting that he would personally carry out the fortnightly review of the export sector. In the meeting, Shehbaz Sharif was told that the discussion on the Free Trade Agreement between Pakistan and the Gulf states was in the final stage and transit trade agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had already been materialized. The meeting was further told that during the recent Pak-Saudi Business Conference, around 450 business-to-business meetings were held and that the volume of e-commerce trade was witnessing a constant increase with the enlisting of over 3,000 firms on the Pakistan Trade Portal.

Cabinet committee principally approves 24 entities for Privatisation Programme

SAMRA ATHAR

ISLAMABAD: The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCOP), principally and for the time being, approved 24 State Owned Enterprises for the Privatisation Programme, directing the Privatisation Ministry to deliberate the phasing of each entity in consultation with the respective ministries.

The committee, which met here under the chair of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, was presented with a phased Privatisation Programme (2024-29) by the Ministry of Privatisation, based on the recommendations of PC

Board, according to a press release. The meeting was also attended by other committee members including the finance minister, minister for commerce, minister for privatisation, minister for industries and production, governor State Bank of Pakistan, chairman SECP besides federal secretaries of various ministries and division. The CCOP recommended that priority shall be accorded to privatisation of loss-making entities while the federal footprint shall be limited only to the Strategic and Essential SOEs under the federal government's domain.

The CCOP emphasized that even the SOE making profits shall be considered for privatisation.



After deliberating on the privatisation policy guidelines, the CCOP considered 44 SOEs in detail in light of SOE Act and Policy.

The committee recommended that 40 SOEs, categorized as Strategic or Essential, shall be placed by respective ministries before the Cabinet Committee on State Owned Enterprises (CCSOE) for their categorization as Strategic or Essential; Those SOEs which will not be categorized as Strategic or Essential shall be included in the Privatisation Programme, it added.

The CCOP directed Ministry of Privatisation to deliberate the rationale provided by respective ministries for not including 18 SOEs in consultation with them and firm up proposals regarding each shall be submitted to CCOP in its next meeting.

The CCOP directed all ministries/ divisions to take up their cases of Strategic and Essential SOEs with CCSOE at the earliest so that a comprehensive phased privatisation programme is finalised in the next meeting of CCOP.

The CCOP also considered the proposal for transfer of 322,460,900 shares of OECI from the Privatisation Commission's CDC's account to Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division). The matter was deferred with the direction to Law and Justice Division to holistically examine the provisions of Sovereign Wealth Fund Act 2023 in the instant case and submit its recommendations before the CCOP in its next meeting.

Pakistan's orbiter ICUBE-Q beams back first image from lunar orbit

SABA SHAFIQ

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's orbiter ICUBE-Q beamed back on Friday the first image from the lunar orbit, marking a significant milestone in the country's space programme. The orbiter successfully entered the moon's orbit on Wednesday at 1:14 pm PST.

A special ceremony on the successful mission was held at China National Space Administration, during which the Chinese authorities formally presented the first image to Pakistani Ambassador Khalil Hashmi.

The satellite is now in its fixed lunar orbit and is operating within specific parameters.

Experts had previously indicated that it may take approximately one week to verify the subsystems before the satellite imaging system becomes operational, after which the first image of the Moon is likely to be received by May 15 or 16.

The Change-e mission has entered lunar orbit under the influence of lunar gravity. In the next phase, the Change-e mission will deploy its lander and ascender to the far side of the lunar south pole.

On June 1, the main lander will detach from the spacecraft followed by Change-e mission to commence the collection of soil and rock samples from the lunar surface on June 2. The Change-e mission is scheduled to commence

its return journey on June 4. The mission will dock on June 5 and return to Earth on June 25 upon completion of its 53-day mission as per the program.

Pakistan's space programme achieved a historic milestone on May 3 as the country's first-ever lunar orbiter lifted off from China's Hengshen Space Launch Site.

The quest to send a lunar orbiter started in 2022 when the China National Space Agency (CNSA), through the Asia Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO), offered member states an opportunity to send a student-built payload to Earth's closest celestial neighbour onboard the Change-e mission.

SIFC will not replace or take over any institution, clarifies ISPR DG

KOMAL BUTT

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan military's media wing head Major-General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry clarified that the purpose of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is not to replace or take over any institution, reported by a private news TV channel on Friday.

According to the TV channel, Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) Director General (DG) Major-General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said the role of the army in SIFC and other sectors is to facilitate as per the intention of the government.

The ISPR director general said that the SIFC is a transparent organization in which civil and military officers with high professional skills are working

together to improve the economy of the country.

Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said SIFC has rendered a lot of services in less than a year and the willingness of Saudi Arabia to invest heavily in the last one and half months and its confidence in Pakistan's economic environment is proof of these efforts.

The ISPR Director General said that considering the high administrative and technical capacity of the Pakistan Army, the government wants it to be used for facilitation and coordination to improve the economy of Pakistan. The chief of the military's public wing also said that in less than a year of its establishment, SIFC has performed a lot of services at the administrative, policy making and coordination level.

