

QUETTA VOICE

Editor :Asim khan

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dquettavoice@gmail.com

PM Kakar tells militants to 'surrender unconditionally'

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar on Monday warned terrorist groups in the country to make an "unconditional surrender", saying the state would not negotiate with them.

"The state will not show any leniency towards terrorists who committed violence and killed innocent citizens," he said in an interaction with the families of martyrs at the interior ministry in Islamabad.

"The state is morally, Islamically and constitutionally correct. If not, we are ready to fight a thousand years. Whoever has any misunderstanding should remove it [...] no surrender, no retreat. The only option that lies with these thugs [is] if they want to surrender then it should be unconditional. No one has a desire for talks," the prime minister stressed.

PM Kakar categorically said that no person would be allowed to take the law into their hands, adding that only the state had the legitimate right to use armed force through its security forces.

"No one should have any doubt about the stance of the state against terrorists," he



said. "All organs of the state have the clarity to remain persistent against militancy," he said.

The prime minister said if a terrorist wanted to renounce his militant ways, they would have to seek forgiveness from the families of the martyrs who had paid the ultimate price.

"We cannot compensate those who lost their loved ones but we can make a gesture to acknowledge and honour their invaluable sacrifices," he added.

PM Kakar said it was

society's responsibility to honour the country's martyrs. "I pay tribute to all the martyrs — an unending list of heroes from all segments of the society, including police, politicians, journalists, soldiers and even children," he said.

The prime minister also inaugurated a memorial gallery where the pictures of martyrs were on display. He also mounted a photograph of Additional Inspector General of Police Safwat Ghauri, who was martyred by terrorists, on the wall.

Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti received PM Kakar on his arrival at the Ministry of Interior. A contingent of the Islamabad police presented a the premier with a guard of honour.

The family members of the martyrs, including senior politician and Awami National Party General Secretary Mian Iftikhar Hussain, whose son was martyred by the terrorists, expressed gratitude to the caretaker government for recognising the sacrifices of martyrs. **News Desk**

Tragedy Strikes Tehsil Chhatar: Former SHO's Brother Gunned Down

From Our Correspondent:



NASEERABAD: In a shocking incident in Tehsil Chhatar of Naseerabad district of Balochistan, armed accused opened fire, resulting in the tragic death of Shahzad Shah, the brother of former Station House Officer (SHO) Chhatar Majed Shah. The local police are actively investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident.

According to initial reports, the firing incident occurred in Tehsil Chhatar, and Shahzad Shah, a prominent figure in the community, fell victim to the attack. His connection to the former SHO has raised concerns about potential motives behind the targeted shooting.

Investigation Into The Incident Launched

Law enforcement authorities swiftly responded to the scene, cordoning off the area and launching an investigation into the identity and whereabouts of the assailants. The police are working to gather evidence and statements from witnesses to piece together the events leading up to the unfortunate incident.

Shahzad Shah's body has been transferred to a local hospital for post-mortem examination, and authorities are urging the community to remain calm as they diligently work to bring the perpetrators to justice. The loss of a well-known individual like Shahzad Shah has left the community in shock, and residents are expressing their condolences to the grieving family.

Bilawal moves SC for live streaming proceedings on reference against Zulfikar Bhutto's death sentence

ISLAMABAD: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Monday approached the Supreme Court for live streaming of proceedings on a presidential reference seeking to revisit the controversial death sentence awarded to former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

A nine-member larger bench of the Supreme Court will take up the reference tomorrow (Dec 12).

Headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, the larger bench will consist of Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Musarat Hilali.

The reference was filed on behalf of former president Asif Ali Zardari on April 2, 2011, for an opinion on revisiting the death sentence awarded to the former premier under the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction.



Today, Bilawal, through his lawyer Farooq H. Naek, filed a petition in the top court requesting that the hearing of the case should be "live-on-air" so that the entire country could hear it.

The reference was filed by the then president of Pakistan namely Asif Ali Zardari, who is the father of the present applicant, hence, the applicant is the son of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and the grandson of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was the founder of the Pakistan People's Party and a great leader of unprecedented scale,

caliber, and character," the plea, copy of which is available with Dawn.com, said.

It stated that Bhutto was a "man who arose from the muzzles, he worked for them, he led them, gave his life for them and till this day live in their hearts".

The petition said that throughout his life, Bhutto wanted to uphold the rule of law. "His motto of 'roti, kapra, and makan' was a testament to his yearning that every man gets his fair due. It was a loud cry woeing the chords of justice, that 'Let Justice be done

though the heavens may fall'," it stated.

"This passion of the applicant's grandfather, however, did not derail the irony that was to befall him. The spirit of justice that he so admired, was nowhere to be found when he himself was adorned with the noose of injustice.

"He was charged, convicted of conspiracy to commit murder, sentenced and executed on the testimony of an approver in the greatest miscarriage of justice that was ever to befall this country," the plea said.

It added that Bhutto's ideology remains intact to date and his sentence "is not just on the history of the family but a wretched stain on the entire judicial system of Pakistan and remains so till date".

"It is in order to remove this stain and correct the wrong in history that the applicant has preferred the instant reference to bring on record the reality of the life of his grandfather, hence, the applicant wants that the hearing of this case. **News Desk**

Gaza health ministry says death toll at 18,205

GAZA: Gaza has pulled an advertising campaign featuring mannequins with missing limbs and statues wrapped in white from the front page of its website and app after it prompted calls by some pro-Palestine activists for a boycott of the fashion retailer, Reuters reports.

Inditex, which owns Zara, said the change was part of its normal procedure of refreshing content. It did not comment on the boycott calls, but said the "Atelier" collection was conceived in July and the photos were taken in September.

