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Positive Post

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November in History

December 24, 1952:
UN Security Council adopts the Anglo-American Resolution on Kashmir urging immediate demilitarization talks between India, Pakistan.

December 31, 1952:
Pakistan National Scouts instituted.

December 22, 1957:
Malik Feroz Khan Noon is sworn in as seventh Prime Minister of Pakistan.

December 7, 1970:
First General elections held. Awami League and Pakistan People Party emerge as leading parties in East and West Pakistan.

December 19, 1970:
Pakistan wins gold medal in Asian Games hockey, beating India 1-0.

December 20, 1971:
General Yahya Khan hands over power to Z. A. Bhutto, who takes over as President and Chief Mar- tial Law Administrator.

December 30, 1973:
Z. A. Bhutto lays foundation stone of Pakistan Steel Mills.

December 27, 1975:
1976 is declared Quaid's Century year.

December 31, 1985:
Martial Law is lifted, amended 1973 Constitution revived.

December 2, 1988:
Benazir Bhutto is sworn in as first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan.

December 12, 1990:
Pakistan becomes 37th country to send expedition to Antarctica.

December 4, 1994:
Pakistan regains World Hockey Championship title after 12 years, beating Holand 4-3.

Pakistan's standing in the global rankings

Overview

Pakistan observed a slight improvement in the overall international rankings in 2018 covering socio-economic and political outcomes of the country. Several elements complemented the prospects including successful democratic transition,efficient counter-terrorism measures leading to enhanced peace and security, and foreign direct investment inflows under CPEC, among others. Albeit, decoupling economic growth from human development suggests that the country needs to enhance its scores in health, education and standard of living by ensuring political will, equitable financing and efficient governance to ensure parallel growth for marginalized segments as well. Civil and political liberties must grow hand in hand to ensure a conducive environment for democratic dialogue and accountability which ultimately supports its nation building process.

DEMOCRACY INDEX

Pakistan ranked 112th out of 167 countries in the Democracy Index scoring 4.17 out of 10 in 2018 compared to 4.26 in 2017.

Index from 0 (authoritarian regime) to 10 (full democracy)

Compiled based on indicators covering: Electoral process and pluralism, Civil liberties, Functioning of government, Political participation, and Political culture.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Pakistan ranked 150th out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index scoring 0.562 out of 1.000 in 2018 compared to 0.560 out of 1.000 in 2017.

Index from 0 (low development) to 1 (very high development)

Compiled based on indicators covering: life expectancy, education, and per capita income

PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

Pakistan ranked 139th out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index scoring 43.24 out of 100 in 2018 compared to 43.55 in 2017.

Index from 0 (most press freedom) to 100 (least press freedom)

Compiled based on indicators covering: pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and infrastructure.

TERRORISM INDEX

Pakistan ranked 5th out of 163 countries in the Terrorism Index scoring 8.18 out of 10 in 2018 compared to 8.40 in 2017.

Index from 0 (lowest impact) to 10 (highest impact)

Compiled based on indicators covering : Total number of terrorist incidents in a given year, total number of fatalities caused by terrorism in a given year, total number of injuries causedby terrorism in a given year and the approximate level of total property damage from terrorist incidents in a given year.

ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

Pakistan ranked 131st out of 180 countries in the Economic Freedom Index scoring 54.4 out of 100 in 2018 compared to 52.8 out of 100 in 2017.

Index from 0 (repressed) to 100 (free)

Compiled based on indicators covering: Market openness, Regulatory efficiency, Government size and the rule of law.

Positive Post is a strategic effort to project achievement and contributions of Pakistan. While showcasing Greenwich University's cultural diplomacy initiatives, it also encapsulates a compilation of different developments complementing Pakistan's socio-cultural, economic and Political outcomes.

Centre urges Sindh, Balochistan to join ration, health schemes

The Centre on Thursday urged Sindh and Balochistan to join the federal government's much ambitious social welfare programmes Ehsaas Ration and Sehat Card and decided to hold local government (LG) elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtun khwa through electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) core committee presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

At a press conference after the meeting, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the Balochistan government had agreed to join and contribute to the social welfare programmes, but Sindh had not yet agreed.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Welfare Dr Sania Nishtar briefed the core committee on various social welfare programmes.

Decides to hold LG elections in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through EVMs

Fawad Chaudhry said the government was persuading the Sindh government to join the federal government for starting such welfare programmes in the province, but they were reluctant due to the "absence of chances of receiving personal gains from the programme". "The Sindh government is anti-people as they are reluctant to join social welfare programmes of the federal government," he added.

