

Positive Post



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February in History

February 2, 1948: Urdu is declared the national language of Pakistan.
February 8, 1949: Azad Kashmir Government shifts its capital

February 21, 1956: Constituent Assembly decides the country shall be a Federal Republic known as Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

February 2, 1957: President Iskandar Mirza laid down the foundation-stone of Guddu Barrage.

February 24, 1960: Presidential Cabinet decides to name the new Capital as Islamabad.

February 3, 1962: Prominent poet and Pakistan's Guinness world record holder Dr. Mubammad Saeed Fazal Karim Beebani born in Rawalpindi. He wrote Ghair Munqoot Naatia poetry book 'Mumdoob-e-Kirdigar' and Ghair Munqoot Hamdia poetry book 'Albumdulillah'.

February 13, 1973: Begum Rana Liaquat Ali becomes first woman to assume office of Sindh Governor.

February 01, 1978: Allama Iqbal's Lahore house is declared national monument.

February 11, 1996: Cricket World Cup jointly hosted by Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

February 03, 1997: Nation goes to the polls. PML secures 135 seats. February 17, 1997: Nawaz Sharif sworn in as 19th Prime Minister.

February 23, 1997: Nawaz Sharif launches "Qarz utaro Mulk sanwaro" scheme. Declares Sunday, instead of Friday as weekly holiday.

February 04, 2016: First season Pakistan Super League.

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 caused by 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.

Govt hoping PM Imran's China trip can reinvigorate CPEC

The government hopes that Prime Minister Imran Khan's four-day trip to China, which starts, will reinvigorate the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

"Twenty-one different sectors have been identified to be discussed with the Chinese leadership," Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told Dawn on Wednesday after attending a series of meetings chaired by Mr Khan at the Prime Minister House.

The sectors to be discussed during the PM's visit are related to the Special Economic Zones created under CPEC, trade, information technology, agriculture and the relocation of massive Chinese industries to Pakistan.

In a statement, the Foreign Office said PM Khan would hold bilateral meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.

Officials say govt hopes to open up 21 new sectors under the project, including trade, IT and agriculture

"The leaders will review the entire gamut of bilateral relations, with a particular focus on stronger trade and economic cooperation including CPEC," the statement said.

The FO also said that the prime minister was visiting China on the invitation of the Chinese leadership. There has been a general impression



that CPEC had slowed down ever since the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) came to power three years ago. However, the government expects the PM's upcoming visit would be a boost for projects that are either being executed or have yet to be launched under the ambit of CPEC.

Prime Minister Khan has repeatedly said that his government had changed the focus of CPEC from road infrastructure to industrialisation, energy and agriculture.

PM's Special Assistant on CPEC Khalid Mansoor told Dawn that this time around, they were better prepared and had done a comparative analysis of the opportunities Pakistan could provide to Chinese investors.

He said there were 10 different sectors that both countries

discussed bilaterally in joint working group meeting, but said that meetings had been arranged with influential Chinese industrialists, who will meet the PM during his visit.

According to the Foreign Office, the prime minister will be meeting with prominent business leaders, representatives of leading Chinese think-tanks, academia and the media during his stay in Beijing

Meanwhile, chairing a high level meeting ahead of his upcoming visit to China, the prime minister on Wednesday expressed confidence that his trip would take the strong bilateral ties that already existed between the two countries, to new heights.

The meeting was attended by federal ministers including Shaukat Tareen, Fawad Chaudhry, Asad Umer and Hammad Azhar as well

as Commerce Adviser Abdul Razak Dawood, State Minister Farrukh Habib, National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yousuf and Special Assistant Shahbaz Gill along with Kahlid Mansoor.

In addition to meetings on CPEC, PM Khan will also attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games during his visit to China.

"It is highly admirable that the Chinese government has made meticulous arrangements for holding the Winter Olympic Games despite the COVID-19 pandemic," the FO statement.

The prime minister's visit will mark the culmination of celebrations commemorating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, with more than 140 events organized to showcase the resilience of the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the unfolding international situation.

"It would thus renew the bilateral commitment to taking the iron-clad partnership between Pakistan and China to new heights and add impetus to cooperation across multiple domains," the FO statement said.