Tarar for measures at global level to counter misuse of social media, spread of fake news

ARSHAD MALIK

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Friday that there was a need for measures at the global level to counter the misuse of social media and the spread of fake news.

The Government of Pakistan recognizes the importance of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and it is determined to protect the rights of journalists, he said while talking to a delegation of Bangladeshi journalists visiting Islamabad who met him here. In the meeting, various important issues were discussed including freedom of expression and economic initiatives of the government. The minister said that the government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was fully

focused on economic stability. After the present government came to power, he said economic indicators were becoming positive, international journals were also predicting improvement in Pakistan's economy. The government is also taking steps to invest in infrastructure projects in Pakistan," the minister said adding these projects would not only boost the economy but also create employment opportunities. The government, he said had established a special Investment Facilitation Council to attract foreign investment and facilitate investors. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was determined to provide relief to the people, he maintained.

Tarar said that the tax collection system was being improved in



Pakistan, and in this context, tax reforms were being introduced in the Federal Bureau of Revenue. He thanked the Bangladeshi journalists who visited Pakistan and took interest in learning about the government's economic initiatives. The delegation of Bangladeshi journalists thanked the Government of Pakistan, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and journal-

ism institutions for hosting and providing support to them in Pakistan. The members of the delegation said it was very good to visit Pakistan and expressed the hope that such visits would promote relations between the two countries and people-to-people contacts. The delegation of Bangladeshi journalists included Iqtadar Ahmed, Mukram Hussain, Rizq Ahmed, Sheikh Sajid.

Pakistan committed to promote green investment: Aurangzeb

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Highlighting Pakistan's vulnerability to the diverse effects of climate change, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb here on Friday emphasized his country's commitment to addressing climate change and promoting green investment opportunities. He was delivering a keynote speech via online platform at the UK-Pakistan Green Investment Forum, organized by the British High Commission in Pakistan, according to a press statement issued by finance ministry.

He shed light on Pakistan's disproportionate vulnerability to the devastating impacts of climate change, despite its minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions. He cited a

recent World Bank study, estimating potential annual GDP losses of up to 1% due to climate-related risks. Acknowledging the significant funding gap in climate change mitigation projects, the Federal Minister stressed the importance of bridging this divide. He noted that the government's efforts to enhance investor confidence in bankable green opportunities. The



Minister also outlined Pakistan's plans to utilise innovative financing instruments to raise international climate finance. He said that the government was working on issuing domestic green Sukuk bonds by December 2024 to finance sustainable development projects. He elaborated on the significant improvements in various macroeconomic indicators over the past 10 months. He provided an overview of the country's macroeconomic stability, including improvements in inflation, GDP growth in the agricultural sector, increased forex reserves, upward trend in stock market and the projected reduction of the Current Account Deficit. The minister also communicated about the successful completion of the 9-month-long Standby Arrangement (SBA) of International Monetary Fund (IMF).



Tamasha to livestream ICC men's T20 World Cup 2024

ARIF MEHMOOD KHAN
ISLAMABAD: Tamasha, Pakistan's largest home-grown OTT platform, has secured digital broadcasting rights for Ten Sports for all six ICC mega tournaments spanning the years 2024 and 2025.

The mega tournaments included the highly anticipated ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, ICC Champions Trophy 2025, ICC test men's test championship, and all women ICC events, said a news release received here on Friday.

The agreement was between Tamasha and Ten Sports, attended by Aamir Ibrahim, CEO, Jazz, and Duraid Qureshi Founder and CEO, HUM Network Limited (HNL).

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, co-hosted by the West Indies and

the United States from June 2 to June 29, will include 55 matches.

The highly anticipated Pakistan vs. India match is scheduled for June 9 in New York. Pakistan's first match is against the USA on June 6 at the Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium, Dallas.

Before the T20 World Cup, Pakistan will play three T20 matches against Ireland in Dublin from May 10 to May 14, followed by a four-match series in England from May 22 to May 30, serving as a crucial warm-up games. Babar Azam will captain the Pakistan side in the T20 World Cup.

Commenting on Tamasha securing digital broadcasting rights for the ICC tournaments, Aamer Ejaz, Chief Digital Officer, Jazz, stated, "We are incredibly excited to



Tamasha joins hands with TenSports to bring live streaming of ICC Men's T20 WC 2024 on your mobile screen!

bringing the free HD livestreaming of the ICC mega tournaments for millions of passionate cricket fans across Pakistan.

Tamasha has always been dedicated to providing top-notch entertainment, and the new development reaffirms our commitment to delivering unparalleled viewing experiences. With the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 and all the upcoming ICC events now part of our lineup, we're

poised to set new standards in digital streaming."

Also sharing his thoughts on the development, Duraid Qureshi,

CEO, HNL, said, "We are thrilled to join hands with Tamasha, Pakistan's premier home-grown OTT entertainment platform, for digital streaming of all major ICC tournaments till the end of 2025."

