First Digital,print daily of Balochistan

ABC Certified

QUETTA VOICE

Https:// www.dquettavoice.com/ @Q.voice00 @Voicequetta Quetta_voice Quettavoice

Vol. IV, No:305 Wednesday, May,19,2021, Email adderss : dquettavoice@gmail.com Editor : Asim Khan Price Rs.10

Pakistan to send aid to Palestine to help with Covid-19, medical emergency situation: Fawad Chaudhry

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry disclosed on Tuesday that Pakistan would send aid to Palestine to help the country deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and the medical emergency situation created by Israeli air strikes that have been ongoing for more than a week.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad after a meeting of the federal cabinet, he said Pakistan was the first Islamic country that adopted a "very clear and strong stance on Palestine" which it was standing by even today. The foundation of Pakistan's policy on Palestine was laid down by the Quaid-i-Azam and Prime Minister Imran Khan was its "trustee", he added.

Chaudhry said that Pakistan's leadership and efforts for Palestine were being "accepted by the entire Muslim ummah", including Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and the country's ambassador to Pakistan who had thanked Pakistan for its support.

"[Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan said what was in his heart for Palestine was on Imran Khan's tongue. There is a very big role of Prime Minister Imran Khan."

A day earlier, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi left for Turkey on a diplomatic mission to bring the international community's attention to the worsening situation in Palestine.

After Turkey, Qureshi will leave for New York with the foreign ministers of Palestine, Turkey and Sudan where he will hold "important meetings" with dignitaries and "raise a voice [for] oppressed Palestinians in the United Nations General Assembly".

Chaudhry said that the government would present a report on electoral reforms in parliament on Monday. "Our stance is that ECP (Election Commission of Pakistan) reforms are very necessary and we want to bring EVMs (electronic voting machines)."

To this end, the National Assembly speaker and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs would invite parliamentary reporters and leaders for a meeting this week so a detailed discussion could be started from Monday, he added.

During the meeting, the reporters and parliamentary leaders would analyse the EVMs themselves and see how they could prove to be effective in combatting rigging in elections, the information minister said.

Criticising the opposition for its inconsistent "narratives" on electoral reforms, Chaudhry said the PPP and PML-N had first claimed the Result Transmission System (RTS) malfunctioned in the 2018 general elections.

"We asked which constituency [it malfunctioned in], they didn't say anything. Then they claimed that Forms-46 were missing. We asked in which constituency, they didn't say anything.Web Desk.

ANKARA: Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a meeting with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, at Turkish Foreign ministry.

FM Qureshi reaches Turkey on Palestine mission

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Tuesday reached Ankara capital of Turkey on an extensive diplomatic mission to attract the world attention towards the deplorable situation in Palestine where Israeli airstrikes hammered the Gaza Strip killing more than 200 people.

The foreign minister was received by Deputy Governor Ankara Ismail Catkli and Pakistan's ambassador Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi at Ankara Airport.

FM Qureshi will leave for New York along with the foreign ministers of Sudan, Palestine and Turkey.

He will hold meetings with important personalities in New York.

He will raise his voice against the Israel's brutalities on the oppressed Palestinians. He will also address the international media persons and presented Pakistan's point of view with regard to Palestine situation.

The violence between Hamas and Israel is the worst since 2014, when Israel launched a military operation on the Gaza Strip with the stated aim of ending rocket fire and destroying tunnels used for smuggling.

The war left 2,251 dead on the Palestinian side, mostly civilians, and 74 on the Israeli side, mostly soldiers.

Opening the first session of the UN Security Council on the renewed violence on Sunday, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the fighting "utterly appalling". "It must stop immediately," he said.

But the UN talks, already delayed by Israel's ally the United States, resulted in little action, with Washington opposing a resolution.

President Joe Biden's administration says it is working behind the scenes, and that a Security Council statement could backfire. INP

LAHORE: President Dr. Arif Alvi being briefed about the National College of Arts at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

President for promoting arts education to project soft image of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi Tuesday called for promoting arts education to effectively project the soft image of Pakistan.

He said that the government attached utmost significance to the education sector and was taking steps for the socio-economic progress of the country by focusing on human resource development.

He made these remarks at a briefing on National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore, here at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Principal NCA Prof. Dr. Murtaza Jafri briefed the President about the role of the college in promoting arts education in the country.

The President urged the management of NCA to enhance outreach of the college by developing collaboration with international educational institutions of high repute.

He emphasized the need to improve online education facilities which were cost-effective and provided easy access to students.

The President also highlighted the importance of adopting new technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution enabling Pakistan to join the ranks of technologically-advanced countries.

He also stressed the need for implementation of disability quota and facilitation of persons with disability by providing them easy access to college premises.

The President appreciated the role of NCA in providing arts education and assured the Principal of every possible support for success of the college.INP

Shaukat Tarin to chair ECC meeting today

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin will chair a session of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet to discuss a nine-point agenda on Wednesday (today).

The ECC among others will deliberate upon exemption of the Turnover Tax to Special Economic Zones, according to a document.

The ECC is also expected to consider over the gas supply from the Hoor-I Gas field.The cabinet committee will also mull over the proposals with regard to the arrears of the K-electric, according to the paper. The meeting will also deliberate over a summary to withdraw the late shipment surcharge on the overseas Pakistanis, sources said.

The ECC will also mull over allocation of funds for the second phase of the Ehsaas Emergency Cash.The cabinet committee will consider over four supplementary grants for different ministries in the session.

Earlier in April, Shaukat Tarin was appointed as the finance minister in a cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Imran Khan. The additional charge of the finance minister was taken back from Industries and Production Minister Hammad Azhar who replaced Omar Ayub as the energy minister.INP

Nation to observe Solidarity Day with Palestinians on May 21: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Special Representative for Religious Harmony Maulana Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Tuesday announced that the entire nation will observe Solidarity Day with Palestinians on Friday (May 21). Talking to media persons in Islamabad, he said the day is being observed to strongly condemn Israeli atrocities against unarmed Palestinians. He said that Pakistan is effectively highlighting the Israeli violence against Palestinians at international fora and also engaging with Muslim countries including the OIC on the matter. INP

Increasing wheat price is causing problems for poverty-stricken people: Bilawal

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhuttio Zardari on Tuesday criticized the government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) over not providing relief to the general masses.

In a statement, the PPP chief said increasing price of wheat is creating problems for poverty-stricken people, adding that the incompetent policies of the federation is badly irking the nation. Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan has failed to smoothly run the country, he stated.

Bilawal said that the PTI had decimated the purchasing power of the masses. Championing a fraudulent slogan of change, the government had robbed people of even the few joys they could indulge in, he added.INP

NAB Files References Against 38 Officials Of Balochistan Revenue Department

The anti corruption bureau unearthed Rs.550 million scandal in Gwadar

Staff Reporter

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) filed three separate references against 38 officials of the Balochistan Revenue Department on Tuesday. The anti-corruption bureau unearthed Rs. 550 million's land scandal in Gwadar, the country's port city, the Spokesman NAB said.

The accused had inflicted huge financial losses to the national exchequer through fraudulent means. The accused had conducted fake sales of land and tampered revenue record, he said.

Accused allotted 1738 hecters of land illegally

During the investigation, it was revealed that the accused Naib Tehsildar, Maqbool Ahmed, Agha Zafar Hussain, and Hafeez ur Rehman and others allotted 1738 hecters of land illegally.

They sold out the land to private people while inflicting a financial loss of Rs. 32 crore to the national exchequer. NAB files reference in the Accountability Court Quetta

NAB Balochistan filed the reference at the Accountablity Court Quetta against the accused. NAB has intensified its operations against the corrupt elements operating in various government departments in the province.

NAB unearths massive corruption in the Fisheries department

The anti-corruption bureau had recently unearthed a mega corruption scandal in the Fisheries department government of Balochistan. NAB has also arrested some key officers involved in massive corruption in the Fisheries department.