Zara's Instagram account saw tens of thousands of comments posted about the photos, many with Palestinian flags, while "#BoycottZara" was trending on messaging platform X. In one of the photos a model is pictured carrying a mannequin wrapped in white, in another a bust lies on the floor and another features a mannequin with no arms. Critics said they resembled photos of corpses in white shrouds in Gaza.

Zara said at the launch of the collection on Dec 7 that it was inspired by men's tailoring from past centuries. The photos appear to show an artist studio with ladders, packing materials, wooden



crates and cranes, and assistants wearing overalls. Shops, schools and government offices shut across the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem as Palestinians staged a general strike protesting against Israel's relentless onslaught in the Gaza Strip, AFP reports.

Many Palestinians took part and rallies were planned in the West Bank, according to Essam Abu Baker who coordinates Palestinian factions in Ramallah. He described the protest as part of a global effort to put pressure on Israel to stop its bombardment, reporting strikes also taking place in parts of Jordan and Lebanon.

The strike today is not only in solidarity with Gaza, but also against the USA which used its veto in the Security Council against a truce," he said, referring to the US rejection of a ceasefire resolution on Friday.

Quetta police granted two-day transitory remand of Khadija Shah in May 9 case

QUETTA: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore on Monday granted Quetta police two-day transitory remand of fashion designer and PTI supporter Khadija Shah in a case pertaining to violent protests in the country on May 9.

Shah — currently incarcerated in Kot Lakhpal Jail — was arrested in cases of attacks on Lahore corps commander house, Askari Tower and torching police vehicles near Rahat bakery in cantonment. So far, all the cases registered against her were being heard in Lahore.

On Nov 15, an anti-terrorism court had granted Shah bail in the fourth and last case of May 9 protests against her. However, she was re-arrested on Nov 17 under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) ordinance for 30 days.

Shah had subsequently challenged the detention in the Lahore High Court as "unlawful and unconstitutional".

Today, the Punjab government submitted a notification in the LHC, stating that it had withdrawn Shah's detention



orders "with immediate effect".

However, before Shah could be released, the Quetta police filed a request in the ATC of Judge Abhar Gul seeking her transitory remand. The court accepted the request and granted the investigating officer Shah's custody for two days.

It also directed the Quetta police to present Shah in court on Dec 13.

Punjab IG appears before LHC

Meanwhile, during the hearing of Shah's petition against her detention under 3-MPO today, Barrister Samer Khosa told LHC's Justice Ali Baqar Najafi about the ATC decision to remand the PTI supporter to Quetta police custody. **News Desk**

SC verdict on lifetime disqualification, Elections Act amendments cannot co-exist: CJP Isa

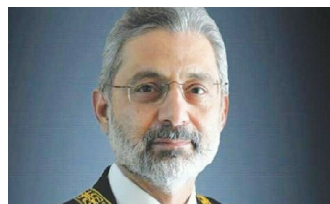
ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on Monday remarked that the Supreme Court's verdict on lifetime disqualification and the amendments made to the Elections Act, 2017 could not co-exist.

In a landmark verdict in 2018, the apex court had ruled that disqualification handed down under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution was supposed to be "permanent".

The law, which sets the precondition for a member of parliament to be "sadiq and ameen" (honest and righteous), is the same provision under which former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified in the Panama Papers case. Imran Khan was also disqualified under the same article in the Toshakhana case earlier this year.

However, in June, the then-coalition government had passed an amendment to the Elections Act 2017, which limited the disqualification of lawmakers to five years with retrospective effect.

Today, CJP Isa observed that either the SC's 2018 verdict or the Election (Amendment) Act, 2023 could be upheld. He passed these remarks as the apex court took up case pertaining to the disqualification of ex-MPA Meer Badshah Khan Qasrani. During the hearing,



Justice Isa noted that discrepancies in the SC's interpretation and the law could result in "confusion" in the upcoming general elections and sent the matter to a three-judge panel, which would form the bench that would hear the case. He also issued notices to Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan, advocate generals of all the provinces and the Election Commission (ECP) to assist the SC.

Meanwhile, Justice Athar Minallah asserted that polls would be held on February 8 and warned that anyone spreading uncertainty regarding elections would be guilty of contempt. The court also said that the current case

would not be used by the ECP or anyone else for delaying the upcoming elections.

At the outset of the proceedings today, CJP Isa asked why the petitioner was disqualified. Advocate Saqib Jilani replied that the Quasrani was disqualified under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution on the basis of a fake degree in 2007. In 2018, the Lahore High Court had granted the ex-MPA permission to contest polls.

Justice Minallah pointed out here that the case was connected to the 2018 elections and inquired if it was still admissible in the run up to the upcoming polls. However, Jilani contended that the current case would have an impact on the upcoming elections

as well. Meanwhile, Justice Isa asked: "How can lifetime disqualification continue if a person's sentence comes to an end?"

In his response, the lawyer said that a person should be disqualified for submitting nomination papers on false affidavits, adding that the SC had issued its verdict in the Panama Papers case on the interpretation of Article 61(1)(f). "There are two opinions on the SC's lifetime disqualification order," CJP Isa said here. "If there is a strict punishment of lifetime disqualification in NAB cases, how long would the disqualification be for in other cases?" he asked. Advocate Jilani replied that the disqualification of a politician in a murder case was five years. Justice Minallah also noted that even for grave crimes like sexual abuse of a child the punishment was five-year disqualification.

The top judge then asked if a new law pertaining to Article 62(1)(f) and lifetime disqualification had been passed recently, to which the lawyer said the Elections Act was amended recently and disqualification was limited to five years. Here, Justice Minallah noted that the SC's verdict on lifetime disqualification had become "ineffective" after the amendments made to the Elections Act. **News Desk**

EDITORIAL VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Chronic Project Delays Reflect Governance Woes in Balochistan

Editorial:

In the wake of persistent project delays plaguing Quetta City, the recent setback in meeting the November 30th deadline for ongoing initiatives has raised concerns over governance and project management. Commissioner Quetta Division, Hamza Shafiqat, has openly acknowledged the challenges faced by the engineering teams, attributing the delay to encroachments and the intricate process of relocating essential utility services.