On the other hand, Sindh Information Minister Saeed Ghani told Dawn that the provincial government would never join the Ehsaas Ration Programme under which both the federal and provincial governments will have to contribute Rs350 and Rs650, respectively, as subsidy on three essential items wheat flour, pulses and edible oil/ghee.

"If the federal government wants to give some relief to the poor, it should increase monthly stipend under the Ehsaas Programme from Rs2,000 to Rs3,000 instead of opting for a complicated process of availing Rs1,000 subsidy per month on three food items," he added.

Mr Ghani said that under the Ehsaas Ration Programme, the Sindh government had to bear Rs17 billion on account of subsidy. "We [Sindh government] do not have such additional money to contribute to the programme," he added.

Sinia Nishtar had told Dawn that if the Sindh government did not join the programme, the eligible people of the province would get only Rs350 subsidy, and not Rs1,000 per month.

LG polls through EVMs

At the press conference, Fawad Chaudhry said the Punjab Local Government Bill would be approved over the next few days, adding that LG elections in Punjab and KP would be held through EVMs.

He said local government elections were being held in 17 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on December 19 in which 37,752 candidates were taking part, with 689 candidates in the run for the slots of village chairmen and tehsil mayors and 19,282 for neighborhood councils.

Brushing aside the reports suggesting that the upcoming elections would be costly, the minister claimed that the process of elections would be a bit cheaper than to the past due to use of EVMs.

The PTI's core committee also discussed the issue of inflation and noted that the Sensitive Price Index had posted a decrease of 0.67 per cent.

Fawad Chaudhry claimed that people would get relief in the days to come. Responding to a question, he said inflation was a result of devastating policies of the previous governments and now people like former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi were shedding crocodile tears on the price hike. He invited Mr Abbasi to have a session with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics to understand their system of issuing figures about inflation.

The information minister termed the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) a "story of five rats" and said four rats had left the opposition alliance. "It sounds awkward to call Maulana Fazlur Rehman [PDM chief] a rat," the minister said in an informal way while replying to a person standing behind him.

PM's special assistant Shahbaz Gill claimed that a new video tape of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz vice president Maryam Nawaz would soon come to the fore which, he said, "will add in humiliation of the party".

Fawad Chaudhry said former PM Khaqan Abbasi had left Rs157 billion debt, adding that "Pakistan is still bearing the brunt of their anti-people policies".

He said the opposition was not ready to participate in the meetings of parliamentary parties [for election reforms]. "It is obvious that the opposition is not going to end their reservations over the use of EVMs in the elections," he added.

Meetings

Presiding over a meeting on Ehsaas Ration Programme, Prime Minister Imran Khan emphasised the need for involving district government authorities to raise awareness among Karyana (grocery shops) stores and the potential beneficiaries about the programme. "The government is taking all possible measures to provide maximum relief to the common man," he said.

The prime minister was informed that under the ration programme, a monthly subsidy of Rs1,000 on flour, ghee and pulses would be given to 20 million households of the country that have monthly income below Rs50,000.

The programme will be launched across the country on December 15. Registration of Karyana stores under the programme is in progress and more than 15,000 such stores have been registered so far.

Meanwhile, during a meeting with Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, Prime Minister Khan directed the formulation of an effective media communication strategy to highlight various government initiatives for the welfare of the people.

Special Assistant to the Punjab Chief Minister on Information Hassan Khawar and Special Assistant to the KP Chief Minister on Information Barrister Saif Ali also attended the meeting.

According to a source, the prime minister directed them to highlight alleged corruption of the opposition leaders in the media.

Courtesy: Dawn

Saudi Arabia starts issuing Umrah visas for Pakistani pilgrims

The Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has announced it is now issuing Umrah visas for Pakistani pilgrims.

According to the notification, Umrah visas are will be issued for Pakistan, India and Egypt and intending pilgrims from these countries can now enter the kingdom directly.

Pilgrims who have had both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine will be exempt from quarantine, but single-dose pilgrims have to stay in quarantine for five days.

People who do not need to undertake quarantine are those who are completely vaccinated with two doses of Pfizer, Moderna, BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Covishield, SK, Bioscience or one dose of Johnson & Johnson, the ministry said.

Two doses of either Sinopharm or Sinovac with an additional jab from any one of the above vaccines will also not necessitate quarantine.