Ministers Dispel The Impression About A Revolt Against Jam Kamal

By Our Reporter

Balochistan ministers on Tuesday dispelled the impression about a reported revolt against Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan. In a statement issued to the press, Home Minister, Mir Ziaullah Langove reiterated his support to Jam Kamal. "We standby Jam Kamal and will foil all conspiracies", Mr. Langove mentioned. Finance Minister Balochistan, Zahoor Buledi took to social media network Twitter and contradicted reports about any resignations.Ministers statements have come after a section of the press reported cracks in the ruling party Provincial ministers' statements have come after a section of the press reported that Speaker Balochistan Assembly, Qudoos Bizenjo, Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI) provincial chief, Sardar Yar Muhammad Rind, finance minister Zahoor Buledi had decided to resign. Except for Buledi, none of the angry ministers and speaker contradicted the news item.

Media should avoid fake news, Buledi said "Media should avoid speculations and fake news", Mr. Buledi clarified. However, the parliamentary secretary on information, Bushra Rind reposed her confidence in the Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan. "The Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) is united under the leadership of Jam Kamal", she said in an official handout issued on Tuesday evening.

BAP has 24 lawmakers

The ruling BAP has 24 lawmakers in the house of 65 in the Balochistan Assembly. However, the PTI has 7 legislators in the provincial assembly. The two parties BAP and PTI have a political alliance in the province and the federal government in Islamabad.

Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has preferred not to comment on existing cracks within the ruling party so far.

Ring Road scandal: PM displeased over Ghulam Sarwar Khan's press conference

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Tuesday that the government ordered an inquiry into the Rawalpindi Ring Road scandal after it received a complaint.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said this while addressing a meeting of the Federal Cabinet. According to sources, the PM asked Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan to explain why he held a press conference when he had not been named in the scandal.

Sources said that Ghulam Sarwar Khan was of the opinion that since his name was doing the rounds on social media, he considered it necessary to issue a clarification.

The Aviation Minister said, it seems that the Punjab government has conspired against him. "The Punjab government's investigations and TORs are against me", he added.

The Prime Minister said that the fact finding report had just been released and the investigation was yet to take place. He said that Ghulam Sarwar's name was not in the fact finding report and assured him that he was overseeing the matter himself.

On Monday, Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan addressed a presser and said that the PTI government is taking all necessary measures to implement the Rawalpindi Ring Road project. He had said that the alignment of the project was changed on technical grounds, therefore, they cannot be accused of political interference in the development project.INP

PIA Resumes Flights Operations To Zhob After 3 Years

Mir Salam Jogezai, Ali Khan Mandokhail

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed its flight operations to Zhob after a period of three years. On Tuesday, a PIA flight PK 528 carrying 36 passengers from Karachi landed at Zhob airport.

Balochistan Livestock Minister, Mitha Khan Kakar inaugurated the resumption of flights to Zhob located near the Pak-Afghan border. "This was the long-standing demand of people of Zhob", Mr. Kakar told the participants of the inaugural ceremony.

General Manager PIA Bilal and other high-ups were also present on the occasion.

Passengers can now travel to Zhob via PIA

The passengers can now travel to Balochistan's district of Zhob via Pakistan International Airlines. Earlier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed its flight services between Lahore and Islamabad.

PIA will operate two flights from Karachi to Zhob on Tuesday and Friday every week. The government has also announced concession in tickets for the passengers belonging to Zhob.

"Our government believes in practical work", Mitha Khan Kakar stated.

PIA had suspended its operations in 2018 to Zhob

PIA had suspended its operations in 2018 to Zhob for unknown reasons. Balochistan Livestock Minister, Mr. Kakar had held a series of meetings with high ups in Islamabad to make sure resumption of PIA flight operations to the area.

QUETTA VOICE
Editor Asim Khan

Rampant Road Accidents In Balochistan

Road accidents on national highways across Balochistan are common. Quetta-Karachi highway is called the 'killer highway' as 88 traffic accidents reported only from Winder district Lasbella during the last three days of Eid ul Fitr.

At least 264 people injured in 128 traffic accidents across Balochistan on the eve of Eid ul Fitr. The Medical Emergency Response Center (MERC) has responded to 128 traffic accidents across Balochistan on the eve of Eid ul Fitr.

This is alarming. Over-speeding, reckless driving coupled with narrow and poorly constructed roads continue to claim precious human lives on a daily basis. Balochistan chief minister, Jam Kamal Khan's announcement of installing speed limit meters in buses is laudable. Action needs to match his words.

The only installation of speed meters is not enough to curb rising accidents

Although the only installation of speed meters is certainly not enough to curb the rising number of road accidents on this deadly route (Quetta-Karachi), which continue to claim lives.

The province that covers half of the country in terms of the area has not a single kilometer motorway. The present coalition government has not been able to approve a single kilometer motorway project for Balochistan in the last three years.

MERC shifts 15,000 injured of road accidents to hospitals since October 2019

The Medical Emergency Response Center (MERC) has shifted over 15,000 injured of road accidents to hospitals across Balochistan since October 2019. Traffic accidents continue to claim precious human lives on a daily basis in various parts of Balochistan. Over-speeding, reckless driving, and poor conditions of roads/highways are the underlying reasons behind rampant road accidents.

78 percent of those injured in traffic accidents were bike riders

MERC data also revealed that 78 percent of those injured in road accidents were bike riders. "Since there is no custom of wearing a helmet that is why most of the riders suffered head injuries", Aziz Ahmed Jamali, the CEO of MERC revealed.

The establishment of MERC is a praiseworthy step. Its mandate is only to shift injured to hospitals to save human lives. However, the provincial government has to evolve a strategy to curb rising road accidents. Motorway police, traffic police, and levies force have to evolve a joint strategy with concerned district administrations to overcome this issue.

Soil is the solution

Volkan Bozkir

What do you think of when you hear the word "desertification"? Sand dunes slowly encroaching on bountiful farmland? The Sahara and Gobi taking over Africa and Asia? Rivers and streams drying up? That's certainly part of it. But the key impact of desertification is the degradation of land — to the point where soil becomes so damaged that it no longer supports life.

Soil is so much more than dirt. And healthy soil is essential to a healthy planet. The ground beneath our feet is teeming with a hidden world of plants, animals and microbes — many too tiny to see. But our survival depends on them. This overlooked reservoir feeds our agriculture and food industries. It helps to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and keeps plants, animals and humans strong.

But today, more than one-fifth of the planet's land — including more than half of our agricultural land — is suffering. Each year, more than 12 million hectares of land are lost to desertification, land degradation and drought. This loss hurts over three billion people, particularly poor and rural communities in the developing world. At the same time, when land is hastily converted to cropland, without considering the overall health of our environment, then carbon and nitrous oxide are released into the atmosphere. Climate change accelerates, biodiversity withers and infectious diseases blossom. This all jeopardises water supplies, livelihoods and our ability to face natural disasters and extreme weather events.

Unless we act now, it's only going to get worse. Over the next 25 years, land degradation could reduce global food productivity by as much as 12%, leading to a 30% increase in world food prices. We will never achieve the Sustainable Development Goals if we remain complacent.

But there is much to be hopeful about — and much that we can achieve together. As we have seen with the rapid development of Covid-19 vaccines, when the will is there and resources are deployed, humankind can achieve truly astounding feats.

Restoring 350 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 could take between 13 and 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. For every dollar spent on land restoration — including through low-skilled and labour-intensive projects — at least $9 of economic benefits can be expected. Restoring land not only generates green job opportunities across a wide range of industries — but will also enable us to grow more nutritious food, provide clean water security, address biodiversity loss, and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Whether we're talking about city dwellers, who need reliable supplies of fruits and vegetables, or island fishers, who count on protected beaches and swaying palm trees to draw in tourists, or hospital patients, whose lives depend on nature-derived medicines, one thing is clear. There is no person on earth — or for that matter any being — whose existence is not tied to land.

So, what can you do to help protect our land and soil? One simple step is not to waste food — because when farmers work the land to produce food we're not eating, that just exhausts our soil unnecessarily. And if you're an urbanite, you can work with your local officials to make your city greener — through such innovative methods as rooftop gardens and vertical forests.