Pakistani audience along with Ten Sports will have an opportunity of watching cricket matches live on Tamasha. In this partnership we aim to reach out to a wider audience and promote the digital viewing habits of Pakistanis, bringing the exhilarating experience of ICC tournaments directly to the fingertips of millions, fostering a new era of connectivity and passion for cricket across the nation." Tamasha has solidified its position as the top choice for live sports streaming, with

over 26 million viewers tuning in for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023. It reached #1 on both the Apple App Store & Google Play Store, peaking at 8.5 million daily active users and 21 million monthly active users during the tournament, capturing 80% of the viewership among seven digital platforms. The platform previously streamed events like the ICC T20 World Cup (2022), FIFA World Cup (2022), Asia Cup 2023, ICC World Cup 2023, and IHL PSL seasons 8 and 9. In 2023, "Tamasha" was the second most searched tech term on Google, just after ChatGPT.

Viewers can effortlessly catch the ICC T20 World Cup action on Tamasha through its user-friendly Android and iOS apps or website.

Pakistan women's team all set for England challenge

PEAK POINT
BIRMINGHAM: Pakistan women's cricket team are all geared up to take on England in the first of the three-match T20I series starting tomorrow at the Edgbaston Cricket Ground in Birmingham.

The first ball will be bowled at 2.30pm local time. The second and third T20Is will be played in Northampton and Leeds on 17 and 19 May, respectively. Three ODIs – part of the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25, will be played from 23 to 29 May in Derby, Taunton and Chelmsford.

Pakistan women's team captain, Nida Dar said: "We have been working hard to fine-tune our skills and strategies ahead of this series. Each member of the team has showcased great dedication and discipline during the



practice sessions, and I have full faith in their abilities to deliver in the forthcoming series.

"Playing against a top side like England is always a challenge, but it is also a great opportunity for our players to test themselves against the best in the world. The series will help us identify key players for the upcoming T20 World Cup."

Pakistan women squad: Nida Dar (captain), Aliya Riaz, Ayesha Zafar, Diana Baig, Fatima Sana, Gull Feroza, Muneeba Ali (wk), Najha Ali (wk), Nashra Sundhu, Natalia Parvaiz, Rameen Shamim, Sadaf Shamas, Sadia Iqbal, Sidra Amin, Tuba Hassan, Umm-e-Hani and Waheeda Akhtar

England women T20I squad: Heather Knight (captain), Alice Charles, Amy Jones, Bess Heath, Cappy Dean, Danielle Gibson, Danielle Wyatt, Freya Kemp, Lauren Bell, Lauren Filer, Linsey Smith, Maia Bouchier, Nat Sciver-Tunst, Sarah Glenn and Sophie Ecclestone.

England women T20I squad: Heather Knight (captain), Alice Charles, Amy Jones, Bess Heath, Cappy Dean, Danielle Gibson, Danielle Wyatt, Freya Kemp, Lauren Bell, Lauren Filer, Linsey Smith, Maia Bouchier, Nat Sciver-Tunst, Sarah Glenn and Sophie Ecclestone.

Pakistan-New Zealand match ends in 1-1 draw

JAVED KHAN
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and New Zealand ended their match in a 1-1 draw in the 30th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Ipoh, Malaysia on Friday.

According to information made available here by the Pakistan Hockey Federation, in the fifth pool match both Pakistan and New Zealand struggled to break the deadlock until halftime.

It was not until the 35th minute when New Zealand managed to find the net, taking the lead. However, Pakistan's resilience paid off when they equalized through a penalty corner executed by Abu Bakar in the 43rd



minute, ultimately resulting in a 1-1 draw. With a total of 11 points from five matches, Pakistan has successfully secured its place in the final. Pakistan had clinched the third position in the previous edition of the event. In the final, to be contested on

Saturday, Pakistan will take on Japan. This prestigious event, featuring six teams including hosts Malaysia, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada, has garnered immense attention from hockey enthusiasts from across the world.

Pakistan remain unbeaten in Azlan Shah Cup as match with New Zealand ends in tie

SAMRA ATHAR
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday secured a tie in their match against New Zealand in the 30th Azlan Shah Hockey Cup.

Pakistan's fifth match today, which was played in Malaysia's Ipoh city at 1pm (PKT), saw them remain unbeaten throughout the tournament.

The match ended in a draw with both teams securing one point each, as the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) said in a post on X.

Both Pakistan and New Zealand had not scored by half-time. Senior player Ammad Shaheel is leading the 18-member squad with Abu Bakr as the vice-captain.

Pakistan now lead the points table with 11 points



while Japan rank second with a point less. New Zealand hold the third position with seven points while Malaysia follow them with six points.

Pakistan and Japan had already qualified for the final match, which will take place at 5:30pm (PKT) on Saturday at the Azlan Shah Stadium in Ipoh, after winning their respective matches on Wednesday.

Pakistan had defeated

and New Zealand ended in a draw.

Japan, with the same number of wins plus a draw, are facing Canada today at 3:30pm (PKT).

Earlier this month, head coach Roelant Oltmans had said he expected an improved show by Pakistan in the tournament.