However, those who are vaccinated with two doses of Sinopharm, Sinovac and Covaxin will have to quarantine three days and take a PCR test 48 hours after arriving in the kingdom.

Earlier on, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah had limited Umrah permits for overseas Muslims to those aged between 18 and 50 years.

Courtesy: Dawn

High-speed internet coming to Northern areas of Pakistan

High-speed internet services will become available soon in Chitral, Kaghan and other tourism hotspots in the northern areas of Pakistan.

Haris Mehmood Chaudhry, the CEO of Universal Service Fund, said that within six months high-speed internet will be available in Chitral, Kaghan, Naran, Neelum Valley among other areas.

Gwadar, Panjgur, and other parts of Balochistan will also get high-speed internet service after a year.

Fiber optic work has been started in seven districts of the tribal districts as well and 900km of fiber optic is being laid in Khyber, Kurram and Mohmand as well, he added.

The work is beset by the challenge of the theft of batteries from the generators of towers in rural areas. However, the basic power supply to the USF-subsidised towers comes from the solar system.

On September 24, Information Technology Minister Syed Amin-ul Haq had said that that connectivity and high-speed internet projects cost Rs31 billion and it would soon be completed.

The minister said 5G technology would be introduced by December 2022. The government was working on a Smart Phone For All project, enabling 220 million Pakistanis to have access to such devices.ReplyForwardAF

Courtesy: Dawn

India to use Afghan trucks for sending aid to Afghanistan through Pakistan

Pakistan on Friday permitted use of Afghan trucks for transporting Indian humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

"It has been decided to allow the use of Afghan trucks for transportation from Wagah border to Torkham," FO spokesman Asim Iftikhar said.

The decision was conveyed to the Charge d'Affaires of India at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he said.

The move came as European Union's envoy to Afghanistan Tomas Niklasson urged both Islamabad and Delhi to resolve issues concerning the transfer of Indian humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, the UNDP fears, could face the worst humanitarian crisis of its history with nearly 23 million people facing imminent severe hunger and millions likely to sink into poverty.

Pakistan had last week allowed Indian assistance for the war-torn country to transit through its territory on what was described as "an exceptional basis for humanitarian purposes".

India had offered to provide 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat and lifesaving medicines in humanitarian aid for the people of Afghanistan.

Problems, however, arose at the time of negotiating modalities for shipment of the aid between

Pakistan and India. India wanted its own trucks to carry aid goods up to the Afghan border, but the move was not acceptable to Pakistan.

A proposal regarding handing over the assistance to UN agencies was also considered.

It appears that finally as a compromise Pakistan has allowed India to use Afghan trucks for transportation of goods through the Wagah border.

Mr Iftikhar said Pakistan's decision "demonstrates the commitment and seriousness of the Government of Pakistan to facilitate the proposed humanitarian assistance".

Delhi was urged to "expeditiously" take necessary steps for delivery of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia sign deals on workers' recruitment, skills

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have signed two agreements related to workers' recruitment and skills verification of Pakistani workforce being employed in the kingdom, said a statement issued by the Foreign Office.

It said the signing ceremony of the agreements took place during the visit of Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mahmood to Saudi Arabia.

According to the FO, the agreement on workers' recruitment will contribute to streamlining the process of export of workforce from Pakistan in diverse professions in the kingdom while safeguarding their due rights and providing comprehensive legal protection to Pakistani nationals employed in Saudi Arabia. The agreement will also help in resolving contractual disputes and taking legal recourse against recruitment offices, companies or agencies for any violation.

The agreement on skills verification will enhance export of skilled and certified Pakistani workforce to the kingdom.

The FO statement said imparting modern skills and ensuring certification of Pakistani workforce to improve their employability abroad were key areas among Prime Minister Imran Khan's priority sectors. "Certification for our skilled manpower will create opportunities for technical workforce in Pakistan to get internationally recognised trainings and certifications," it added.

The education ministry said in a press release that the agreements were signed by Shafqat Mahmood and Dr Ahmad Jabbar Al Yamni from Saudi Arabia at a ceremony at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of the kingdom. It was witnessed by senior officials from both countries.

"This important cooperation between both countries has far-reaching impact for enhancing the employment opportunities for skilled Pakistani workforce by joint certification and testing by Takamol Saudi Arabia and National

Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) Pakistan," said the statement.