Here at the United Nations, promoting land regeneration is a critical part of our work. In the coming months, major conferences to follow up on the three Rio Conventions — the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) — will all be held during the same year for the first time ever. This is a unique opportunity to reflect on the health of our planet — and on what we can do to improve it and protect our very existence.For my part, on May 20, I will host a high-level meeting on desertification, land degradation and drought, in the iconic United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York. This meeting — the first of its kind in more than a decade — will build on previous achievements, highlight gaps in our collective efforts and spur momentum towards the three big Rio-related conferences. It will remind us that land degradation is real and needs to be fought. It will show how three seemingly different issues — climate, biodiversity and desertification — are actually intrinsically linked. And it will drive up ambition for global action.

The General Assembly is the only body where all 193 member states of the United Nations sit as equals. So, there is no better place to tackle the problems that transcend borders and affect us all. When it comes to the very earth we stand on — the life-giving soil that sustains us — there is no time to waste. High-level conferences may not improve the situation overnight. But in making sure we're all on the same page, sharing best practices and taking real steps together, we can change course. Ultimately, we will reverse desertification, land degradation and drought because there is no other choice. But we will need to work together. We will need to change some of our practices. And I hope the United Nations can count on your support.

The PM on rape: the licence no one has

Nasim Zehra

This government's rape law mirrors the government's concern to battle the heinous crime of rape. However, the prime minister's recent statement linking the increase in rape to the rise of obscenity, vulgarity and indecency implies a complete lack of understanding of what encourages rape in a society. Hence his statement, like similar statements made in the past by others in authority, has been widely condemned and an apology has been demanded.

Was this reaction unjustified? In response to this question several inter-related observations, related to social dynamics, to authority and responsibility, to religion, to justice, to our own realities and history etc come to mind. The following may be noteworthy:

One, that words are really the drawing board and blueprint of what our subsequent outlook and actions are in our personal and our collective existence. Hence, the more powerful and consequential position one is in, the more one needs to be mindful of the words we utter. In fact even before what we say, the foundational aspect of our existence is what we think. People's thoughts are borne of several elements – ranging from family, friends, teachers, and now perhaps the biggest: social media and the internet. From thoughts we graduate to an outlook.

Our outlook in life is a combination of two elements – a weave that pulls our experiences together and the framework that interprets our experiences and designs the weave. The framework is defined by overlapping factors: believers get it from religion, others from ideologies and some just develop it on the basis of experiential wisdom; the bohemian's framework is just her/his own feelings and sentiments. So, there's a whole lot of diversity in how we look at life, how we think, how we speak and how we act.

If you are in a position of authority, the spoken word is of huge consequence. It begins from you influencing those who look up to you or support you, who report to you, those over whom you exercise authority. Your outlook influences policy choices and, above all, is a message to society and to policymakers. So there is no getting away from how critical the spoken word is and how much thought must go into it. Our Beloved Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) life, his words, his acute sensitivity to those, his family, his Companions, his enemies and all those around him, testify to the significance of the spoken word.

It is no surprise therefore that for the believers, if you turn to the Quran it is constantly reiterating Allah's Command to think and to speak with great care lest we damage and hurt those who are affected by our words. The Holy Quran and the Prophet's (pbuh) teachings give no licence to people in authority to speak at will, or even out of deep concern, without clearly factoring in the complex realities of their context and without being mindful of the consequences of the spoken word for individuals and for collective society. A mind appreciative of the complexity of the human soul, and of society and its management, can appreciate the power of the spoken word. The Holy Quran, alongside the study of the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) life, is the first Grand Induction of the human soul and mind into fully appreciating this reality.

Three, following from this Grand Induction, especially those with authority who aspire like our prime minister to work for a state that is like the Riyasat-e-Madina, the discipline of weighing spoken words for integrity, logic and impact is a must. Words reach out to the core of human existence, the human soul, which directs human mind and action. Passion and good intentions cannot justify loosely spoken words.

The prime minister's comment about increasing vulgarity leading to an increase in rape perhaps points to a general fact that human behaviour is influenced by multiple factors. However, whatever the multiple factors may be, the key question in this case that ought to be raised by the PM is about the identity and the responsibility of the perpetrator of such a beastly crime. In the context of those speaking from the position of authority – policymakers, politicians and those responsible for creating the collective deterrent against rape – it is important to not confuse or dilute the issue by identifying a broad spectrum of factors that contribute to rape. Instead, the culprit has to be identified, and assigned complete agency and responsibility for the crime.

This leads us to the absolute need for Prime Minister Imran Khan to clearly state that the criminal in this case is the man who committed the crime of rape and not articulate any statement that would deflect from the criminal's total responsibility. It is important to note that it is this government that has come up with a tough law which clearly puts the onus of rape on the rapist. This again takes us to the more fundamental question of the spoken word and the need for those in authority to speak with great care so as not to send mixed signals.

On the question of the responsibility of the rapist and what impacts the behaviour of the rapist, it is instructive to turn to what Islam has emphasised, through the text of the Holy Quran and the teaching and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On numerous occasions, including in the Prophet Muhammad 's Last Sermon, it was repeatedly emphasised that men must also be of a model character to ensure justice and equality in society.

Of course, character for both men and women – all individuals – in society has been emphasised in the Quran but in the case of men it's centrality was critical given the vitiating anti-women customs – including female infanticide – pre-Islam Arabia was saddled with.

The reality of rape, as the PM himself recalled not too long ago, takes place also within the four walls of the home, sadly by family members and others who have access to women and children. There is enough documentation to establish that the crime of rape is also a function largely of the male view of his own power and of the view he has of women. It is that which needs to be addressed, to be tackled – a fact that our Beloved Prophet (pbuh) repeatedly appreciated through his words and actions. In all mention of rape in public space by people in position of authority this factor must be emphasized and must be integral.

Wild Tulips And Barren Beauty Of Balochistan

Aziz Ahmed Jamali

Loving nature is a matter of preference and passion; it's totally a personal choice as to where one seeks or finds solace. I prefer the natural environment and Wilderness overall. And for cogent reasons; it's the most economical yet rewarding preference.

Traveling to Wilderness and walk(s) into nature helps us look at the busy life from a distant, neutral perspective. Far from the maddening crowds, nature embraces us without asking for money. "Come live in my heart and pay no rent".

Nature opens greater vistas

As we add adventure into travel, nature opens greater vistas (luck favors the brave). we get to see flora and fauna of the most unique type. In Balochistan, it's the bed of wild tulips, iris, and more in the spring. As we ascend to altitude, urban areas and related problems appear to be small. Tired after the venture(s), one tends to have sweet sleep.

Interaction with animals and insects helps us realize how important it is to conserve wildlife. Fresh air convince us to protect jungles to maintain the supply of oxygen. "Leave nothing except footprints and take nothing except photographs" should be the core principle of Interaction with nature. Rather we should try to keep clean and green premises in houses, offices, and vicinity where we reside.

Geographical varieties offer the true barren beauty of Balochistan

Beaches of Balochistan and other geographical varieties offer the true barren beauty of the province; it is rich and can make us rich if we have the 'seeing eye'. There exist people in this world who still see patterns in natural features, who appreciate the music of the flowing waters or otherwise, who find fragrance in the floral ambiance around and seek serenity in the simpler lifestyle of nomads and rural folk.

A view of Quetta city. Photo provided by Aziz Ahmed Jamali

Nature lovers add significantly to the treasure bank of experiences on this Earth

They find no harm in disengaging from the hustle-bustle of urban life, for a however long or short duration, and reconnect after interactions with nature. When they bring images and stories from the Wilderness, the readers or viewers can relate and appreciate the same as part of human evolution. Nature lovers add significantly to the treasure bank of experiences on this Earth.

The author is a senior bureaucrat and currently serving as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) PPHI Balochistan

HEC: draining the swamp Part - I

Dr Tariq Banuri

On April 2, Dr Atta-ur-Rahman, a former chairman of the HEC (2002-2008) and a contender for the position again, after the unfortunate ordinance aimed at cutting my term prematurely, wrote in this newspaper to criticize the HEC's record of performance under my tenure.

Quite clearly, he is trying to divert attention from his recent attempts to escape accountability. Nevertheless, since the issues have been raised publicly, they need a public response. Rahman applies a number of derogatory terms to describe the agency under my stewardship, including "destruction", "lost its way", and "slow down", and compares it unfavourably to his six-year tenure.