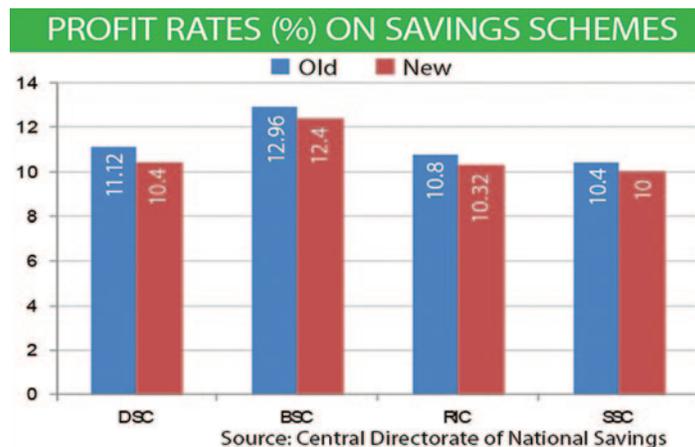
Courtesy: Dawn

Karachi: 20,000 appear in charity organization's IT admission test

The stands of Karachi's National Stadium were full Sunday, but it was not for a Pakistan Super League match. These 20,000 people are aspiring to get an admission into IT courses offered by a charity organisation.

An entry test was conducted by Saylani Welfare Organisation. President Arif Alvi, Saylani Welfare Organisation Chairman Maulana Bashir Farooq and Mufti Muneeb ur Rehman attended the event.

Addressing the occasion, President Alvi commended the efforts of



Saylani Welfare to usher a digital revolution in Pakistan.

He told the aspirants that their employment opportunities lie all over the world. "Word hard. Go out and change your destiny."

Talking about the program, Maulana Farooq said that one student, who worked as a carpenter and earned Rs8000, has now earned more than \$100,000 through freelancing on Upwork after receiving training under this program.

Courtesy: Dawn

PM Imran lands in Beijing on four-day official visit

Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived here on a four-day official visit during which he will join other world leaders attending the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Accompanied by a high-level delegation, including federal cabinet members, the prime minister will also meet the Chinese leadership.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf, Adviser on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Khalid Mansoor are part of the delegation.

On his arrival at Beijing Capital International Airport, the prime minister was received by Assistant Foreign Minister of China Wu Jianguo. Pakistan's Ambassador in Beijing Moeenul Haq and senior embassy officials were also present.

Besides attending the ceremony of Beijing Winter Olympics, PM Khan will also meet President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. During the meeting, they will discuss the ways of further promoting bilateral trade and economic cooperation, particularly under the CPEC framework, besides regional and international affairs.

Besides virtual interactions with prominent

Chinese business leaders, top think tanks, intellectuals and media, other bilateral meetings are also on the prime minister's agenda of the visit.

The government hopes that PM Khan's visit will reinvigorate the CPEC project. "Twenty-one different sectors have been identified to be discussed with the Chinese leadership," Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry had told Dawn on Wednesday after attending a series of meetings chaired by Imran Khan at the Prime Minister House.

The sectors to be discussed during the PM's visit relate to special economic zones created under CPEC, trade, information technology, agriculture and the relocation of massive Chinese industries to Pakistan.

This is the prime minister's fourth trip to China as he paid the last visit in October 2019. Prior to his visit, Prime Minister Khan ordered removal of red tape hindering the Chinese investment in Pakistan, besides doing away with 37 regulations to ensure one-window operation for foreign investors.

Pakistan and China supported each other in their fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and pushed forward high-quality development of CPEC. Beijing had invested over \$25 billion in Pakistan on CPEC projects generating 80,000 jobs, producing 5500MW of electricity and building over 500km of roads.



Pakistan-China cooperation against the Covid-19 pandemic has remained exemplary. President Dr Arif Alvi visited China in March 2020 to express solidarity with the Chinese people.

Pakistan is one of the earliest supporters and participants of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As BRI's flagship project, CPEC complements the Pakistan government's vision of economic sovereignty.

China's non-financial direct investment in countries under the BRI reached \$17.99bn from January to November 2021, up 12.7 per cent year-on-year despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and gloomy global investment environment.

CPEC is a transformational project. Among 70 early-harvest projects, 46 have been launched or completed with a total investment of \$ 25.4bn, creating 80,000 local jobs.

Courtesy: Dawn

Profits on all savings schemes slashed

Amid higher policy and reduced secondary market coupon rates, the Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) slashed profit rates on all national savings schemes, but increased these on savings bank accounts and short-term savings certificates.

The new rates would be applicable to deposits and investments made with effect from February 4. The State Bank of Pakistan had increased its discount rate by one per cent to 9.75pc on Dec 14, 2021, and kept it unchanged on Jan 24 this year.