"This step [agreements] will also safeguard the existing Pakistani work force in Saudi Arabia. It is expected that millions of Pakistani skilled workers will get gainful employment opportunities with higher earning as a result of the efforts of the government of Pakistan," it added.

It said that under this partnership, NAVTTC and Takamol, a subsidiary of the government of Saudi Arabia, were establishing the testing regime under the Skills Verification Programme (SVP) by exchanging the NOS (National Occupational Standards) and facilitating skill verification of candidates through competency-based assessment (theory & practical) at exam centres in Pakistan for candidates desirous of working in Saudi Arabia.

This will enable Pakistani skill workforce to have authentic and internationally recognised joint certification by both Takamol and NAVTTC through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment.

According to the press release, the Saudi ministry has introduced the SVP from July 2021 to regulate its labour market. After the implementation of the SVP, the skill verification has become necessary for the Pakistani workers who intend to get employment in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to note that the largest number of Pakistani expatriate workforce is based in Saudi Arabia, contributing substantially to the country's economy through foreign remittances. Most of the present Pakistani workforce in the kingdom fall in the category of unskilled or semiskilled labour, which means reduced remunerations and it also impacts remittances negatively, the press release said.

Moreover, it added, in the changing scenario of labour laws and dynamics of the labour market overseas, a large number of Pakistani workforce require skills certification as presently they face non-recognition of their qualifications, skills and certification. This cooperation will help a large number of these workers and also lead to national productivity and development.

Saudi Arabia is home to over two million Pakistani migrants and is the single largest remittance source to the South Asian nation. According to Arab News, Pakistani expatriates in the kingdom sent home $5.7 billion in July-March 2021.

Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood also visited Saudi Broadcasting School "IEN" in Riyadh. Saudi Education Minister Hamad Bin Mohammed Al Al-Sheikh and Vice Minister for Education Dr Saad Bin Saud Al Fahid received Mr Mahmood at the school and briefed him on the state-of-the-art live facility established in 15 days to cope with learning losses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Mahmood appreciated the IEN live broadcasting school systems, quality of content and its delivery and reach out mechanism.

"It was decided that both IEN Saudi Arabia and TeleSchool Pakistan will engage and share experiences, processes and technologies to boost distance learning education in order to provide quality education in rural areas," the press release said.

Courtesy: Dawn

CAA hopes to resume licensing in February

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) hopes it can resume licensing pilots in February with the release of an International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) audit report after a scandal over fake licenses, an authority official said.

The ICAO, the UN Aviation body, advised Pakistan in September 2020 to undertake immediate corrective action and suspend the issue of any new pilot licences after false licences came to light following the crash of a Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane in May that year, in which 97 people were killed.

A nine-member ICAO team carried out an audit in Pakistan for 10 days that concluded on Friday.

"We are hopeful we will resume issuance of licensing following the release of the ICAO audit report expected in February," Khaqan Murtaza, director general of the PCAA, told reporters on Monday.

ICAO told Pakistan in Sept 2020 to suspend issue of any new pilot licences after false licences came to light

The pilot licence scandal tainted Pakistan's aviation industry and hurt flag carrier PIA, which was barred from flying to Europe and the United States.

In June last year, Pakistan grounded 262 airline pilots suspected of dodging their exams following checks of their qualifications.

The action was prompted by the preliminary report on an airliner crash in Karachi last year, which found that the pilots had failed to follow standard procedures and disregarded alarms.

The situation is that they have cleared us but a final report is awaited. The report is expected any time after mid-February, Murtaza said.

The audit was carried out in six areas airworthiness, flying standards, personal licensing and examination, air navigation services, aerodromes and aircraft accident.

The ICAO team visited Pakistan aeronautical complex, PIA offices and offices of other airlines.

Courtesy: Dawn

Afghanistan to host Pakistan for three ODIs in 2023

Afghanistan will host Pakistan for a three-match One-day International (ODI) series in 2023, according to the Future Tour Program (FTP) issued by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB).

The series will take place in February and March, however the exact schedule will be released later.

“A total number of 11 ODIs, four T20Is and two Test series have been included in Afghanistan schedule for the upcoming two years. These series are scheduled on home and away basis, among which Afghanistan will play 18 home and 34 away matches, apart from participating in the Asia Cup 2022, ICC T20 World Cup 2022, the Asia Cup 2023 and the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023,” a press release issued by the ACB said.

The ACB also stated that the team’s focus will be on playing limited-overs match due to the fact that major ICC events are scheduled for the next two years.