The 69-year-old Oltmans has served Pakistan's senior and junior teams in different roles since 2004 and was involved with the youth side in his most recent stint.

Pakistan won the Azlan Shah Cup title thrice – in 1999, 2000 and 2003 – and came third in the last edition which was also held in Ipoh in 2022. Malaysia are the defending champions of this year's edition.

PM to host hockey team for brilliant performance in Azlan Shah tournament; Rana Mashhood

KOMAL BUTT
ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Prime Minister Youth's Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan on Friday announced that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will host the National Hockey Team for their excellent performance in the Azlan Shah Hockey tournament on their return back to the country. Congratulating the hockey team on the video link for succeeding in the final of the Azlan Shah Cup after 13 years, he said that Pakistan's qualification for the final of a



major event after a long time was a demonstration of the selection on merit due to the devotion of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif with sports.

"Best of luck to our hockey team for tomorrow's match! May you play with determination, skill, and unwavering fighting". Appreciating the brilliant performance of hockey players, Mashhood said that the entire nation was eying tomorrow's final match and praying for you.

Central Asian Volleyball C'ship trophy unveiled

SABA SHAFIQ
ISLAMABAD: The trophy of the Engro Central Asian Volleyball Championship was unveiled by captains of Iran, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Pakistan here at a local hotel on Friday. The stage was set for the highly anticipated Engro Central Asian Volleyball Championship, scheduled to take place from Saturday here at the Liaquat Gymnasium of Pakistan Sports Complex.

The event to run till May 17 will feature six national teams of Central Asian countries, including Iran, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Meanwhile, speaking at a press conference, Chaudhary Muhammad Yaqoob, Chairman of the Pakistan Volleyball Federation said the event promises to be an electrifying pre-



lude to a week filled with exhilarating matches and intense competition. The festivities would kick off with the first match of the tournament at 1pm, featuring a showdown between Turkmenistan and Iran. This would be followed by a match between Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan.

The highlight of the day would be the much-anticipated opening ceremony, scheduled for 5:30pm,

where esteemed guests and dignitaries will come together to celebrate the spirit of sportsmanship and international camaraderie.

Following the opening ceremony, the action-packed day would continue with a riveting match between Pakistan and Afghanistan at 6:30pm, setting the stage for an exciting start to the tournament.

Pakistan Volleyball Federation

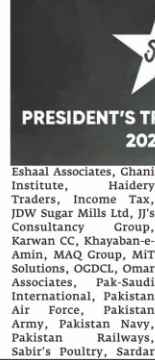
(PVF) extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Pakistan Sports Board for providing the facilities to host this prestigious tournament, he said. PVF also acknowledges the invaluable support of the Director General of Sports, the Minister of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC), and the Secretary of IPC, whose unwavering support has been instrumental in making this event a reality.

President's Trophy Grade-II to be played from May 12

SEHRISH NAZ
LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board Friday announced details of the President's Trophy Grade-II three-day non-first-class tournament, which will be played in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from May 12 to June 11.

The departments' event, returning to the national circuit after the 2018-2019 season, will include 24 sides, which have been equally divided into four pools. Table toppers will progress to the semifinals, with the winners qualifying for the final.

The sides participating in the tournament are: Ahmad Glass, Azlaan Traders, Capital Development Authority,



Eshaal Associates, Chani Institute, Haideri Traders, Income Tax, JDW Sugar Mills Ltd, JJ's Consultancy Group, Karwan CC, Khayaban-e-Amin, MAQ Group, MIT Solutions, OGDCL, Omar Associates, Pak-Saudi International, Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Railways, Sabir's Poultry, Sardar

Sports & Group, Service Industries and TARA Group. Pool A will comprise Ahmad Glass, Income Tax, Khayaban-e-Amin, Pakistan Railways, Service Industries, and TARA Group, and will play their matches in Lahore at the LCCA ground, Railways Stadium, and Central Park Cricket Club Ground.



PTCL's 'Flash Fiber' Reaches 500,000 User Milestone, Reflecting Rapid Growth

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's fastest Fiber-To-The-Home (FTTH) service, PTCL's Flash Fiber has demonstrated swift growth to reach the milestone of 500,000 customers nationwide. The service revolutionizes internet connectivity in Pakistan, besides offering a host of integrated ICT services to transform the experience of its customers. PTCL Group is rapidly expanding its fiber network in Pakistan, upgrading from copper to improve digital experiences and customer satisfaction. Currently, PTCL's Flash Fiber service links 79 cities across the nation and is expanding further. Flash Fiber achieved a milestone at an unmatched pace in Pakistan's telecom sector, highlighting its exceptional popularity due to its rapid speeds, flawless connectivity, and a range of complementary digital offerings, such as PTCL Group's premier OTT service, SHOQ. Celebrating this significant milestone, Haten Bamatraf, President and Group CEO of PTCL & Ufone AG expressed, "We are thrilled by the enthusiastic response to our FTTH service 'Flash Fiber', which is designed to revolutionize user experiences, support smart home setups and enhance digital lifestyles in Pakistan. We firmly believe that high-speed and reliable internet connectivity acts as a catalyst for economic growth and social advancement, as it drives a substantial portion of the economy and opens doors to progress and development. We are strategically expanding our fiber network with the aim of providing high-quality connectivity easily accessible to every internet user in Pakistan." High-speed connectivity is also expected to spur softer aspects including leisure and entertainment.