The returns on savings accounts and certificates are linked with the central bank's policy rate and are normally kept slightly higher to ensure better returns to small savers without drastically affecting the government budget. The government has been increasing profits on savings schemes since May last year.

According to a series of notifications issued by the Ministry of Finance, the CDNS has slashed the profit rate on Defence Savings Certificate (DSC) to 10.40pc from 11.12pc fixed on December 10, 2021, showing a reduction of 72 basis points (bps). It stood at 9.29pc in May last year.

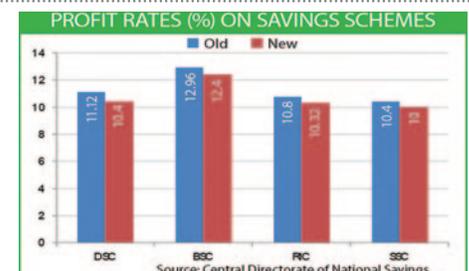
Likewise, the returns on Behood Savings

Certificate (BSC) and Shuhadas Family Welfare Account were reduced to 12.40pc from 12.96pc, down 56bps. The return on Regular Income Certificate (RIC) was reduced to 10.32pc of total investment from 10.80pc, down 48bps.

The returns on Special Savings Certificate (SSC) and Special Savings Account (six-month to 30-month tenor) were slashed to 10pc from 10.40pc, showing a reduction of 40bps. The return on three-year Special Savings Account was reduced by 20bps to 11.40pc from 11.60pc.

The return on Savings Bank Account (SBA) has been increased to 8.25pc from 7.25pc, up 100bps. Likewise, the return on Short-Term Savings Certificate (STSC) was increased to 9.68pc and that on three and six month tenors to 10.12pc from 9.24pc and 9.66pc, respectively, showing a reduction of 44bps and 46bps. However, the return on one year STSC was slightly reduced to 10.20pc from 10.26pc, down 6bps.

The CDNS has dispatched the revised rate sheets to all regional offices with instructions that the existing stock of blank special savings, regular income and defence savings certificates would now be used by affixing rubber stamps with



Issue57, Issue63 and Issue58, respectively, along with the revised rates before issuance.

Officials said the profit rates were revised even though the central bank had increased its policy rate by 125bps after the last revision in saving rates (from 8.5pc to 9.75pc) on December 14 last year. There were, however, some reductions in government papers.

The rates of national savings schemes are announced after every two months and are linked with cut off yield of long term Pakistan Investment Bonds. The returns on three-year and 10-year PIBs range between 10.79pc and 10.97pc, respectively, compared to 11.5pc and 11.76pc in December 2021.

An official said the rates had been revised downward due to the declining trend in secondary market yields on long-term PIBs and treasury bills.

Courtesy: Dawn

Islamabad, Beijing vow to boost links at all levels

Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday agreed to strengthen institutional links at all levels, cementing mutual strategic, diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries.

While exchanging views on the entire spectrum of bilateral relations, regional situation and international political landscape, the two leaders appreciated the finalisation of a number of agreements and memorandum of understanding in the fields of trade, infrastructure, industrial development, agriculture modernisation, science and technology and socio-economic well-being of local people.

The meeting held at the Great Hall of People was the last leg of PM Khan's four-day trip to China. During the visit, he attended the opening ceremony of Beijing Winter Olympics and met the Chinese premier, leaders of several countries and chairman of the China's National Development and Reform Commission. Mr Khan also had detailed discussions with corporate leaders and investors besides attending the luncheon hosted by Mr Xi in the honour of visiting heads of the states.

President Xi and PM Khan met for the first time since October 2019 when the latter visited China.

After completing the tour, the prime minister, along with his delegation, returned to Islamabad.

Later, in a tweet, PM Khan said he had a "great meeting" with the Chinese president. "We agreed to further enhance our strategic and economic relations and to fast track the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)," he said.

According to the Prime Minister Office (PMO), Mr Khan and Mr Xi reviewed the entire gamut of Pakistan-China bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, in a warm and cordial atmosphere.

The two leaders appreciated the signing of a number of agreements

covering industrial, space and vaccine cooperation.

Both leaders also acknowledged that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan would promote economic development and connectivity in the region and called on the international community to promptly assist the Afghan people in averting a humanitarian catastrophe.