“If we bifurcate the tally into limited-overs cricket and the Test format, it clearly shows that Afghanistan’s focus will be on the shorter formats of the game. Considering the fact that Afghanistan will be playing seven ODI series in the ICC Cricket World Cup Super League, as well as participate in four major limited-overs events, such as Asia Cup 2022 (T20 format), ICC T20 World Cup 2022, the Asia Cup 2023 (ODI format) and the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023,” the press release added.

PM Khan: Punjab to get health cards by March 2022

"Pakistan will only be able to become a welfare state when it instills the concept of humanity in the society," Prime Minister Imran Khan said Monday.
On a one-day visit to Lahore, the premier inaugurated health cards, under which 100% health insurance will be provided to poor families, in Punjab. The provincial government will be spending Rs440 billion on the project.
"By March 2022, all families in Punjab will get health cards," the prime minister promised. "You will see. In a few years, a web of hospitals will be spread across Pakistan. Private hospitals will be constructed even in the poorest areas of the country."
The premier reflected his memories when Khan's mother died of cancer in 1985. "I never realised until my mother had cancer that what an underprivileged families go through when someone their loved ones falls ill," he said.
The cancer treatment used to be very expensive, people falls into lifelong debts for its treatment just to save the family.
"I had to bring my mother back to Pakistan when her cancer got to the fourth stage and our family were helpless," he said. "This made me realise the need of a cancer hospital in Pakistan and I pledged to make Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital."
If you want to serve society so you have to make sure that no individual would feel helpless in medical emergencies, he added.
He lauded the government's policy in handling the pandemic and imposing "smart and micro-smart

ADB approves $385 million loan for KP’s urban development project

The Asian Development Bank or ADB has approved a $385 million loan to help improve the livability and community health of five cities in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In a statement on Friday, ADB said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project will help construct two clean water supply treatment facilities, three sewerage treatment facilities, and will rehabilitate dysfunctional tube wells among several other important subprojects in Abbottabad, Kohat, Mardan, Mingora, and Peshawar.

Under the new project, ADB will provide a $380 million loan and a $5 million grant, while the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will provide co-financing of $200 million.

ADB Director General for Central and West Asia Yevgeniy Zhukov said that more than 3.5 million people will benefit from improved access to clean and safe water, reliable and integrated waste management and sanitation services, green urban spaces, and gender-friendly urban facilities.

“About 150,000 households will gain new connections to water supply systems and have smart water meters installed in their homes,” he pointed out.

The project will help address the challenges of climate change and deteriorating municipal services of urban centers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“Large urban projects are often delayed due to their inherent complexity and competing interests in limited urban space,” Zhukov said.

Earlier, the Asian Development Bank approved a $603 million loan to Pakistan to strengthen and expand its Ehsaas Social Protection programs.

Using conditional cash transfers, the loan will support the implementation of Ehsaas Program, Pakistan’s national social protection, and poverty reduction strategy.

Under the Integrated Social Protection Development Program, ADB will provide a regular loan of $600 million and a $3 million grant from the Asian Development Fund. It will also administer a $24 million grant from the Education Above All Foundation.

Courtesy: Dawn

Ministerial body proposes major reforms in sugar sector

A ministerial panel on Wednesday called for major reform in the sugar sector, suggesting a shift in sugarcane pricing on the basis of sucrose content without any government role, freedom to import sugar but controlled export in case of surplus and imposition of heavy penalties for delayed sugarcane crushing and cartelisation by mills.

The Sugar Sector Reform Committee (SSRC), led by Energy Minister Hammad Azhar, was constituted by the federal cabinet in June 2020 following massive price hike in November 2019 and subsequent investigations by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

The crisis had shaken the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government in the Centre and Punjab, which led to parting of ways between Prime Minister Imran Khan and his long-time friend, Jehangir Khan Tareen.

The reform committee suggested a series of amendments to several federal and provincial laws and fixed new roles for Pakistan Commodities Exchange Control (PMEX) and Suparco to streamline the entire supply chain.

It suggested increasing the fine to Rs5 million as well as one-year imprisonment to late crushing mills and imposing Rs75 million worth of penalty for cartelisation.

The SSRC conceded that the sugar advisory board based in the Ministry of Industries and Production had viewed that the price hike in November 2019 was not due to market forces and had asked provinces to invoke price control and profiteering act to counter unfair market practices. However, later the board felt that 'there was real shortage of sugar", exerting pressure on prices, and therefore banned export of sugar but advocated imports.