Why Projects Faced Such Chronic Delays?

While the efforts to address the obstacles are commendable, it is crucial to recognize that these challenges have been a long-standing issue, lingering for the past four years. The announcement of a revised completion target by December 31st indicates a commitment to overcoming hurdles, but the question arises: why have these projects faced such chronic delays in the first place?

A broader perspective reveals a concerning pattern of inefficiency in project execution, raising questions about governance and institutional efficacy in Balochistan. Notably, the failures to meet deadlines are not isolated incidents. Former Chief Secretary Balochistan, Abdul Aziz Uqaili, and former Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Qudus Bizenjo, also struggled to meet project deadlines during their tenures, reflecting a systematic issue rather than isolated instances of mismanagement.

Growing Sentiment Of Frustration Among the Public

The consequences of these delays are not insignificant. The people of Quetta continue to grapple with under-construction roads and collapsed bridges in suburban areas, highlighting the tangible impact of prolonged project timelines on the daily lives of citizens. This has led to a growing sentiment of frustration among the public, who rightly expect timely completion of vital infrastructure projects.

Comparisons with other regions in Pakistan, where projects worth billions are completed within a few months, only intensify the concerns about the efficiency of governance in Balochistan. The stark difference in project execution timelines suggests a need for a thorough evaluation of the processes and mechanisms in place within the province.

Govt Should Move Beyond Mere Lip Service

It is imperative that the government moves beyond mere lip service and takes concrete actions to ensure the timely completion of development projects in Quetta. The people deserve better, and the province cannot afford to be left behind in terms of infrastructure development. A comprehensive review of institutional frameworks, project management practices, and accountability measures is necessary to address the root causes of these delays and establish a more effective and responsive governance system in Balochistan.

Conflict and climate

By Huma Yusuf:

PROMISES are meant to be broken. That's why we should respond to the outcome of COP28 with a healthy dose of scepticism. The headlines will focus on the language agreed regarding the fate of fossil fuels: 'abate', 'phase down', 'phase out'.

Whatever the agreement, it is unlikely to be fettered with concrete targets or firm deadlines and will rely on fantasies of how quickly we can scale carbon capture technologies. In all scenarios, you can count on the ongoing, unapologetic use of fossil fuels. But let's not fully dismiss COP28 yet. In other areas, the summit has been more productive. Foremost among these is the new Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace, which calls for "bolder collective action to build climate resilience in highly vulnerable countries and communities, particularly those threatened or affected by fragility or conflict".

Seven out of 10 of the most climate-vulnerable countries are also ranked as fragile states. COP28's focus on intersections between climate and security is thus a welcome addition. The declaration enshrines a

two-fold recognition: one, that climate change exacerbates security challenges; two, that state fragility and conflict impede climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. This is a vicious circle, leaving the most vulnerable further exposed to both violence and climate risk.

These topics have relevance to Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, our country witnessed a 34 per cent increase in militant attacks in November as compared to the previous month, bringing the number of attacks this year until Nov 30 to 599. Security concerns are also cited as the reason why Pakistani soldiers are being sent to Afghanistan in a controversial move. Though under-researched, there can be no doubt that cycles of drought and flooding in Pakistan and Afghanistan are exacerbating these trends.

The links between climate change and security challenges are increasingly better understood. Until now, the focus has primarily been on resource competition, the idea that food and water scarcity drives competition between different groups (for ex-

ample, Kenya's herders, farmers and conservancy owners) leading to conflict. But other factors are at play too.

In an article titled 'How Climate Change Helps Violent Non-State Actors', Noah Gordon underscores how climate change undermines state legitimacy by reducing states' capacity to service delivery and creating more space for non-state actors. Gordon discusses how the spread of inhospitable environments, particularly in arid regions, has led to farmers being desperate and more susceptible to militant recruitment. He also points out how climate migration will increase the demand for illicit activities such as people smuggling, which will provide militant groups with a new funding stream. Most importantly, climate injustices will further weaken state legitimacy and spread anger that can be channelled through non-state actors' narratives.

There is also growing awareness that climate disasters are security forces from their prime aims as they are increasingly pulled into rescue and reconstruction efforts. This year, from Spain to the US and East Africa, militaries

of child stunting and out-of-school youth. The latest highlights the policy failures of the last two decades, marked by a lack of priority regarding the climate agenda. This neglect has led to high maternal mortality, amounting to nearly 11,000 babies dying each year. Infant mortality rates follow a similar trend, with around 360,000 babies dying each year.

Furthermore, high abortion rates have been recorded as an outcome of millions of unwanted pregnancies. A large number of closely spaced children due to high fertility rates contribute to these indications including malnutrition among children and subsequent stunting. Poor population planning and resulting high population growth rates have played a central part

in creating the looming human capital crisis. The ever-growing population that traditionally shaped human development must come to terms with the fact that policy reforms will have to incorporate human development to ensure economic recovery. When countries such as Vietnam, India and Thailand face similar cases, they have embarked on their recovery pathways with stronger human capital projects. However, they have not yet reached the later stages of their fertility transitions.

A consensus has been reached among several influential quarters, especially economists, that reducing fertility rates is essential to achieve the objective in order to spur

By Maleeha Lodhi:

SPECULATION persists over whether general elections might be postponed. This prompted the Election Commission of Pakistan to issue a 'clarification' rejecting reports about a delay in elections as "completely baseless and misleading".

It said the electoral process is on track and the polls will be held as announced on Feb 8, 2024. The ECP also expected to issue the election schedule this week.