This raises a major question. It is now 19 years since Atta-ur-Rahman became HEC chair, and 13 years since he stepped down. This is enough time for the impacts of his actions to become evident. If he had done some good work, as he claims, the quality of education and research should have improved dramatically. The reality is quite the opposite. The value of Pakistani degrees has deteriorated.

The only places that show some improvement in the quality of education or research are those over which the HEC has had little to no influence – for example: the best non-profit universities (LUMS, AKU, Habib, GIKI, etc), the universities established by the armed forces, and engineering and medical programs, which are regulated by other councils.

The reason is the patronage-based system established at the HEC under Rahman's initial years. It is this system and its various manifestations that I had set out to dismantle. All the points raised by Rahman and others in these pages are attempts to defend this patronage-based system. The HEC today is merely trying to clean up the mess of 15 years of unaccounted and unaccountable spending.

Take the case of the foreign faculty hiring programme. Launched with much fanfare, its ostensible purpose was to offer high salaries ($60,000 per year or more) to attract foreign scholars to Pakistani universities. In practice, it suffered from serious flaws of conflict of interest and unintended policy consequences. By some accounts, it was a vehicle for patronage and corruption.

Yet, the HEC has never tried to do an accounting or assessment of whether the programme worked, what outcomes it produced, directly or indirectly by the scientists who visited or those with whom they worked.

There was little thinking behind what kind of people it would likely attract. While a few good scholars did indeed take advantage of it, the vast majority did not have the requisite quality. Many were expatriate Pakistanis looking for jobs anywhere. Others were unknown commodities from nondescript universities. Indeed, a number of the most reputed universities consistently refused to take the HEC's the whistle-blower report, the director recruited tens of former Eastern European mathematicians – most of whom only showed up a few times, temporarily or never at all. Some drew their high salaries, while others claimed that their salaries had been pocketed by programme staff.

To this day, the universities are unable to say in concrete terms how they benefited from the presence of expensive (and often invisible) foreign scholars – whether they were able to make a research breakthrough, attract additional research funding, improve the quality of the syllabus, provide training to faculty members, or anything else that matters to a university's quality or reputation.

Bottom line: with some exceptions, it was a program designed to favour preferred individuals; it involved a waste of public money, and had little to no quantifiable impact. The best course is to let the universities do their own hiring.

Rahman also claims that his "successful initiative" of providing scholarships to students for PhD abroad was curtailed by me. He claims that he sent 11,000 students abroad during his six-year tenure, while I have failed to utilize money allocated for the purpose. All of these claims are false.First, the data. According to the HEC Vision 2025 document, published in 2017, the total number of PhD scholarships awarded by the HEC in the entire period since its founding was 8,131. Compared to this, about 1,400 students are enrolled in HEC-funded PhD programs today (in addition to over 500 in other programs). In fact, more HEC scholars are enrolled in foreign universities today than at any other time in history. To say that the program has been curtailed is completely untrue.But to return to the earlier question: why has the quality of education and research in the country deteriorated instead of improving despite the generous scholarships? The simple answer is that if all scholarships had been awarded merit, they could have produced the desired impact. But if half or more were awarded on the basis of patronage or favouritism, they could only deepen the malaise of poor quality.

The past selection procedure was highly suspect. A diplomat from a European country complained to me about the reported lack of preparation of Pakistani PhD students. A Dutch professor confided that the leading universities from his country – Delft, Leiden, Eindhoven, Twente – were so utterly unimpressed with the quality of 'HEC scholars' that they had decided not to offer admissions to them. In fact, they raised the bar also for non-HEC students. This created a bad impression of Pakistani students and created an opportunity for students from other countries – India, Iran and Brazil.

This patronage-based system has now been replaced with a merit-based one. Students are encouraged to apply directly to top universities. The HEC has tried to ensure that the selected students are of a significantly higher quality, and that they are placed at better universities at a lower cost.

Crippling energy crisis

Haroon Rashid Siddiqi

Crippled with an overwhelming energy crisis, Pakistan is increasing its dependence on oil and gas, especially on imported LNG.The circular debt, currently standing at a colossal Rs2.3 trillion, is all set to cross Rs2.6 trillion by the end of the ongoing fiscal year. Reportedly, Rs1 trillion is owed by Sui Southern Gas Company Ltd (SSGCL) and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd (SNGPL) to Oil & Gas Development Company Ltd (OGDCL) and Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL) which are the mainstay of oil and gas exploration and production in Pakistan. This cheap indigenous source of energy is almost half the price of imported LNG the use of which is increasing in Pakistan. This is placing a heavy financial burden on our limited foreign exchange reserves and holding back OGDCL and PPL from investing in new areas as their revenues are stuck in the vicious circular debt. In the wake of depleting oil and gas reserves, no fresh investment in exploratory activities is alarming and does not augur well for the country.

New discoveries in the country are planned in inhospitable areas, requiring extra outlays on security and logistics. The offshore option is further challenging and capital-intensive. Keeping OGDCL cash starved by Rs600 billion and PPL by Rs400 billion is in fact marginalising the local exploratory activities that will cause an irreversible damage of humongous proportion in the long run. Moreover, a comprehensive petroleum policy encompassing present day requirements is needed to attract foreign investors. The fact is that most foreign oil and gas exploration and production companies have left Pakistan in the last decade or so which is reflective of something rotten in our petroleum policies and regulatory regime.

As the light at the end of the tunnel is rapidly fading, we must find urgent solutions to rescue ourselves from the looming disaster. There is no talisman to achieve an overnight transformation but some doable options are available to set the energy policy right. Once properly formulated and implemented, any government in power should own it like the nuclear programme. Pakistan has miserably failed in utilising its huge coal reserves as Dr Samar Mubarakmand has wasted both time and money without achieving gasification from Thar coal reserves. We, therefore, need to collaborate with reputable multinational companies to meet this objective befittingly. There is also a pressing need for increasing the share of cheaper energy sources like hydel, biomass, solar and wind in our energy mix which is heavily tilted towards imported fuels. The perennial issue of circular debt must be addressed from its root cause. The electricity theft and line losses are main factors. A political will and writ of the government are required in bringing a paradigm shift towards increasing efficiency, reducing the magnitude of theft/corruption and making electricity affordable for the masses. Similarly, the use of hybrid/electric vehicles and other fuel-efficient equipment and appliances including solar street lights and similar applications must be encouraged. The Directorate General of Petroleum Concessions being a regulatory government institution must be staffed by competent people and revamped as a regulatory body.

All state-owned enterprises in the power and petroleum sectors must hire highly qualified professionals based on merit. Likewise, their board of directors should comprise the best independent industry brains free of political and bureaucratic interference. Furthermore, the retirement age of these professionals needs to be extended beyond 60 years because this is when they are full of experience.

LHC removes objection over Shehbaz's plea against govt for stopping him to travel abroad

LAHORE: Lahore High Court (LHC) on Tuesday removed objection over Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president and opposition leader in National Assembly (NA) Shehbaz Sharif's plea against the federal government for not allowing him to travel abroad.

During the hearing, LHC judge Justice Ali Baqir Najfi remarked that the PML-N leader was allowed to travel abroad for only one time. Shehbaz Sharif's lawyer Azam Nazeer expressed concerns over federation's move to stop his client at airport and termed it as disappointing.

The counsel told that Shehbaz Sharif wants to go abroad for medical checkup. The system will be disturbed if the government continues to treat judicial order in this way, he added.

Earlier, federal government had filed a plea in Supreme Court to challenge the LHC order allowing Shehbaz Sharif to travel abroad and argued that how the honorable judge of the LHC could allow abroad travel without issuing notices to concerned departments.

The petition asked the apex court to suspend the LHC order of May 07 and allow the government to appeal against the decision.Later, Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid also announced that the name of PML-N president was included in Exit Control List (ECL). National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had recommended to put Shehbaz Sharif's name on the ECL as it was investigating a corruption case of seven billion rupees against him.INP

LAHORE: Opposition Leader in Provincial Assembly of Punjab Mian Hamza Shahbaz Sharif leaving after his hearing at Accountability Court in Provincial.