The committee recommended strong media campaigns against use of sugar by people because of its health hazards as it noted that 30pc of the total sugar produced was consumed by households while the remaining 70pc was utilised for commercial use.

It said the major reason for price volatility and speculation was the result of unregistered supply chain at undisclosed locations.

Therefore, it suggested that the commodity should be deposited at accredited warehouses regulated by a collateral management company (CMC) after customer due diligence through electronic warehouse receipts while its trading and settlement records be maintained by PMEX to provide a level-playing field to market participants for efficient price discovery.

The committee recommended abolition of legislation by provincial governments on zoning of crops and leaving the choice of what to grow to farmers and market forces.

On the issue of delayed crushing, the committee observed that the Sugar Factories Control Act 1950 provided for crushing between the period starting from Oct 1 to Nov 30 each year, which was considerably a long period and should be curtailed.

The committee stressed the need to

provide enabling legal instruments to provinces for intervention in case of delayed crushing, and observed that legislation carried out by Sindh was ideal as no date was defined and the date for crushing was approved by the cabinet each year under the Sugar Factories Control Act 1950.

It also proposed amendments to Sugar Factories Control Act 1950 to do away with indicative price but called for giving two to three years' time to farmers to make adjustments.

Pricing of sugarcane should be according to the sucrose content and the provincial government should provide the latest equipment and laboratories to cane commissioners for testing of sucrose content and implementation of new pricing mechanism, it suggested.

The committee also called for adequate pricing of water on volumetric basis to avert market failure and remove externalities, leading to incorporation of actual cost of production of sugarcane. Under the new legislation, the provinces would be required to supply water to cropping areas.

It said farmers and the private sector should have free choice of area to cultivate crops and set up sugar mills through abolition of Sugar Factories Establishment & Enlargement Act 1966. The government would invest in efforts to improve seed technology and study beet sugar cultivation and the relevant authorities would initiate programmes for seed improvement to enhance sucrose content in sugarcane and increase per hectare yields as well as consume less water.

For improvement in forecasting and provision of accurate data of sugarcane crop, Suparco and provincial crop reporting departments need to collaborate and employ modern techniques for accurate reporting of data about sugarcane crop production to the federal government.

It also suggested a cost-benefit analysis of cultivation of different crops to review relative importance of crops for Pakistan viz-a-viz area under cultivation to enable the government to devise required interventions.

The State Bank of Pakistan would be required to issue advisory to commercial banks to inspect their pledged sugar stocks, and to verify, their presence with the collaboration of the Federal Board of Revenue and cane commissioners.

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan would be required to amend relevant laws for audit of cost accounts sugar mills.

Courtesy: Dawn

PTI issues Shaukat Tarin senate ticket from KP

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) has issued a senate ticket to Shaukat Fayaz Ahmed Tarin, advisor to to PM on finance and revenue.

Although Tarin comes from Karachi in the Sindh province, he is likely to be elected on a KP seat without resistance.

Once elected, it Tarin will be able work as federal minister on finance and preside over key government and parliamentary meetings.

In October, the government had to change the status of Shaukat Tarin from that of a federal minister to advisor to PM, as his six-month tenure as the federal minister came to an end.

According to the Constitution, a non-elected person can work as a federal minister for only six months. After that, the person needs to be elected either a member of the National Assembly or the Senate to continue working as the minister. Last month, PTI's senator from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ayub Afridi resigned from his seat to make for Tarin In return, Ayub has been

made PM's advisor on overseas Pakistanis and human resource development.

Courtesy: Dawn

NCOC allows Pakistanis to return from Category C countries

The Natio¬nal Command and Opera¬tion Centre (NCOC) on Tuesday allowed Pakistanis to travel inbound from category C countries.

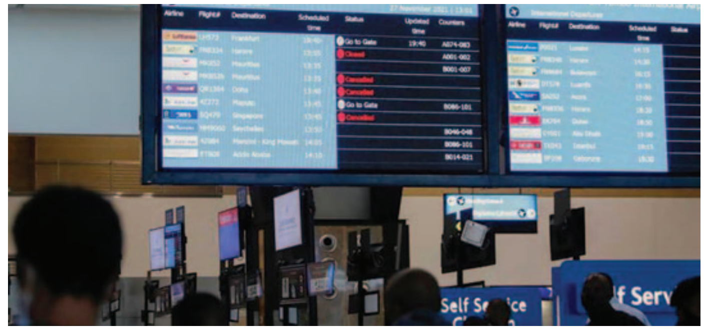
Meanwhile, 25 per cent of total population and 37pc of vaccine-eligible population of Pakistan has been inoculated.