Yet public doubts continue. In a statement last week, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan referred to an "air of uncertainty" in the country created by "persistent rumours of potential delays". Some political parties have accused their rivals of seeking to delay elections. One of them even called for a delay, citing the winter weather, ignoring the fact that elections in the past have been held in February.

Speculation also intensified when reports emerged that ECP had not received funds from the government allocated to conduct the election and that it summoned the finance secretary for an explanation in this regard. The money was subsequently released.

Remarkably, Ghulam Ali, governor of KP, also added grist to the mill of those speculating about a postponement. The governor publicly voiced concerns about the se-

curity situation, saying this made it difficult to carry out political activities in parts of KP and Balochistan. True that a surge in terrorist attacks this year, especially by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, has led to a deterioration in the security situation in these two provinces. But that is not sufficient reason to postpone the polls. Both past experience and present realities dictate that the election should go ahead as scheduled.

In two previous elections, in 2008 and 2013, the security situation was much worse with the fallout from the raging war in Afghanistan posing an imposing challenge to the electoral process. In 2007, militant insurgency was at its peak in 2008 with two major terror attacks in KP just ahead of the election. Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's tragic assassination in December 2007 made the situation even more fraught.

It led to an outbreak of protests with several incidents of destruction of private and public property including ECP offices in interior Sindh. The election was postponed by little over a month — from Jan 8 to Feb 18. In 2013, the election was preceded by terrorist bombings by the TTP especially targeting the Awami National Party and involving an attack on a JUI-F rally in KP. But the election went ahead as scheduled.

In any case if some parts of KP are vulner-

able to terrorist violence, elections in 'sensitive' constituencies can be held later — as by-elections. The number would be very small and will not affect the overall outcome. The country's two largest provinces, Punjab and Sindh, which account for over 72 million and 26m voters respectively (almost 100m out of a total electorate of 127m) face no security challenge. Nor does much of KP and Balochistan.

Therefore, security cannot be invoked as justification for any poll delay. To do so on the basis of a handful of constituencies will be a pretext or alibi designed to serve electoral purposes and not a credible ground for delay.

Any delay would have constitutional, political and economic implications. There are no constitutional grounds on which elections can be delayed. To postpone elections now would be an outright constitutional transgression. Politically, such a move could set the stage for turmoil in the country, deepen polarisation and become a source of political instability.

All three major political parties, which are now in electioneering mode, would oppose the delay and also mount a legal challenge plunging the country into a constitutional crisis. Half of the Senate is up for election in March. If elections are not held before then, it will leave the

country with a truncated Upper House, which is elected by national and provincial assembly members. That too would be a recipe for constitutional chaos.

The economic cost to the country would also be high as uncertainty would gravely jeopardise the prospects for economic stability. The economy is still on life support, with the country having narrowly averted a debt default only months ago by securing a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) with the IMF. The bailout is only a temporary reprieve that momentarily restored some confidence.

Uncertainty will only raise the cost to the economy. It will continue to vitiate the investment climate, produce instability in the capital market and encourage capital flight. Already a caretaker arrangement that has exceeded the 90-day constitutionally mandated period in office has had to leave major economic decisions pending with obvious consequences for the country.

Opinion surveys and anecdotal evidence show that people want elections as soon as possible so that a legitimate, elected government is in place to get on with the job of governance and address the account deficit in the next financial year. It would need to negotiate a larger, longer-term programme with the Fund (apart from the public's worsening economic plight).

Taxing agri incomes

By Aijaz A. Nizamani:

PAKISTAN'S inability to generate enough revenue means it invariably finds itself at the mercy of international lenders. Currently, we are signatories to an IMF deal that binds the government to increase revenue generation and improve the tax-to-GDP ratio which, in our case, is among the lowest in the world. This cannot be possible unless the state starts taxing all sectors of the economy equitably. This includes the rural sector, where great potential lies in efficiently taxing agricultural output.

Agriculture accounts for about one-fifth of Pakistan's \$350 billion economy. If the sector was contributing its fair share, a fifth of the current target of Rs9,415bn would be coming from farm output. However, actual collection is just a fraction of the ideal amount. There is a need to correct the common misconception that agriculture is exempt from income tax. It is not. Income from agriculture is

taxed like any other income as per the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. The only difference is that this tax is collected by provincial authorities and not the Federal Board of Revenue.

Farmers and other interest groups advance various arguments against agriculture income taxes. They generally feel that since they are already heavily taxed indirectly, they should not be made to pay direct taxes as well. They also complain of controlled commodity prices, which is an implicit tax on their incomes. However, while such complaints are not unreasonable, the doubling of wheat prices in 2022 has rendered price controls ineffective. In any case, other commodities like cotton and rice are free for export, in fact, and there is encouragement for export under government policy.

Sugar, among the major crops, is the only exception. It remains subject to strict government controls and export restrictions. To offset this, sugar import is heavily taxed in order

to benefit local industry and large farmers.

Many tax experts feel agricultural taxes are unenforceable due to a lack of documentation of the economy and its vast geographic spread. Perhaps this is the real reason why our government is reluctant to increase taxes on overlord levels levied prescriptive taxes on agricultural revenue and based it on land rental value instead of actual production or productivity potential. However, assuming there is a sincere commitment at the policy level, taxing agriculture should no longer be an issue in the age of satellite imagery and machine-learning technologies. In fact, farmers should advocate for such an approach if they want agriculture in Pakistan to formally be considered part of the larger economy and documented as a part of national supply chains.

Surveys and statistics show that agricultural revenue collection is still done manually by revenue staff as it was 100 years ago. In the prevailing system, if someone does not pay or is over-

charged, there is no way of monitoring or redress the injustice. Therefore, the time has come for the entire system to be modernised. In this regard, the lead has to come from the IMF. International lenders and bilateral agencies, as our domestic system seems too subservient to vested interests which are unlikely to allow tech-enabled transparency in the farm and rural economies.