28 passengers from Bahrain test positive for COVID-19 at Peshawar airport

PESHAWAR: As many as twenty-eight passengers from Bahrain tested positive for COVID-19 at the Bacha Khan International Airport on Tuesday.

The airport's Chief Operating Officer (COO) said rapid antigen tests were conducted on 130 passengers who arrived at the Peshawar airport from Bahrain.

The passengers who tested positive for the virus have been handed over to the district administration.

The development is a worrying one as Pakistan, like many countries around the world, continues to grapple with the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.On Monday the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) slapped a fine over a private airline for bringing passengers from Sharjah to Peshawar on fake negative COVID-19 reports.

According to the notification, a private airline had been warned and fined by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) over bringing passengers from Sharjah to Peshawar on May 10 and 17. The action against the airline has been taken under Civil Aviation Rules 1994.

The private airline brought 27 COVID positive patients to Peshawar on May 17 and 24 on May 10 from Sharjah.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) also warned that any further violation shall entail more stringent penal action. The development is a worrying one as Pakistan, like many countries around the world, continues to grapple with the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

On Monday the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) slapped a fine over a private airline for bringing passengers from Sharjah to Peshawar on fake negative COVID-19 reports.

According to the notification, a private airline had been warned and fined by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) over bringing passengers from Sharjah to Peshawar on May 10 and 17. The action against the airline has been taken under Civil Aviation Rules 1994.

The private airline brought 27 COVID positive patients to Peshawar on May 10 and 17 and 24 on May 10 from Sharjah.INP

Vocational training and skilled labor, key factors for CPEC growth

ISLAMABAD: Setting up more vocational institutions and training of skilled labor force in Pakistan is the key factor for the growth of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro.

The report quoting Amir Ali, a Pakistani scholar on CPEC stated, to get the most benefit out of CPEC and for placing Pakistan in a leading position on the road of economic development, labor in Pakistan must be expert in their specific fields and should be educated about their moral duties.

"From technical education we can have more skilled labor, labor in Pakistan is much cheaper than in China which can greatly benefit the Chinese industries moving to Pakistan. Industrialization in Phase II of CPEC can largely benefit Pakistan's economy if the labor is well trained," he said.

Ali highlighted that countries like China and Japan are great examples that prepared ground and completed all infrastructure before attracting investors. They provided switch to start industry, and this example needs to be followed in Pakistan as well.

He estimated that the total investment in Pakistan under CPEC would reach $1,000 billion, which includes projects of Phase I, Phase II and Gwadar. All the three phases of CPEC are expected to be completed by 2030.

It is evident that labor is power that acts as fuel for production. No one can deny the importance of skilled labor at CPEC projects.

In the development of CPEC, adequate quality and skilled labor force is a big challenge to achieve high degree of excellence and in-time completion of the projects.

In order to understand the exact human resource demand and supply of the CPEC industry, we need to establish strong linkages and relationship with Chinese industry and academia, more specifically, vocational and technical training institutes.

According to the government's annual plan 2020-21, Pakistan has the 9th largest labor force in the world,which is increasing every year. The number of employed workers will reach 62.91m in 2020-21 from 62.18m in 2019-20.

As per the Labor Force Survey 2017-18, unemployment rate for 2020-21 has been estimated at 9.56 percent.

The annual plan, according to the government, focuses on creating gainful employment opportunities under the broader framework of the government plans for economic growth and reforms. It also suggests COVID-19 responsive measures to protect workers and their jobs.It is evident that labor is power that acts as fuel for production. No one can deny the importance of skilled labor at CPEC projects.

In the development of CPEC, adequate quality and skilled labor force is a big challenge to achieve high degree of excellence and in-time completion of the projects.

In order to understand the exact human resource demand and supply of the CPEC industry, we need to establish strong linkages and relationship with Chinese industry and academia, more specifically, vocational and technical training institutes.

According to the government's annual plan 2020-21, Pakistan has the 9th largest labor force in the world,which is increasing every year. The number of employed workers will reach 62.91m in 2020-21 from 62.18m in 2019-20.INP

Fawad Chauhdry says no cabinet member involved in Rawalpindi Ring Road scam

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information Fawad Hussain on Tuesday made some revelations about the Rawalpindi Ring Road (R3) scandal and said that Prime Minister Imran Khan had asked to probe the matter after an engineer wrote a letter to him, saying that the alignment of the road had been changed.

The minister in a series of tweets said, after an investigation was launched into the matter, it was revealed that not only the alignment of the road was changed but it had been expanded towards Attock by 29 kilometres, Fawad said.

"The reason for expanding the road was to benefit several housing societies," said Fawad.

Regarding the alleged involvement of Special Assistant to the PM on Overseas Pakistanis Zulfi Bukhari and Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan in influencing the officials to change the design of the project, Fawad said that so far, there is no evidence of the involvement of any minister or adviser in the Rawalpindi Ring Road (R3) project.

He added that Bukhari had tendered his resignation on moral grounds. Both the government functionaries have rejected the accusations, saying they have been "wrongly dragged into the matter."All citizens are equal in the eyes of law. Now there will be investigations into all allegations whether these are against opposition leaders, cabinet members, the bureaucracy or any institution," he said."The reason for expanding the road was to benefit several housing societies," said Fawad.Regarding the alleged involvement of Special Assistant to the PM on Overseas Pakistanis Zulfi Bukhari and Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan in influencing the officials to change the design of the project, Fawad said that so far, there is no evidence of the involvement of any minister or adviser in the Rawalpindi.INP

Justice Raja Saeed Akram takes oath as AJK CJ

MUZAFFARABAD: Justice Raja Saeed Akram Khan on Tuesday took oath as Chief Justice of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan administered oath to the new Chief Justice at a ceremony held at the President House in Muzaffarabad.

AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan, members of the state cabinet, Acting Chief Justice of High Court, Justice Sadaqat Hussain Raja, Deputy Attorney General for Pakistan, Raja Khalid Mehmood Khan, senior officials of the AJK government, and the members of the legal fraternity attended the oath-taking ceremony.Members of the Bar Councils of Muzaffarabad, Hattian, Bagh, and Neelum and former chief justice Azad Jammu and Kashmir Chaudhry Ibrahim Zia also attended the ceremony.

Born in Lala Musa on March 10, 1962, Justice Saeed Akram completed graduation and LLB from the Punjab University. He was appointed as Assistant Advocate General Punjab in 1995 and elevated as Judge Islamabad High Court in 2009. He also served as Special Prosecutor Anti-Narcotics Force at Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2010, and Special Public Prosecutor of the Government of Punjab.

Justice Raja Saeed Akram was appointed Chairman AJK Accountability Bureau in 2010, and judge of the AJK Supreme Court in 2011. INP

Remittances grow by 29pc to record $24.2 bln in 10 months

ISLAMABAD: The workers' remittances surpassed previous records, reaching to $24.2 billion during the first ten months of the current fiscal year, showing growth of 29 percent over the same period last year.

The remittance during July-April (2020-21) also crossed the total remittances of the last fiscal year (2019-20) by over $1 billion, according to latest data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

During the month of April 2021, the workers' remittances rose to an all-time monthly high of $2.8 billion, 56 percent higher than the remittances of the same month last year.The remittance inflows during July-April (FY2020-21) were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia ($6.4 billion), United Arab Emirates ($5.1 billion), United Kingdom ($3.3 billion) and the United States ($2.2 billion).

Proactive policy measures by the government and SBP to encourage more inflows through formal channels, curtailed cross border travel in the face of COVID-19, altruistic.INP

LAHORE: President Pakistan Muslim League (N) Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif leaving after his hearing at Accountability Court in Provincial Capital.

Nawaz Sharif's properties can't be auctioned off, petitioners say

ISLAMABAD: Three men have filed different petitions in the Islamabad High Court challenging the auction of former PM Nawaz Sharif's properties on May 20.

The government has decided to auction off Nawaz's properties in Sheikhupura, Raiwind, and Lahore on Thursday as he remains absconding in the Toshakhana reference.

A man identified as Ashraf Malik claimed that he bought the land in Sheikhupura from Nawaz for Rs75 million. The deal, however, could not be completed due to some complications.