To facilitate stranded passengers, a meeting of the NCOC decided to allow Pak¬istanis, including NICOP/POC holders, to travel inbound from category C countries till December 31. However, vaccination certificate, pre-boarding (maximum 48 hours old) PCR test and mandatory quarantine for travellers from Omicron-hit countries will remain applicable.

Moreover, as vaccination of people between 15 and 18 years of age has not begun in a few countries, mandatory full vaccination for inbound passengers of this age group has been exten¬ded till January 31, 2022.

After emergence of Omi¬cron variant of coronavirus, the NCOC had announced on December 6 that there were 15 countries in category C list and there would be a ban on inbound travel from there. Countries placed in category C are the Neth¬erlands, Hungary, Ukraine, Ireland, Zimbabwe, Slove¬nia, Vietnam, Poland, Croatia, South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini and Botswana.

As many as 13 countries were placed in category B, including the US, United Kingdom, Germany, Azerbaijan, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Russia, Thailand, France, Afghanistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Austria and Turkey. Remaining all countries were placed in A category. Inbound patients from countries in



C category have to follow NCOC guidelines which also include compulsory quarantine. Inbound passengers from category B countries need 100pc vaccination, PCR test and rapid antigen test (RAT) at airport and passengers from category A list need to clear RAT.

The data regarding vaccination shows that as many as 25pc of the total population of Pakistan, i.e. over 220 million, and 37pc of vaccine eligible population has become fully vaccinated. Overall 134,818,017 doses of vaccine have been administered.

Meanwhile, 250 new Covid-19 cases and three deaths were reported in last 24 hours with positivity rate of 0.67pc. The number of active cases was 9,120 out of which 773 patients were admitted to hospitals as of December 14.

The data shows that 3,342 ventilators are available across the country out of which 1,518 have been allocated for Covid-19 patients. However, only 71 ventilators were being used by Covid-19 patients across the country on Tuesday and occupancy was 5pc.

Courtesy: Dawn

Freight train launched to link Istanbul with Tehran, Islamabad

The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul freight train stands at Margalla Railway Station in the federal capital during the inauguration ceremony.

A freight train service was inaugurated here on Tuesday with an aim to boost trade between Pakistan, Iran and Turkey.

Minister for Railways Azam Khan Swati, along with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood, inaugurated the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) freight train at Margalla railway station. Ambassadors of Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were also present on the occasion.

The freight train service will play a vital role in improving the economies and lives of citizens of ECO member states by maximising economic efficiency and reducing the cost of doing business.

Railways Minister Swati highlighted the importance of ITI freight train and said this service would open doors for business and connectivity in the region. “The passenger train service will also start soon,” he said, adding: “We have opened our trade routes and it is a great opportunity for importers and exporters.”

Terming the ITI freight train an important milestone in Pakistan’s history, the minister said that business-to-business contact among the business community would further enhance through this train. He said the service would further strengthen relations between the three countries.

Razak Dawood said regional connectivity was one of very important pillars of Pakistan’s strategic trade policy framework and it was heartening to witness the resumption of operations of ITI freight train.

Foreign Minister Qureshi appreciated the resumption of ITI freight train and said the service would play an important role in regional

connectivity and promoting economic activity in the region.

Turkish Ambassador Mustafa Yurdakul expressed the hope that the train service would not stop at Istanbul only but go all the way to Europe which would benefit all regional countries as the economies bounced back in the post-Covid era.

According to Pakistan Railways, the first train from Islamabad to Istanbul was inaugurated on August 14, 2009. Similarly, the first train from Istanbul reached the Islamabad dry port on August 13, 2010.

So far eight trains have been dispatched from Pakistan to Turkey, with the last leaving the Lahore dry port on November 5, 2011. Since the launch of the service in 2009, Turkey has sent six trains to Pakistan, with the last one reaching here on December 9, 2011.

ITI freight train will be operated regularly on Tuesday of every week. The freight train had nine wagons initially, said a senior railway official.

As per present arrangement to start the train and the schedule agreed jointly by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, the running time between Drence-Kapikoy (Istanbul) and Zahidan-Tabraiz (Iran) will be 90 hours each. From Zahidan to Islamabad, the train would take 135.5 hours.