On the back of Flash Fiber's blazing speeds, PTCL is enriching user experience by providing premium content through OTT (SHOQ TV) and OTT App (SHOQ) services. Flash Fiber customers can also enjoy Flash Eye Security Solution for their house or office that is designed to meet all their security needs. Not only this, but Flash Fiber customers can also avail medical insurance. PTCL's FTTH service provides the fastest connectivity that fosters innovation and drives socio-economic growth. The widespread adoption of fiber connectivity presents a valuable opportunity to unlock Pakistan's growth potential across agriculture, health, education, e-commerce, entrepreneurship, and the digital economy, promoting sustainable and inclusive progress.

ISLAMABAD: Commuters drive at Jinnah Avenue during heavy rain in morning hours in the Federal Capital.

Economy's pain points tightening noose around tax-compliant cigarette industry

ZAHID YAQOOB KHAWAJA

ISLAMABAD: Ipsos Pakistan, launched its research study titled, 'Pakistan Cigarette Market Assessment 2024' in Islamabad. The report represented a comprehensive survey of over 1,000 retail outlets across all four provinces of Pakistan, thoroughly covering both urban and rural areas. Key findings highlight a significant shift in market dynamics, including a projected decline in the market share of legitimate cigarette brands and an increase in the presence of illicit brands, posing severe implications to the national revenue and sustainability of legitimate business. Easy availability of low-priced smuggled and tax-non-compliant cigarettes across Pakistan, non-compliance of Track & Trace

system, cigarette sales below the minimum legal price (MLP), price disparities and numerous other crises had not only put down the compliant cigarette industry to its knees but was also denting national exchequer with an annual loss of Rs300b. While visiting retail outlets in these areas, Ipsos checked the availability and prices of tax-non-paid and smuggled cigarette brands and estimated the market shares, compliance of Track & Trace (T&T) and minimum legal price (MLP), price disparities and new phenomena in the market. Later Ipsos also presented analysis of the information collected from the markets of these areas. Furthermore, in wake of increased enforcement, an observation study was also conducted across the sample to corroborate the findings. "Year on year, 6 brands have been included in the Track and Trace list however there have been numerous instances where the same brands were being sold without stamps. However, the failure to implement Track and Trace is evident as 37 new brands, bringing the total to 165 brands, in the market do not have track and trace stamps. This is exposing another failure of the concerned authorities, the research mentioned that in Pakistan around 104 cigarette brands were being sold below the MLP while 45 smuggled brands were being sold above the MLP. "53% of the cigarette brands available in the market are being sold below the MLP", the study

PEAK POINT

added. In a bid to show a huge margin of disparities in the market, the research highlighted that a locally manufactured tax evaded pack of a famous brand was being sold in the market for Rs 120, while another pack of a famous smuggled brand was priced at Rs 165. Both the brands were easily available across the surveyed areas. Contrary to that, the most popular tax-paid brands were being sold in the market for Rs 220 and 550. Nearly 95% of the cigarette market lies between Rs. 65 - Rs. 120 price bracket per pack. The research said that in the surveyed areas most of the locally manufactured tax evaded packs of 25 and 30 cigarettes.

Opinion & Editorials

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Education emergency

Faisal Bari

ON Wednesday, the prime minister announced an education emergency at a conference in Islamabad. Though post-18th Amendment, education has been a provincial subject, the prime minister said that the emergency was for the country and he would work with all provinces and chief ministers to ensure cooperation, compliance and follow-up. Representatives from the provinces were present at the conference.

About 26.2 million children between five and 16 years are out of school in the country. For those who are in school, most are provided with a poor quality of education. Access to quality education depends, almost exclusively, on parental income levels: if you have the income, you can get your child a decent quality of education. Otherwise, your child is either not in school, or enrolled in a government or low-fee private school. Most such schools provide poor quality education.

Article 25-A, which says that "free and compulsory" education would be provided to all five- to 16-year-olds in the country, was added to the basic rights section of our Constitution in 2010. Fourteen years later, we are declaring an emergency to do what we had promised our children in the Constitution as a basic right! In an earlier speech, the prime minister had called this criminal negligence. It is surely more than that.

The meaning of 'emergency', according to one dictionary, is "a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action". The situation is definitely serious and dangerous as well as the state of education in the country is concerned. But it is not unexpected: it has been the result of decades of a deliberate and purposeful neglect of education.

The current situation is the result of the choices that we have made and are still making.