Aslam Aziz, on the other hand, said that he invested in orchards in Raiwind. He said that he planted trees of oranges, java plum, and guava there.

Nawaz's house in Lahore's Upper Mall is reportedly owned by Mian Iqbal.All three men have requested the court to declare the decision to auction off their properties null and void.INP

ISLAMABAD: Secretary General Pakistan Muslim League (N) Ahsan Iqbal addressing a press conference in Federal Capital.

Cyclone Tauktae: Extremely hot, dry weather continues to hit Karachi

KARACHI: Extremely hot and dry weather will continue in Karachi, Hyderabad, Shaeed-Banzirabad, Badin and Mirpurkhas districts in next 24 hours due to the cyclonic storm "Tauktae".

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PDM) on Tuesday forecast, "The very severe cyclonic storm Tauktae after intensifying into an Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm crossed Indian Gujarat last night, weakened into a Severe Cyclonic Storm laying over Rajasthan, India."

A few dust/thunderstorm-rain accompanied with gusty winds of 30-50 Kmph may occur in Tharparker and Umerkot districts during next 12 hours.Sea Conditions will remain rough till today evening and fishermen of Sindh are advised to avoid going into deep sea. They can resume their activities from tomorrow (May 19). This is the final alert in this regard, the met office informed.

On the other hand, a major cyclone packing ferocious winds and threatening a destructive storm made landfall in western India, disrupting the country's response to its devastating Covid-19 outbreak.

At least 12 people died over the weekend and on Monday in torrential rains and winds as Cyclone Tauktae, according to press reports the biggest to hit western India in 30 years, swept over the Arabian Sea with Gujarat state in its sights.

The cyclonic system has been packing winds of 155-165 kilometres per hour (95-100 miles per hour) gusting up to 185 kmph, the Indian Meteorological Department tweeted.

In waterlogged and windswept Mumbai, where authorities on Monday closed the airport and urged people to stay indoors, authorities shifted 580 Covid patients "to safer locations" from three field hospitals.

Six people died and nine were injured as the storm lashed Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital, the chief minister's office said. On the other hand, a major cyclone packing ferocious winds and threatening a destructive storm made landfall in western India, disrupting the country's response to its devastating Covid-19 outbreak.

At least 12 people died over the weekend and on Monday in torrential rains and winds as Cyclone Tauktae, according to press reports the biggest to hit western India in 30 years, swept over the Arabian Sea with Gujarat state in its sights.

The cyclonic system has been packing winds of 155-165 kilometres.INP

Pakistan, Turkey condemn Israeli aggression against

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Turkey on Tuesday strongly condemned the Israeli aggression against unarmed Palestinians and their forced eviction from their homes.

This came at a meeting between Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara on Tuesday.

The two foreign ministers also decided to jointly raise voice against the Israeli persecution of Palestinians.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi said we will not leave alone our Palestinian brothers.He said the entire Muslim community is in a state of pain due to the Israeli bombardment and the violence against Palestinians during Ramadan-ul-Mubarak and Eidul Fitr.

The minister said on the direction of Prime Minister Imran Khan, we are observing a day of solidarity with our Palestinian brothers on Friday.

The Turkish Foreign Minister appreciated Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi s address at the OIC s Executive Committee at the level of Foreign Ministers and Pakistan s continuous and robust support to the oppressed Palestinians.INP

Man remanded for allegedly raping minor Christian girl in Karachi

A court in Karachi on Tuesday remanded in judicial custody a man detained for allegedly raping a minor Christian girl.

Police had arrested and booked the Muslim suspect for allegedly sexually assaulting his 10-year-old neighbour in the city's Essa Nagri area on May 4.

On Tuesday, the investigating officer (IO) produced the suspect before the judicial magistrate (East) upon expiry of his physical remand in police custody and requested an extension in the same for interrogation.

The IO informed the magistrate that the suspect was a neighbour of the victim, adding that the victim used to visit his house for taking tuition classes from his sister.

On the day of the incident, the suspect allegedly subjected the minor girl to sexual assault when she came to his house to study, he said.

The IO said an extension in the suspect's custody was required for interrogation and completion of investigation and other legal formalities.However, the judge remanded the suspect in judicial custody, directing the IO to produce him on the next date along with an investigation report.

After the incident, the victim's relatives and neighbours had surrounded the suspect's house but he had apparently managed to flee to avoid the wrath of the charged mob.

This had infuriated the protesters, who had turned violent and blocked the main road for vehicular movement. Some four policemen were reportedly injured during the protest.

Later, the suspect was arrested and booked in a case registered at the PIB Police Station.

As many as 2,960 major crimes against children were reported in the four provinces, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) in 2020.

According to data released by the NGO Sahil, eight children were abused every day in Pakistan in one form or the other, while 51 per cent of the victims were girls and 49pc boys.Out of the reported cases, 985 were of sodomy, 787 rape, 89 pornography and child sexual abuse and 80 were of murder after sexual abuse. Cases of abduction, missing children and child marriages were 834, 345 and 119, respectively.Web Desk

No shortage of Sinopharm vaccine: Dr Faisal Sultan

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Faisal Sultan dismissed on Tuesday reports regarding the shortage of the Sinopharm vaccine.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, the prime minister's aide said reports about the non-availability of Sinopharm vaccine were "baseless" and assured that it was the health authorities' priority to administer the vaccine's second dose to persons who had received a Sinopharm shot the first time.

However, he explained, since the Sinopharm vaccine may be reserved for second doses in case of a shortage, those visiting a vaccination centre for their first dose may be administered another vaccine.

"The priority will always be that a person is administered both the doses of the same vaccine," Dr Sultan said, adding that significant measures had been taken for the purpose.

He also rejected reports regarding the side effects of the AstraZeneca vaccine, terming them "misinformation" and "misleading".

"The vaccine is in use in a number of countries in Europe and outside it," he said, giving the example of Australia, Ireland and South Korea, among others.

Dr Sultan added that there were very few side effects of the AstraZeneca vaccine and cases of clotting due to it were a rare occurrence.

Even then, to further reduce the chances of clotting because of the vaccine, it would be administered only to persons above the age of 40, the prime minister's aide said.

He further stated that the number of cases of vaccine side effects had been "negligible" — just 4,329 against 3.8 million doses administered thus far in Pakistan.

And almost all of these side effects have been "mild and expected," he said, adding that 90 per cent of the cases pertained to pain at the site of injection and fever.

He said six of the cases, which seemed serious, had been investigated and all were found to be coincidental and not caused by Covid-19 vaccines.

Dr Sultan had also shared this information on Twitter earlier in the day.He urged people to get vaccinated and assured that the government would continue to procure Covid-19 vaccine doses so that the vaccination process continued unhampered.

"The more people are vaccinated, the higher will be the chances of life returning back to normal."The prime minister's aide also appealed to citizens to follow coronavirus-related standard operating procedures and share information only from trusted and authentic sources, such as the National Command and Operation Centre's (NCOC's) website, the health ministry's website and verified social media accounts.The NCOC on Tuesday said that as many as 964,227 people have been fully vaccinated in Pakistan.INP

ISLAMABAD: Minister of state and Parliamentary Secretary of Religious Affairs Aftab Jehangir, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Pakistan, Ahmed Ameen Rabei along with others pose for a group photo after meeting at Embassy of Palestine.

4 killed as dust storm, rain hit parts of Karachi after severe heat spell

At least four people were killed in roof collapse incidents after a dust storm followed by light rain hit parts of Karachi on Tuesday evening, after the city remained in the grips of a severe heat spell for two days. The gusty winds could be seen flying objects around as the dark clouds covered parts of the city.

Soon after the weather conditions changed, residents in some areas reported power outages.

The districts in lower Sindh including Karachi have been under the influence of cyclonic storm Tauktae, and on Monday the mercury rose to 43.5 degrees Celsius in Karachi.

Sardar Sarfaraz of the Met department told Dawn.com that the dust storm was caused due to the influence of the cyclone system being in southern Pakistan's vicinity combined with local weather conditions. He said Karachi could experience gusty winds again until the cyclone system is out of the region. Sarfaraz noted that the city's temperature had fallen by 7-8 degrees soon after the dust storm, saying it was likely to drop further as the weather normalises. The official had earlier told Dawn that the storm had started dissipating and weather in lower Sindh would improve by Wednesday as the sea breeze blocked by the storm would resume.