International lenders and development partners should provide grants to digitalise the financial records and make them easily searchable. As a second step, all imagery of farmlands should be made available year-round to individual farmers (respectively of their landholding) and be accessible to the government. The imagery service should help farmers to assess actual land use on a periodic basis (ideally, daily), and help the government monitor and aggregate crop data.

This will greatly help the government in its tax collection, as not much can

be hidden in this digital age. Lastly, machine-learning can help the government and farmers interpret this satellite imagery in depth and assess the yield potential of various crops at the time of harvesting if the systems used to analyse the imagery are properly trained in this task.

Given Pakistan's resource constraints, agricultural taxation as well as fiscal transfers need to be technology-based. At the farmer level, those who refuse to pay taxes must be penalised, for example by not being able to sell or gift their property to fellow family members without first clearing their dues with the government. This is only possible when farm and land records are digitalised and the technology will also help the large farmers, who account for merely four per cent of the population but own nearly 40pc of all farmland. It will help recover hundreds of billions of rupees in lost income tax while also enabling modernisation of farming practices.

By Zeba Sathar:

SUGGESTIONS for policy reforms and puts for party manifestos are surfacing as we move towards the evolving reality of the February 2024 election, which is expected to usher in a new government.

There is a real possibility of all political parties agreeing on some mandatory reforms that are compelling, and adopting them across party lines. Primary discussions at the moment are focusing around economic revival.

Before the next election campaign begins skewed in the direction of financial strategies, it is important to broaden the discussion to include other catalysts for economic growth. It is time to focus on human development not as a separate agenda, but as an essential prerequisite for

Pakistan to turn its economy around.

For the last two decades, Pakistan has practically put its human development objectives on hold. There has been insufficient investment in quality education, primary healthcare and skills development, leaving the country in the midst of an acute human capital crisis. This approach is premised on the belief that the human development agenda can wait till the economy is revived.

However, the World Bank's 2023 Human Capital report and the accompanying policy reforms for a Brighter Future challenge this notion. The policy note expresses grave concern over Pakistan's failure to deliver on human development. It prioritises actions to address the alarmingly high figures

of child stunting and out-of-school youth.

The policy highlights the policy failures of the last two decades, marked by a lack of priority regarding the human development agenda. This neglect has led to high maternal mortality, amounting to nearly 11,000 babies dying each year. Infant mortality rates follow a similar trend, with around 360,000 babies dying each year.

Furthermore, high abortion rates have been recorded as an outcome of millions of unwanted pregnancies. A large number of closely spaced children due to high fertility rates contribute to these indications including malnutrition among children and subsequent stunting. Poor population planning and resulting high population growth rates have played a central part

in creating the looming human capital crisis. The ever-growing population that traditionally shaped human development must come to terms with the fact that policy reforms will have to incorporate human development to ensure economic recovery. When countries such as Vietnam, India and Thailand face similar cases, they have embarked on their recovery pathways with stronger human capital projects. However, they have not yet reached the later stages of their fertility transitions.

A consensus has been reached among several influential quarters, especially economists, that reducing fertility rates is essential to achieve the objective in order to spur

economic development.

The success story of Bangladesh is a testament to a well-supported population planning programme there, which has successfully brought down fertility rates, thereby enabling a country previously considered a basket case to evolve into a successful development model.

Under the National Security Policy 2022, human development has entered the agenda of security think tanks. Population planning is now under discussion at high-level security dialogues as a policy imperative for dealing with Pakistan's non-traditional threats.

It is now widely accepted that if the country's resources are freed from catering to the pressure of keeping up with the ever-expanding six million children being added

to our population each year, we can focus on meeting the needs of the population. In particular, 2m to 3m youth looking for employment each year are the fiercest and biggest threats to our economy and our state's future viability and security.

The Population Council and UNFPA have worked for the last 60 years to develop a carefully crafted consensus on the part of the clergy on the need to reduce fertility rates and birth spacing to reduce maternal and child mortality. Let us build on that and not lose ground. The new population narrative termed 'tawazzun' (balance) endorsed both by religious and political leaders, calls for a balance between resources and population numbers and population growth rates. Due to overpopulation, quality education, and lack

of population planning, the country is unable to meet the basic needs of the population. In particular, 2m to 3m youth looking for employment. People are thus being deprived of their fundamental human rights.

Agreement by political parties to prioritise population planning is only possible if it is seen as improving the lives of the population, particularly women and children. The argument is that women once in control of their own health as a result of better reproductive health interventions will see improvements in their own health as a result of fewer pregnancies.

They will subsequently be motivated to make wiser decisions related to their own health, nutrition and schooling. Parents, if their offspring are offered free and decent quality education, as a

guaranteed under Article 25-A of the Constitution, will be more inclined to inform choice to send their children to school.

First and foremost, there is a need for a persuasive communication campaign based on 'balance' and promoting the idea of family planning as a means of improving women and children's health to cement the needs of the government across the political and religious leadership. This should be followed by decision-making services for the millions of women and couples who want to postpone their next child for health and economic reasons but are unable to access family planning services.

The idea of having smaller families to ensure better-educated children will take root if free basic education becomes a reality.

Solangi confirms February 8, 2024 as poll date

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi has said that general elections in the country will be held on 8th February next year.

Speaking at private television channel program, he said the growing momentum in the election campaign by the political parties is an evidence of the elections in the country.

The Minister said the Election Commission of Pakistan has the authority to issue the election schedule

and all the political parties will be given fifty-four days for electioneering as per the law.

Replying to a question, Murtaza Solangi said some people are raising questions, but the courts have provided justice to all.