Even today, when international bodies recommend a minimum

expenditure of four per cent of GDP on education, our government spends 1.7pc or so. The situation is also not unexpected, given that educationists, researchers, academics, civil society representatives, teachers, parents and children who have been talking of this neglect for years have not been heard. Every education policy of the past has also had aspirations to universalise education. We started off in the right direction with the first education conference held in 1947, but we have yet to universalise education. The current situation is the result of the choices that we, as a society, have made and are still making.

Given this, the bit on emergencies 'requiring immediate action' is the part that is yet to happen. While announcing the emergency, there was nothing about what steps would be taken to address the situation, what policy changes would take place, and when the state would invest more in education and how. When will all this start?

How will it be implemented? Who will monitor the implementation and ensure we move towards the goal of 'access to quality education for all children', and how do we ensure all this is not just rhetoric and that actual action will indeed follow? The prime minister did say he will be monitoring the situation himself. It is good to have that level of commitment, but given the demands on a prime minister's time, this might not work.

It was also mentioned that there will be a 'task force' to look at issues of implementation. The task force, its mandate and power, its modus operandi, had not been announced as yet. Let us see when the follow-up happens.

Clearly, a lot of urgent and comprehensive work is needed if we are going to live up to our promises of providing access to quality education to all our children. If it takes the creak of an emergency to do it, so be it. But the proof will be in the actions that start now, and in outcomes

that are achieved as a result. Otherwise, it is all rhetoric and it will be another opportunity wasted.

There might not be one programme that all the governments follow. Given the varied conditions and circumstances across the provinces and the Islamabad Capital Territory, governments have their own priorities in line with local conditions, this is not an issue. In fact, it is better this way, as local programming will create local buy-in as well. But there has to be a clear declaration of priorities by all governments and, subsequently, the action plans they will follow.

Pakistan has some 100,000 schools in the public sector and more than 250,000 in total. Similarly, we have about 1m teachers in the public sector, and more than 2m teachers overall working in the education sector. We are still short of schools as well as teachers. So, we are talking of a very large system here. Reform of a large system or change in a large system will require large and deep interventions. Small initiatives here and there, as governments have been taking in education for quite some time, are not going to be enough to address the issue of 26.2m out-of-school children or the quality of education issues for the millions who are in schools.

We need more schools, teachers and classes; we need to revamp our assessment and examination systems; we need to redo our curricula and books; we need to upgrade teaching skills and content knowledge of teachers; we need better governance structures in the public sector.

All this and more needs to be done at scale and quickly. This will require more resources and it will require a lot of focus on prioritising and coordinating. And it will need high levels of competence as well. By invoking an emergency, the prime minister has said he is putting his weight behind all this. Let us see if this is anything more than rhetoric.

Courtesy Dawn

Attacking the NFC - again

Kaiser Bengali

THE attacks on the 7th National Finance Commission Award continue relentlessly, even though all the technical arguments forwarded by apologists of centralization for reversing it have been told already in the previous paragraphs. It has now induced the centralist lobby to give vent to figments of imagination.

The new line of argument being presented at different fora is somewhat as follows: the provinces had been told that under the seventh NFC award, a sustainable if tax revenue worth an additional three per cent of GDP was raised in the next three years; the unworkability of the award without the addition tax revenue had been clearly discussed with the provincial finance ministers; it was hoped an integrated goods and services value-added tax would be brought about; and the expectation was that the NFC Award would lead to fiscal decentralization, with provinces enacting local governments and setting up provincial finance commissions to finance them; and so on.

This author was a member of the 7th NFC that produced the Consensus Award, signed in Gwadar on December 30, 2009. The process of arriving at the consensus decision was intensive and comprised 16 meetings over five months. A nine members, led by the federal finance minister and including the federal finance secretary and five provincial finance ministers, were actively engaged in the deliberations. One of the provincial finance ministers was also the chief minister of a province. The fact is that none of the four claims alluded to in the previous paragraphs are true.

The then federal finance minister did express his intention to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent which was also recorded in the Gwadar Declaration. However, at no point during the five-month-long deliberations was there any mention or even insinuation that the Award would be 'unsustainable or unworkable' sans additional tax revenue nor was there any 'expression of hope' that the goods and services component of sales tax would be integrated - rather, they had just been separated. Moreover, there was never any discussion during the deliberations to induce the expectation that local governments would be instituted along with provincial finance commissions. And then there is the usual refrain: provincial tax collection is underwhelming; provinces collect less than one per cent of GDP in taxes or less than eight per cent of total taxes collected, nationally; but finance only 16 per cent of their expenditures with their own revenue. The fact is that tax collection is dependent on tax bases; the larger and more robust the tax base, the greater the potential for tax collection. And the fact again is that - except for sales tax on services, now - all the larger and robust tax bases are with the federal government. Reverse the tax bases and it is the federal tax collection that will mirror today's provincial tax collections.