Courtesy: Dawn

Govt may rethink energy subsidy policy as misuse surfaces

Amid major gas supply constraints, the government may have to rethink its energy subsidy priorities after coughing up over Rs80 billion per annum in handouts to the export industry in the last over three years as it found little connection between subsidies and export growth, with the textile industry even reneging on its side of the pledge.

A senior government official told Dawn that the Ministry of Energy had received an independent study from three international reputed organisations The University of Chicago, The London School of Economics and Political Science and International Growth Centre which did not comprehensively support a narrative in the country that gas and electricity subsidies had direct link to export growth.

The ministries of energy, finance and planning are convinced about rent seeking and misuse in the textile sector, he said.

Also, the Ministry of Energy feels aggrieved by the textile industry's attempts to protect gas supplies and subsidies through courts instead of honouring its commitments to spare gas quantities being used in captive power plants (CPPs) while gas companies struggled to manage supplies for other priority sectors.

"They got stay orders against efficiency tests and minor adjustments in subsidised tariffs. They cannot have best of two worlds by squeezing the state," the official said.

This is on top of other subsidies and facilitations like DTRE, TERF and DLTL schemes as well as tax exemptions.

On the other hand, the influential All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) is seeking urgent intervention of the prime minister to block the energy ministry and related cabinet committees from additional steps including disruption in gas supplies.

The Ministry of Energy has been advised by some experts to get more specific studies done on urgent basis to conclude whether the return in the shape of export on each dollar of subsidy paid to the textile sector was justified. The ministry believed that the major part of their production went into the domestic market.

This was based on the study conducted by the above international institutions while examining the entire value chain of five export-oriented sectors between 2014 and 2020.

The study concluded that preferential tariffs had "limited effects on exports" and while partial evidence suggested gas subsidy increased the overall exports by 6pc, statistical evidence was weak. This highlighted the need for specific study for impact on textile export and the cost benefit analysis.

On the other hand, the study, however, confirmed larger increases in domestic sales for both gas and electricity subsidy.

It observed that subsidies had "smaller overall effects with much less statistical significance" and in overall terms concluded that" preferential tariffs are not a game changer.

"There may be positive effects, but the sensitivity of results suggests they do not lead to transformative changes", the study observed.

It also noted that largest firms in the export sector were receiving subsidies and, perhaps because of

political reasons, other eligible firms were not getting such subsidy.

The government has been providing subsidised gas and power at $6.5 per MMBTU and nine cents per kwh, respectively, for three years, but now finds it unsustainable and untargeted.

It estimates the cost of annual gas subsidy at Rs65bn and Rs20bn on power subsidy – leading to circular debt build up.

Official sources said about 1,870 export industries were currently getting uninterrupted gas on SNGPL network (mostly Punjab) while about 420 factories were on SSGCL network (mostly in Sindh). Because of gas crunch, about 375 factories with captive power plants had been disconnected because they were running their captive power plants (mostly inefficient) at subsidised gas while gas for their processes was still intact.

The official said the subsidy was originally meant for one year to revive the export sector but was later extended for another year till June 2020 because of Covid-19 challenges. The textile mills had agreed to end gas subsidy on June 30, 2020.

The energy ministry is now pushing for targeted subsidy to exporters based on export proceeds. Specifically for textile exports, it wants gas supply only for cloth-making and complete ban on gas consumption by CPPs as both the process and captive power plants have separate meters. The ministry believes that power supply at nine cents per unit was regionally competitive and a ban on gas to captive power would shift these mills to use power from the national grid.

On the other hand, the APTMA, in a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan, sought an urgent meeting.

It said the energy minister had assured the Punjab export sector of continued gas supply provided they agreed to increase the price to $9MMBTU from $6.5.

"The Punjab-based industry was thereof hit with a double whammy increase in gas price at $9, double that of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and load shedding from Dec 15. Under these circumstances, some member mills went to court on Dec 8 full six days after the CCOE and got stay on the basis of discrimination vs other provinces".

Claiming that 70pc of the textile industry was Punjab based and suspension of gas will bring 80pc of the industry to a complete halt, the APTMA said it would have "an extremely negative impact on exports and will bring to an end the extremely positive increase in exports and investment witnessed during the last year", adding that if the industry was "unable to deliver goods on order, orders once lost will be a permanent loss to Pakistan, and extremely difficult if not impossible to reverse", resulting in negative impact on employment and investments.

Courtesy: Dawn

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