He said there should be across the board accountability. He said we are bound to follow the orders of the Supreme Court.

The Minister said many governments in the democratic history of Pakistan could not complete their tenure. He said the case of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto has

been fixed for hearing after four decades. He said we are bound to implement the Supreme Court's orders.

Answering another question, he said the Advisor on National Security in the PTI government had been making statements for repatriation of the illegal foreign nationals. But now it seems that the former PTI chief indirectly wants to gain the sympathies of the Taliban government and the TTP, which is regrettable.

Replying to another query, the Information Minister said the Information Minister said that Public Broadcast-

ers run their affairs on public support as they are public service institutions. However, they need reforms. He said there is a need to upgrade technology of these institutions.

Murtaza Solangi rejected the rumours about privatization of public broadcasters and also ruled out possibility of privatization of Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television.

Talking about Pak-China ties, the Information Minister said that China is our strategic partner and our relations with China will be further strengthened.



ISLAMABAD: United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ambassador to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salim Al Zabri called on Caretaker Minister for Privatisation Fawad Hassan Fawad.

One-month long talks of PFD, flour millers end without any agreement

LAHORE (INP): One-month long negotiations between Punjab Food Department and the flour millers that started on November 13 have ended without any agreement. The flour millers have refused to buy sub-par wheat from the Food Department and have started buying wheat from the open market. Private wheat is of better quality as compared to government-provided wheat, but it was also costly, which results in an additional financial burden on the masses. Due to the use of expensive wheat being purchased from the private sector by millers, flour has become expensive

in the market, for which the policies of the food authorities are being blamed.

According to the details, the food department was supplying sub-standard and unhealthy wheat to 130 flour mills located in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Lately, the ratio of sand, gravel, and dust was almost a kilogram per 100 kg bag, but this now jumped to eight to ten kilograms, which was not acceptable to millers as it translates into heavy losses.

Moreover, the authorities were also forcing flour millers to buy 25% of the required wheat from the warehouses located in the remote districts of South Punjab to sell it in the local market at the controlled rate. This decision of the food authorities is unacceptable to the flour mill owners because the cost of transportation per sack from Punjab to Rawalpindi and Islamabad was almost five hundred rupees.

The pressure on flour mills despite the removal of subsidies was surprising, and it does not make any sense for the people involved in the grinding business.

Currently, the price of government wheat is Rs 4700 per maund, while private wheat was available at Rs 5050 per maund. The flour mills were using private wheat, therefore, people have to pay Rs 1430 for a bag of 10 kg of flour instead of Rs 1374, which was an additional burden.

Meanwhile, the President of the Flour Mills Association, Rawalpindi Region, Razullah Khan, and other leaders, including Tariq Sadiq, Kashif Shabbir, Raza Ahmad Shah, Khawaja Imran Chaudhry, Mukhtar, Sanaullah Durani Tariq Sethi, Abdul Rahman Khan, and Sheikh Shaikat asked the Secretary Food Punjab, Director Food Punjab, Commissioners of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

The ANF recovered 18 kilogram hashish and 72 kilogram hashish were recovered. In Yaro Chowk of Pishin, during search of a suspected vehicle, 950 kilogram hashish was recovered and a drug dealer was arrested. Two drug peddlers were arrested after recovery of 55 kilogram hashish from a vehicle near Jamshoro toll plaza in Sukkur.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov called on Caretaker Federal Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali.

Pakistan needed to collaborate with China to combat climate change: Dr. Adnan Arshad

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan needed to collaborate with China to combat climate change at COP 28, said Dr. Adnan Arshad, Director of the Climate Change Education Program at Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), Pakistan.

As the world's attention is focused on the ongoing COP 28 climate change conference being held from Nov 30 to Dec 12 in Dubai, Dr. Adnan Arshad attended the event and called for increased collaboration with China to combat the global crisis.

In an interview with Gwadar Pro, Dr. Adnan Arshad highlighted the need for collective action to address the increasing

urgent challenges posed by climate change.

Underscoring the importance of youth climate financing and emphasizing that adaptation must not be left behind, the expert stressed the need for greater collaboration with China, Pakistan's largest trading partner and a key player in global efforts to tackle climate change.

"China has made significant strides in promoting environmental sustainability. In 2022, the country's carbon dioxide emission intensity decreased by more than 51 percent from 2005, while the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption reached 17.5%," he said.

"We need to learn from China's experiences and strengthen our cooperation to combat this global crisis."

With excellent progress in developing solar and wind power, electric vehicles, and power batteries, China is a world champion in clean energy and is advancing in the agricultural and water sectors.

Climate cooperation between China and Pakistan will bring benefits to both sides, including economic boost, land restoration, food production and value addition, research and technology sharing growth, and new business opportunities.

The expert also highlighted several areas where Pakistan and

China can collaborate to address climate change, including knowledge sharing, technology transfer, mutual collaboration in agriculture and the energy sector, and making projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) environmentally friendly.

He added that China and Pakistan must exploit their potential for digital agriculture and resource-efficient food production by adopting technologies and skills to cope with extreme weather events, using similar approaches as China supported Pakistan's agriculture sector during the locust and flood disasters in the recent past.

ANF seizes 1416 kg narcotics, arrests 12 in countrywide operations

RAWALPINDI (INP): The Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) seized 1416 narcotics, arrested 12 drug pushers in 12 operations conducted in various cities across the country. According to ANF spokesperson, during search of a passenger bus in Islamabad, three drug peddlers were held with 500 gram hashish and three kilogram opium.

The ANF recovered 18 kilogram hashish and 72 kilogram hashish were recovered. In Yaro Chowk of Pishin, during search of a suspected vehicle, 950 kilogram hashish was recovered and a drug dealer was arrested. Two drug peddlers were arrested after recovery of 55 kilogram hashish from a vehicle near Jamshoro toll plaza in Sukkur.