Courtesy The News

A tighter muzzle

THE infamous Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) 2016 is seemingly about to get a major shot in the arm. Peca, which digital activists say is used to target journalists and muzzle free speech, will now be amended to, via the Peca Amendment Bill 2024, establish a Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA). The PM has already approved the draft amendment. Rumours of the arrival of such an authority have been circulating for some weeks and it will reportedly have the power to regulate online content and punish those violating the new Peca law on social media. Falling under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information Technology, the DRPA will also advise the government on digital rights matters, ensure responsible use of the internet and enforce regulations, and will also collaborate with social media platforms. The proposed authority will also have the power to demand information from involved witnesses and individuals and establish rules and enforce laws related to digital rights. While the authority is not yet operational and officials claim that this amendment bill has been formulated to protect the privacy and rights of users online, that it is an extension of a law that has been criticized for quashing people's rights does not bode well. A 2021 report by the Freedom Network found that over the prior two years, 23 journalists had been targeted under Peca. One of the most contentious parts of the act is Section 20, which criminalizes defamation and makes it punishable by up to three years in prison, even though Pakistan already had defamation laws in place and the United Nations Human Rights Committee's conclusion that imprisonment is not an appropriate penalty for defamation. Many foresaw the direction Peca would go when it was made law in 2016, coincidentally also under a PML-N government.

President urges global efforts to address climate change through eco-friendly technology, forestation

PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday underlined the need for global efforts to address the challenge of climate change by adopting environment-friendly technology, promoting afforestation, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The president, talking to the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan/COP 29 President-designate, Mukhtar Babayev, who along with his delegation called on him, highlighted that global warming and climate change were affecting the glacier and causing water scarcity. He said that tackling these challenges required global support to mitigate their adverse impacts. Azerbaijan is going to host the 29th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (COP 29) in Baku in November 2024 and the minister, in his capacity as the President-designate of COP 29, is here to invite President Zardari to the conference.
 Welcoming the minister, the president congratulated Azerbaijan on winning the bid to host COP 29 and expressed the hope that COP 29 would result in setting the New Collective Quantified Goal on Finance that would help developing countries fulfil their climate finance needs. He highlighted that Pakistan had planted mangrove forests over hundreds of thousands of hectares that would help protect the environment, besides earning carbon credits for Pakistan. President Zardari said that Pakistan highly valued its relations with Azerbaijan and wanted

to further expand bilateral cooperation in the areas of common interest. He called for promoting more interactions, bilateral exchanges and people-to-people contacts to further cement relations between the two brotherly countries. Mukhtar Babayev underlined the need for further enhancing bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, particularly in the area of tourism and culture. He also delivered the invitation to the president to participate in COP 29 in Baku in November 2024. The president conveyed his best wishes for the successful hosting of COP 29 and expressed the hope that Azerbaijan would play its role to secure the interest of developing countries in meeting their financing needs for climate adaptation.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, Mr Mukhtar Babayev, along with his delegation, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Alwan-e-Sadr.

CPEC the crown jewel in China, Pakistan friendship: Ahsan Iqbal

PEAK POINT
BEIJING: Calling the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) an exemplar of friendship between the two countries, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Prof Ahsan Iqbal said there has always been "spring" in the relations between Pakistan and China which are always moving on an upward trajectory.
 CPEC, which was launched in 2013 and is a flagship project under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, has "benefited Pakistan's economy immensely", he said in Beijing.
 Pakistan looks forward to further cooperating with China to seek shared economic growth as CPEC has entered into its second phase, he added. "The garden of friendship between Pakistan and China in every season has blossomed new and colorful flowers of cooperation



and understanding between the people of Pakistan and China," the minister said. Iqbal lauded CPEC for transforming the development landscape of, creating jobs for and building connectivity for his country, China Daily reported. "CPEC has helped Pakistan transform its energy and infrastructure sectors and connect several parts of the country so the fruits of development can be shared across various regions of Pakistan," Iqbal said.
 "It also helped create over two million jobs and helps Pakistan's workers master new technology

CM Maryam launches 'clinics on wheels' project

PEAK POINT
LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz asserts that Punjab is moving towards development and prosperity.
 Addressing the 'clinics on wheels' project ceremony the chief minister emphasised that this project would transform the health sector and facilitate the public.
 She highlighted that the clinics on wheels project was equipped with all the basic medical facilities. The 200 clinics on wheels would be stationed at various points. The clinics will provide medical tests, screening, vaccination, as well as gynaecology services.
 Fifty out of the 200 mobile clinics will have ultrasound facilities. Through this project, as many as four million individuals will be facilitated, particularly in areas where hospital facilities aren't available.

Local doctors from 36 districts will be given first priority to offer their services for this project.
 The shortage of nurses and paramedical staff is also under consideration.
 The chief minister said this project, initiated by Nawaz Sharif and halted during the previous government, was being reinitiated. She insisted that her government was on a mission to provide health facilities at the doorstep.
 She also disclosed plans to build state-of-the-art cardiology hospitals in eight districts of Punjab.
 CM Maryam inaugurated the clinics on wheels project where Provincial Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafiq, Imran Nazir, and Health Secretary Ali Khan were present.