The strong winds caused roofs to collapse in several areas, killing a man and a woman in Dabba Colony, a nine-year-old child in Shershah, and a man in Baldia No. 14, according to a Karachi Police statement. Meanwhile, traffic was moving slowly in a Nazimabad area after a tree fell down on a road. Traffic coming from Habib Bank towards Nazimabad was diverted to the flyover.In an alert on Tuesday, the Pakistan Meteorological Department said Tauktae, after intensifying into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", had crossed Gujarat in India last night and weakened into a severe cyclonic storm laying over Rajasthan, India.

"A few dust/thunderstorm-rain [spells] accompanied with gusty winds of 30-50km/h may occur in Tharparkar and Umerkot districts during next 12 hours," the advisory said, adding that hot and dry weather will continue on Tuesday (today) in Karachi, Hyderabad, Shaheed Benazirabad, Badin and Mirpurkhas districts. According to the alert, sea conditions will remain rough till Tuesday evening and fishermen of Sindh are advised to avoid going into deep sea. "They can resume their activities from tomorrow," it said.

In India, at least 24 people were killed and almost 100 went missing after Cyclone Tauktae slammed into its western parts on Monday evening, compounding the country's woes as it battles a devastating coronavirus surge.Web Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology Shibli Faraz addressing the24th Annual Session of the United Nations Commission on Science & Technology for Development.

Cabinet gives nod to send aid to Palestine

ISLAMABAD: Federal cabinet on Tuesday approved sending medical aid to Palestine on humanitarian grounds in view of the medical emergency faced by the Palestinians as a result of Israeli aggression.

A meeting of the Federal Cabinet on Tuesday chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan reviewed 14-point agenda. The political and economic situation of the country and the latest situation in Palestine were also discussed in the meeting.

The prime minister briefed the Cabinet on his discussions with world leaders on this important issue.

The federal cabinet also ratified the decisions of the ECC meeting. The ECC had approved the payment of 40% dues to IPPs. In addition, approval was given in principle to exempt Kartarpur Corridor project from PAPRA rules.

According to sources, the cabinet also approved to take four UN vehicles to Kabul via Pakistan. It was also decided to issue a commemorative coin on the completion of 70 years of Pak-China diplomatic relations.

The Cabinet also approved the issuance of SROs relating to the jurisdiction of the Railway Police, submission of the annual report of the Election Commission in Parliament, and issuance of passenger and cargo licenses to private airlines.

Approval for appointment of Chief Executive of Pakistan Housing Authority Foundation, appointment of members of Electronic Certification Accreditation Council and appointment of Community Welfare Attach in Pakistani missions abroad was also postponed during the meeting.Later, briefing the media about the decisions taken in the cabinet meeting, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry said PM Imran Khan has provided leadership to the Muslim Ummah from day one on the Palestine issue. This is also recognized by the Muslim Ummah. He said Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah laid the foundation of Pakistan s policy on Palestine and Imran Khan is now trustee of it.

The Information Minister said the Palestinian leadership also acknowledges Pakistan s firm stance on the matter, adding that the nation will observe solidarity day with the Palestinians on Friday.

He said Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi is in Turkey and he along with some other Foreign Ministers of the Muslim countries will go to New York to attend the UN General Assembly session.

Chaudhary went on to say that the cabinet was also briefed about investigation into Rawalpindi Ring Road project. He said the preliminary investigation reveals that the alignment of the project was changed to benefit some housing societies.

However, he said, the investigation carried out so far shows that no minister or advisor is involved in it. He said Zulfi Bukhari resigned as Special Assistant on Overseas Pakistanis on high moral ground and he has no link with the issue. He said Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan also does not own any land in the area.

Referring to electoral reforms, the Information Minister said the government is committed to introduce electronic voting machines to ensure transparency in elections and give right of vote to overseas Pakistanis. He regretted that the opposition is not serious in electoral reforms and the PML-N and the PPP have not made their position clear on the right to franchise to overseas Pakistanis.INP

Israeli attacks blatant human rights violation: CM

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar termed the continuous Israeli attacks on Palestine as a blatant violation of all human rights.

In a statement, he said Israelis' hands were drenched with the blood of innocent Palestinians. Israel would continue to indulge in similar brutalities if it was not stopped today, he stressed.

The continuous silence of the international community, over the situation in Palestine, was a big question mark, he said.

The defenceless Palestinians had an equal right to live, he added. While the silence of the international community was resulting in human tragedy, the CM said and added that the people and the government of Pakistan had full sympathies towards Palestinians.

It was incumbent upon the international community to immediately react to stop brutalities against the unarmed Palestinians, asserted the CM.INP

Sindh task force on COVID-19 endorses latest decisions taken by NCOC

KARACHI :Sindh Chief Minister (CM) Syed Murad Ali Shah while presiding over a meeting of Provincial Task Force on Coronavirus at CM House endorsed the decision taken by National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) in respect of relaxation in certain specific Non-pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) notified on May 15, 2021.

"We will review the decision keeping in view the impact of COVID-19 in the post Eid scenario on Thursday and may take strict decisions if the standard operational procedures (SOPs) are followed or a spike in the cases is reported," the CM said.

The meeting was attended by provincial ministers, Dr Azra Pechuho, Saeed Ghani, Nasir Shah, Advisor Law Murtaza Wahab, IG Police Mushtaq Maher, ACS Home Usman Chachar, Commissioner Karachi Naveed Shaikh, Addl IG Karachi Imran Minhas, Secretary Finance Hassan Naqvi, Secretary School Education Ahmed Bux Narejo, Secretary Health Kazim Jatoi, Dr Bari, Dr Faisal, Dr Sajjad Qaiser, representatives of Corps 5, Rangers and WHO.

At the outset of the meeting, the task force endorsed relaxation in certain specific NPIs announced by the NCOC on May 15, 2021; however, it was decided that the forum would again review its decision next Thursday by evaluating the impact of the virus in the post Eid scenario. "If the SOPs are not followed in true letter and spirit, the government would take strict action and may withdraw the relaxation given to the NPIs," the chief minister warned.

Secretary Health Kazim Jatoi while briefing the meeting said that during the last one week, May 10 to 16, 2021, Karachi East had shown 26 percent COVID cases, South 17 percent, Central 14 percent, Sukkur 12 percent, Hyderabad and Karachi-Malir 11 percent each, Korangi 10 percent, Dadu nine percent, Karachi-West eight percent, Thatta seven percent, Badin, Ghotki, Naushehroferoze and Shaheed Benazirabad five percent each.

At this the chief minister said that it was not a good situation. "We have to save our valuable lives by taking necessary measures," he said and added it would be possible when people would follow SOPs and get themselves vaccinated.INP

Board exams to take place under all circumstances: NCOC

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) on Tuesday decided that board examinations will be held across the country under all circumstances. It has also been proposed that in the first phase, classes of grade ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth should be started.

According to details, an important meeting of the NCOC was held to review the closure of educational institutions across the country, in which the officials of the Ministry of Health gave a briefing on the pandemic's situation.Sources said that the meeting agreed in principle to let the inter-provincial education ministers' conference take the decision regarding opening of educational institutions.Online

Sindh govt launches grand operation against water mafia in Karachi

KARACHI: A grand operation has been launched against the water mafia in Karachi by the Sindh government.

As per details, Sindh Local Government Minister Nasir Hussain Shah said that the operation was being carried out on the special orders of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

The mafia steals millions of gallons of water from the people and selling it to industries, he added. Shah said that the water supplied to the people of Lyari was also being sold by the mafia.The minister said that a heavy contingent of Police, SSU and Rangers was present at the site of the operation. The purpose of the operation was to deliver water to the people.

Nasir Hussain Shah further said that the people will be given their due right of water soon.

It should be noted that due to water theft in Karachi, the masses in several parts of the port-city are compelled to buy water.As per details, Sindh Local Government Minister Nasir Hussain Shah said that the operation was being carried out on the special orders of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

The mafia steals millions of gallons of water from the people and selling it to industries, he added. Shah said that the water supplied to the people of Lyari was also being sold by the mafia.