ANF recovered 54 kilogram hashish from possession of a drug dealer in Sher Shah Karachi. The spokesman said that during separate actions in unhabited area of district Khayber 105.5 kilogram hashish was recovered. Smuggling bid was foiled in Metha Khari area of Kohat and 10.8 kilogram hashish was recovered.



ISLAMABAD: (SAPM) on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Jawad Sohail Malik held a meeting with ILO delegation.

Japan PM to sack key ministers over graft claims

TOKYO (INP): Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is set to fire several top ministers who are reportedly under investigation for alleged fraud, local media said Monday, in what would be the second reshuffle in three months.

Those to be axed, potentially as early as this week, include Kishida's right-hand man Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, and Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister of economy, industry and trade, the reports said.

According to the Asahi Shimbun daily, the total number to be sacked will be 15, including several deputy ministers and parliament

mentary vice ministers.

All belong to a faction formerly headed by late premier Shinzo Abe -- one of at least five major groupings vying for influence and power within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Prosecutors are investigating allegations that the faction failed to report tens of thousands of dollars raised through fundraising parties, according to media reports in recent days.

Another of those reportedly implicated is former Olympic minister Seiko Hashimoto.

On Monday Kishida refused to be drawn on the possible reshuffle -- which

could take place once the current session of parliament ends on Wednesday -- but said he took the fraud allegations seriously.

"I'm thinking of taking appropriate measures at an appropriate timing for the sake of recovery of the public's trust (in the government), and for preventing delays in government operations," Kishida told reporters. Kishida's poll ratings are at their lowest levels since he took office two years ago, in part because of voter unease over inflation. The latest survey published on Monday by Fuji TV and the Sankei Shimbun daily put public support for his cabinet at 22.5 percent, down from 27.8

percent last month, while the disapproval rating is at 71.9 percent, up from 68.8 percent.

This is despite a previous reshuffle in September and a stimulus package worth 17 trillion yen (\$117 billion) announced in November for the world's third-largest economy.

Kishida, 66, can govern until 2025 but there has been speculation he might call a snap election ahead of a likely tough internal leadership vote in the LDP next year.

The opposition was set to file later Monday a non-confidence motion to the parliament, Jiji Press reported, although it was unlikely to pass.



ISLAMABAD: A signing ceremony for settlement agreement between Ministry of Law and Justice led by Secretary Law Raja Naeem Akber and Nizamuddin KOAMSE Country head Ozpak.

Business fraternity stresses need for economic charter in current business climate

LAHORE (INP): The seminar attended by a large number of speakers comprising influential business community leaders emphasized the critical need for an economic charter in the current business climate. Expressing dissatisfaction with government measures, they criticized what they perceived as an undue burden on traders despite purported relief initiatives.

The participants of the seminar, held in collaboration with the Chain Store Association of Pakistan (CAP) in Lahore on Monday, addressed the challenges and discussed the prospect of a Charter of Economy.

The various trade bodies, including Markazi Anjuman-e-Tajran Central Punjab, Super Store Association, Qom-i-Fajr Itehad, All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajran (Naeem Mir Group), Anjuman-e-Tajran Lahore, President Hall Road Market, President Liberty Market, and President MM Alam Road Market, attended the seminar. The seminar not only shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by businesses in

Pakistan but also marked a pivotal moment in discussions about a Charter of Economy, emphasizing the necessity for a collaborative approach, inclusive policy-making, and responsive governance to alleviate the burdens on the business community.

A focal point of the gathering was the call for an economic charter, with discussions centered on its potential role in navigating the challenging business environment. Business leaders underscored the importance of such a charter in providing a cohesive and clear framework for economic policies, offering stability and guidance to businesses facing uncertainties.

The participants voiced collective grievances, pointing to the intricate and unwieldy Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) system, which requires filing approximately 73 returns annually. This burdensome procedure tests the patience of traders.

The Chain Store Association of Pakistan (CAP) chairman Rana Tariq Mahboob highlighted business' formidable challenges

post-COVID-19 during his keynote address. He mentioned closures resulting from political rallies, electricity crises, smog, and security concerns. Notably, Rana Mahboob drew attention to a tax rate exceeding 110% on commercial meters, characterizing it as an additional business burden.

Rana Tariq stressed the unity among stakeholders, especially in formulating an economic charter that could serve as a comprehensive guide.

Answer Zahoor Butt, President of the Grand Trade Alliance, conveyed to the audience that government policies were being formulated without due consideration for input from relevant stakeholders within the community. This echoed a sentiment calling for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policy-making. Traders from the retail market underscored their vital role in the economy and expressed a commitment to continuing this role. However, they called upon the government to attentively listen to their issues and earnestly work towards resolving them.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Interior, Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti in a meeting with Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

UN needs \$46.4 billion for aid in 'bleak' 2024

UNITED NATIONS (NP): The United Nations said Monday that it needed \$46.4 billion next year to bring life-saving help to around 180 million people in desperate circumstances around the world.

The UN said the global humanitarian outlook for 2024 was "bleak", with conflicts, climate emergencies and collapsing economies "wreaking havoc" on the most vulnerable.

While global attention focuses on the conflict raging in the Gaza Strip, the UN said the wider Middle East, Sudan and Afghanistan were among the hotspots that also needed major international aid operations.

But the size of the annual appeal and the number of people it aims to reach were scaled back compared to 2023, following a decrease in donations.

"Humanitarians are saving lives, fighting hunger, protecting children, pushing back epidemics, and providing shelter and sanitation in many of the world's most inhospitable contexts," UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said in a statement.

"But the necessary support from the international community is not keeping pace with the needs," he said.

The 2023 appeal was for \$56.7 billion but received just 35 percent of that amount, one of the worst funding shortfalls in years. It allowed UN agencies to deliver assistance and

protection to 128 million people.