Gilani promises all out efforts to serve people, elevate their lifestyle

PEAK POINT
MULTAN: Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani said on Friday his determination and passion to serve the people of under-developed South Punjab was an open secret and promised to make all out efforts to resolve problems of the people, upgrade infrastructure and improve their lifestyle.
 He expressed these views in a meeting with former caretaker foreign minister and seasoned diplomat Syed Jallil Abbas Gilani who called on him at Multan Circuit House.
 The Chairman Senate held detailed discussions with Mr. Jallil Abbas Gilani on the region and issues of mutual interest. Different other delegates also called on Chairman Senate Syed



and added they possessed the potential to take Pakistan to the next level of prosperity and development.
 The Chairman Senate said: "The way we have served the people of South Punjab was an open secret" and pledged to continue to strive for resolving problems of the under-developed areas and improve their living standards.
 "We have always led from the front on issues concerning people of under-developed areas be it the elevation of funding or the infrastructure development and we will continue to do so in service of the people."
 The chairman Senate said, he has firm belief in Pakistani youth and women adding that it is the youth that will take us forward on a development trajectory.

Mohsin Naqvi directs to complete construction work of Model Jail in Islamabad

PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Friday visited the model jail under construction in Sector H of Islamabad and ordered to complete the Mohsin Naqvi construction work within six months.
 During an inspection of under-construction jail, the minister observed that the project of construction of jail in Islamabad has been stalled for 13 year but now it will be completed in 6 months.
 Naqvi tasked the

officials concerned to complete the first phase of the prison construction in 6 months directing Chief Commissioner Islamabad and IC Islamabad Police to regularly review progress on construction activities.
 Keeping the project on hold for 7 year is clearly incompetence, Mohsin Naqvi observed, adding that the construction work in jail should continue day and night in the timeline.
 The process of appointment of neces-

sary staff should also be started immediately, he ordered adding that the provision of resources for the completion of the project will be ensured.
 The minister gave instructions to the concerned authorities regarding the completion of the project under construction.
 Chief Commissioner Islamabad Mohammad Ali Randhawa briefed the minister about the project. He said that the project to build a jail in Islamabad started in 2011 but even after

many years, this project could not be completed.
 He said that the jail will have a capacity of 2,000 prisoners however the capacity to hold two thousand more prisoners will be increased.
 Federal Interior Secretary Khurram Agha, Chief Commissioner Islamabad Mohammad Ali Randhawa, IC Police Islamabad Contractors, Consultants and concerned officials were also present on the occasion.

Nerve-soothing rain in Islamabad, Pindi

PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: Rain in twin cities Islamabad and Rawalpindi made weather pleasant on Friday.
 The showers and hail-storm broke the spell of heatwave and Islamabad is still under the cloud cover. It also rained in Attock and some other parts of Punjab where wind made the weather pleasant.
 In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Mansehra district, people heaved a sigh of relief as rain brought the temperature down.
 The Meteorological Department says the rainy weather will continue till Saturday.
 A rain-generating system is expected to enter Balochistan on Friday and showers are likely to fall in nine districts.
 The Met office says weather will remain mild due to rain on May 10 and 11. Meanwhile, Lahore continues to have harsh weather as the minimum temperature is expected to be 26 degrees Celsius and the maximum can soar up to 41 degrees Celsius. Light rain is expected in Lahore on Sunday according to the forecast. The city has been in the news for worse smog situation as its average reading was recorded at 162 on Friday. Earlier, the Met department predicted mainly hot and dry weather in most parts of the country in the last few days. However, it said, partly cloudy weather conditions with light rain-thunderstorm could occur at isolated places in Gilgit-Baltistan.

IT, Telecom role vital for economic uplift: Shaza Fatima

PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Telecom Infrastructure Services Company EDOTCO Group led by Group CEO Mohamed Adnan Ahmad Tajuddin on called on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja and discussed matters of mutual interest and related to Telecom infrastructure. The other members of the delegation included Annis Sheikh, Mohammed, Group CFO, Noreen Sabrina Mohd Noor, Group Head of Corporate Communications, Abdul Aziz, Country Managing Director, and Muhammad Rehan Farooqi, Director of Corporate Affairs and Planning, said a news release. While talking to the delegation, Shaza Fatima said that steps are



being taken for digitalization in the country. She said that the present government is committed to the provision of quality broadband and internet services to the masses. Shaza Fatima said that the IT and Telecom sector has an important role in the economic uplift of the country. She said that the Ministry of IT & Telecom was taking alongside the telecom industry, adding that issues confronting the telecom industry will be resolved.
 The minister noted that EDOTCO Group support was vital for the

Wild elephants killed a journalist in India while making video

SYED MUHAMMAD HAKIS
INDIA: A journalist of a local news channel was killed in an attack by a wild elephant in the Indian state of Kerala. According to Indian media reports 34 year old journalist Mukesh was making a video of the elephants while crossing the river along with the news team. An elephant attacked the team Mukesh fell on the ground while trying to escape the elephant and



was trampled by the elephant after which the injured journalist Mukesh was rushed to the hospital where he succumbed to his injuries. It is being told that the nature of the injuries sustained by Mukesh is yet to be known.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting the under construction Model Prison.