The minister said that a heavy contingent of Police, SSU and Rangers was present at the site of the operation. The purpose of the operation was to deliver water to the people.INP

Sindh decides to launch drive-through vaccination campaign

KARACHI: The Sindh government has decided to start drive-through vaccination strategy in the province to hike the daily vaccination rate.

The government under a strategy, has decided to inoculate people with coronavirus vaccine at different public places using mobile vans.

The vaccine vans will initiate vaccination at the Sea View, shopping plazas and universities, sources said.

The Sindh government is also making separate arrangements for vaccination of the industrial workers. Special vaccine centres will be established at various industrial areas.Moreover, vaccination centres will also set up at the offices of the industrial associations, according to sources.

The government will launch the mass vaccination drive as soon as the required number of vaccine doses is stockpiled.The government under a strategy, has decided to inoculate people with coronavirus vaccine at different public places using mobile vans.The vaccine vans will initiate vaccination at the Sea View, shopping plazas and universities, sources said.

The Sindh government is also making separate arrangements for vaccination of the industrial workers. Special vaccine centres will be established at various industrial areas.

Moreover, vaccination centres will also set up at the offices of the industrial associations, according to sources.INP

Former PM Abbasi alleges govt of protecting people involved in Ring Road scandal

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Tuesday alleged the government is protecting people involved in Rawalpindi Ring Road corruption case.

Talking to media in Islamabad, former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi claimed that everyone in Prime Minister (PM) House is busy in making money. No corruption or money laundering charge has been proven against PML-N president and opposition leader in National Assembly (NA) Shehbaz Sharif yet, he added.

The reaction came after Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on overseas Pakistanis Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari had resigned from his post over the ongoing Rawalpindi Ring Road scandal.

Zulfi Bukhari announced his resignation through a tweet on Monday, in which he said that the Prime Minister has always said that if a person has been named in any inquiry, whether rightly or wrongly, he should cease to hold any public office till his name has been cleared of the charges.

"Owing to the allegations in ongoing Ring Road inquiry I want to set this example by resigning from office until my name is cleared up of any allegations and media's obnoxious lies", he added.

He reiterated that he had nothing to do with the Rawalpindi Ring Road or any other ongoing real estate project in the country. He said that the inquiry should be conducted by capable personnel and endorsed a judicial inquiry of the scandal.INP

PESHAWAR: Activists of Pakistan Muslim League (N) holds flags of Palestinian and shouting slogans during protest against the Israel aggression on Palestinians people.

Record wheat production of 28.75MMT in 2021: Aleem Khan

LAHORE: Senior & Food Minister Punjab Abdul Aleem Khan has said that the record production of wheat in the history of the country has reached 28.75 million metric tons as per the data till date.

He in his tweet said that the agrarian reforms led by Prime Minister Imran Khan have had a positive impact and according to a comparative review of the last 10 years, the wheat crop and production has increased significantly in 2021, which is a good omen for the country.

The minister said that wheat production has increased by 5 million metric tons this year as compared to previous ones. He claimed that Punjab will be self-sufficient in wheat this year and In Sha Allah there will be no shortage.

He said that the present Government would not compromise on the supply of basic commodities like wheat, flour and sugar to the citizens, adding that Prime Minister Imran Khan was taking personal interest in the matter and protecting the interests of farmers and cultivators. Senior & Food Minister Abdul Aleem Khan said that every farmer deserves praises on the best wheat production in Punjab.INP

Three killed as dust storm, rain hit different parts of Karachi

KARACHI: Three people were killed including a child as dust storm, rain hit different parts of Karachi today (Tuesday).

According to details a child was killed when a wall collapsed in the Sher Shah area, while two other people were also killed in rain related incidents.

On the other hand the weather in Karachi became pleasant after strong winds and rain fall in different parts of the city. Rainfall was recorded in Sarjani Town, Shahrah-e-Faisal, II Chandigarh Road, Kemrai and in the airport areas.

Due to rain severe traffic jams were observed in different parts of the city. Many areas of Karachi were left without electricity due to the severe weather conditions including Sohrab Goth, Safora, Gulshan-e-Iqbal and Gulistan-e-Johar.INP

Nawaz's Sheikhupura properties to be auctioned on May 20

LAHORE: Authorities have decided to auction the Sheikhupura properties of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on May 20, 2021.

Meanwhile, the decision of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Sheikhupura to set a date for the bidding on properties has been challenged in the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

The petitioner Ashraf Malik has argued that he had bought 88 kanals of land in Sheikhupura from Nawaz Sharif and also paid Rs75 million to the former premier.He added that due to the arrest of Nawaz Sharif, the sale deed could not be implemented and he has also approached the civil court for the implementation of the sale deed.On the other hand, another petitioner named Aslam Azir has also challenged the decision to auction 105 acres of fruit orchards in high court and asked the court to stop the process. The plaintiff has stated that he ceased the land an invested heavily on it. Even my initial investment has been paid off, he added.The petitioner Ashraf Malik has argued that he had bought 88 kanals of land in Sheikhupura from Nawaz Sharif and also paid Rs75 million to the former premier.He added that due to the arrest of Nawaz Sharif, the sale deed could not be implemented and he has also approached the civil court for the implementation of the sale deed.INP

ISLAMABAD: Minister of state and Parliamentary Secretary of Religious Affairs Aftab Jehangir in a meeting with Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Pakistan, Ahmed Ameen Rabei at Embassy of Palestine.

US approves release of 73-year-old Pakistani prisoner in Guantanamo

WASHINGTON: A US prisoner review board has approved Saifullah Paracha for release, a 73-year-old prisoner in Guantanamo Bay detention centre.

Saifullah Paracha from Pakistan, has been in custody for more than 16 years at the US base in Cuba, his lawyer said in a statement.

Paracha, was held on suspicion of ties to Al Qaeda but never formally charged with a crime. He was cleared for release by a review board along with two other men, said Shelby Sullivan-Bennis, who represented him at the hearing in November.

A notification concluded that Paracha is "not a continuing threat" to the United States, the lawyer said.

It does not mean his release is imminent. But it is a crucial step before the US government negotiates a repatriation agreement with Pakistan for his return.

Saifullah Paracha's lawyer said she thinks he will return home in the next several months. "The Pakistanis want him back, and our understanding is that there are no impediments to his return," she added.

Paracha, who lived in the US was alleged by authorities having suspected links with Al Qaeda network.A notification concluded that Paracha is "not a continuing threat" to the United States, the lawyer said.

It does not mean his release is imminent. But it is a crucial step before the US government negotiates a repatriation agreement with Pakistan for his return.

Saifullah Paracha's lawyer said she thinks he will return home in the next several months. "The Pakistanis want him back, and our understanding is that there are no impediments to his return," she added.INP

Hunan province gives me development opportunity: young Pakistani

CHANGSHA: Hunan province in China gives me development opportunity and enabled me does international trade, said Haky, a young Pakistani..According to China Economic Net (CEN), he had started his own business in Hunan province, China"Some Pakistani department stores plan to procure a number of daily necessities. We are looking for suppliers" Haky is engaged in international trade and the business of his company covers mechanical equipment, electronic products, building materials and new materials.

"Mixers and other construction machines are highly needed in Pakistan and other countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The construction machines made in Hunan are very famous and I want to find some suppliers," Haky said.

It is not easy for anyone to start from scratch, especially for a foreigner like Haky in China.

"At the very beginning, I neither knew the market nor had any resources or friends. It was very difficult to get or close a deal," said Haky when he recalled his path of entrepreneurship.

Haky's international trade company is settled in Hunan-Africa Enterprise Cooperation Center based in Changsha, capital of Hunan.

The center, as the key platform for Changsha to integrate into BRI, provides 21 kinds of services for foreigners in China, including company registration, legal consulting and business tour.

The local government and relevant departments approached and invited them to take part in various business activities and gave guidance on starting business.

"A little while ago, I told the center that I want to contact some Chinese manufacturers of Electric Vehicles as the Pakistani government has a plan to purchase Electric Vehicles.INP