With a few weeks left to go, 2023 is likely to be the first year since 2010 when humanitarian donations declined compared to the previous year.

The UN therefore scaled down its appeal to \$46.4 billion this time around, and will focus on those in the gravest need.

Launching the 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview, Griffiths said the sum was nonetheless a "massive ask" and would be tough to raise, with many donor countries facing their own cost of living crises.

"Without adequate funding, we cannot provide life-saving assistance. And if we cannot provide that assistance, people will pay with their lives," he said.

The appeal covers aid for 72 countries; 26 states in crisis and 46 neighbouring nations dealing with the knock-on effects, such as an influx of refugees.

The five largest single-country appeals are for Syria (\$4.4 billion), Ukraine (\$3.1 billion), Afghanistan (\$3 billion), Ethiopia (\$2.9 billion) and Yemen (\$2.5 billion).

Griffiths said there would be 300 million people in need around the world next year -- a figure down from 363 million last year.

But the UN aims to reach

only 180.5 million of those, with NGOs and aid agencies targeting the remainder -- not to mention front-line countries and communities themselves who provide the first help.

The Middle East and North Africa require \$13.9 billion, the largest total for any region in 2024.

Beyond Syria, the Palestinian territories and Yemen, Griffiths also pointed to Sudan and its neighbours, and to Ukraine, Afghanistan, Venezuela and Myanmar as hotspots that needed sustained global attention.

Ukraine is going through a "desperate winter" with the prospect of more warfare on the other side, he said.

With the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas, plus Russia's war in Ukraine, Griffiths said it was hard for the Sudan crisis to get the attention it deserved in foreign capitals.

More broadly, Griffiths said climate change would increasingly impact the work of humanitarian aid workers, who would have to learn how to better use climate data to focus aid resources.

"There is no doubt about the climate confronting and competing with conflict as the driver of need," he said.

"Climate displaces more children now than conflict. It was never thus before," he said.



QUETTA: Provincial Health Minister Dr. Ameer Muhammad Khan Jozegazi is meeting with the caretaker provincial interior minister Captain (retired) Muhammad Zubair Jamali.



BEIJING: A delegation of Industrialists and Businessmen from Karachi called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

Pakistani EAC members strive to expand exports to China

ISLAMABAD (INP): "The recently established two Export Advisory Councils (EACs) are anticipated to boost Pakistan's exports, particularly to China, its largest trade partner."

This was stated by Khalil Sattar, former Chairman of the Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA) and CEO of K&N's Foods (Pvt) Ltd, the representative of the poultry industry in the EAC, in an interview with Gwadar Pro.

The EACs consist of major representatives from various industrial sectors to advise the Ministry of Commerce on pertinent issues.

The Ministry has included representatives from almost all sectors of the economy, including textiles, agriculture, marble, cement, etc.

Mr. Sattar termed this as a crucial initiative by the Ministry of Commerce, as the private sector engaged in business is aware of the issues hindering the realization of export potential and is apprising the government about these hurdles.

Recent data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) indicates that the country's trade deficit has increased by a significant 33.59%, with a notable 17.3% decrease in imports as the country strives to improve economic indicators amid a depreciating local currency and declining foreign exchange reserves.

Between Syria, the Palestinian territories and Yemen, Griffiths also pointed to Sudan and its neighbours, and to Ukraine, Afghanistan, Venezuela and Myanmar as hotspots that needed sustained global attention.

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"There is no doubt about the climate confronting and competing with conflict as the driver of need," he said.

"Climate displaces more children now than conflict. It was never thus before," he said.

He further stated that if the relations with the neighbouring countries improve, terrorism can end in Pakistan, which will allow the development projects to move on a faster pace, while the costs will also decrease.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the new government has to defeat poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and backwardness, while the tax system has to be balanced and the cost of energy has to be reduced, the

meat.

The Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) issue is also being addressed by making FMD-free zones through compartmentalization and free vaccination against FMD by provincial governments.

China has become the most important export market for Pakistani seafood. At present, many Pakistani companies are seeking to deepen cooperation with China and increase their exports of aquatic products.

Mr. Khalil Sattar noted that in the field of the export of fisheries and fishery products, the Ministry of Commerce has advised the Ministry of Maritime Affairs to improve and modernize the fish harbor, for which the Minister of Commerce has assured them of providing funds from the Export Development Funds.

To further expand the country's exports, the CEO recommended that the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance work out sales tax and duty drawbacks for all exportable items.

"There is also a need to encourage incentives for establishing horticulture value addition plants in FAIA and Gilgit Baltistan, which produces tremendous volumes of dry fruits, apricots, plums, peaches, cherries, apples, etc.," he added.

with two bovine meat export companies already starting production of cooked



BEIJING: Commerce Minister Dr. Ejaz meeting with Zhang Xinmin Chairman of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textile (CCCT) in Beijing.

Friendly relations with neighboring countries vital to eradicate poverty: Mian Zahid

KARACHI (INP): Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain has underscored the significance of friendly relations between all the neighbouring countries to eradicate poverty from the region.

Talking to business community on Monday, he said that improved relations with neighbouring countries are necessary to resolving disputes so that the country can develop.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that prolonged tensions between neighbours are not in anyone's interest as differences are an obstacle to peace and progress.

Pakistan should improve its relations with India, Iran and Afghanistan and increase cooperation with China so that the

country's image can be improved globally, tourism can be developed and foreign investors can be attracted, he added.

The business leader said that currently it was difficult to be able to do business in the risky Pakistani market which was barring national development.

The economic and financial performance cannot improve until local and international political affairs improve, he added.

He further stated that if the relations with the neighbouring countries improve, terrorism can end in Pakistan, which will allow the development projects to move on a faster pace, while the costs will also decrease.

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