PM Khan briefed President Xi on people-centered vision of geo-economics and his government's policies for Pakistan's sustainable growth and regional connectivity. He lauded China's continued support to Pakistan's socio-economic development that had greatly benefited from the high-quality development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Mr Khan welcomed increased Chinese investments in second phase of CPEC that centered on industrialization and improving people's livelihoods.

Sharing his views with President Xi on growing polarization in the world that threatened unraveling of global developmental gains and posed serious risks to the developing countries, Mr Khan highlighted that insurmountable challenges of climate change and growing inequalities could only be tackled through unqualified cooperation of all nations in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The PM lauded President Xi's visionary Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative (GDI) that called for collective action for sustainable development aimed at win win outcomes.

The prime minister observed that persecution of minorities in India and the atrocities in India-held Kashmir was a threat to regional peace and stability and pointed out that rapid militarisation of India was undermining regional stability. He noted that partnership between Pakistan and China was an anchor for peace and stability in the region and thanked China for its unwavering support to Pakistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national development.



While the Chinese side reaffirmed its support for Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty, independence and security, as well as promoting its socio-economic development and prosperity, the Pakistani side expressed its commitment to One-China Policy and support for China on Taiwan, South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet, according to a joint statement issued on the occasion.

Mr Khan congratulated the leadership and people of China on successful hosting of the Beijing Winter Olympics, extended his best wishes on the Chinese Lunar New Year and renewed his invitation to President Xi to undertake a visit to Pakistan at his early convenience.

The Chinese side appreciated the PM's launch of the Pakistan-China Business and Investment Forum, and vowed to enhance B2B cooperation between the business sectors of both countries.

Noting close bilateral cooperation in the areas of health, environment and information and communication technology, the two sides agreed to launch the China-Pakistan health, industry, trade, green and digital corridors.

Highlighting the significance of Gwadar as a central pillar of CPEC and important node in regional connectivity, they expressed determination to safeguard CPEC from all threats and negative propaganda. According to the '1+4' layout, the two sides agreed to jointly accelerate the construction and operation of Gwadar Port and build Gwadar low-carbon circular industry zone. They agreed to build high-quality livelihood projects for the socio-economic development of Gwadar city and its residents.

They also decided to expand bilat-

eral trade relations by fully utilizing the second phase of Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement. The Chinese side welcomed more of Pakistan's high-quality food and agricultural products to the Chinese market.

Hailing the establishment of Pakistan's pavilions on Chinese e-commerce platforms, the two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in e-commerce, setting up online payment systems and cooperating in logistics, warehousing and customs facilitation.

The two sides agreed to celebrate Pakistan-China Year of Tourism Exchanges in 2023 and to establish strong linkages between the tourism promotion agencies and private enterprises of the two countries. They agreed to make all-out efforts in support of greater civilisational exchanges between Pakistan and China and further expand cooperation for the conservation of heritage. The leaders welcomed the organizing of a Gandhara art exhibition at Palace Museum in Beijing in 2022. Both sides agreed to continue the momentum in defence cooperation at various levels between the armed forces of Pakistan and China. They underscored that stronger defence and security cooperation between Pakistan and China was an important factor of peace and stability in the region. China recognized Pakistan's sacrifices and efforts in the fight against terrorism. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

They reiterated that a peaceful and prosperous South Asia was in the common interest of all parties and emphasized the importance of pursuit of dialogue and resolution of all outstanding disputes to promote regional cooperation.

Courtesy: Dawn

Saudi Arabia eases travel restrictions for Pakistani pilgrims

While Pakistan achieved another milestone in the fight against coronavirus by vaccinating over two million people in a day, Saudi Arabia has eased travel restrictions for the pilgrims from Pakistan intending to perform Umrah by revising the Covid-19 guidelines.

The development coincided with the national positivity rate dropping to 5.34 per cent across the country, where less than 3,000 cases were reported in a day after a one-month hiatus.

According to the fresh guidelines for pilgrims from Pakistan intending to perform Umrah, at the time of departure the travellers will be required to submit only a negative PCR test report that should not be more than 48 hours old.

The new directives will apply with effect from Feb 16 to all people intending to perform Umrah regardless of their vaccination or immunity status, Radio Pakistan reported. A National Command and Opera-

tion Centre (NCOC) document available with Dawn mentioned seven vaccines Sinopharm, Sinovac, PakVac or Cansino, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Sputnik were being administered to people across the country. It showed that 68pc population is vaccine eligible, with 153,615,747 (153.6m) of 228,567,704 (228.5m) people being eligible for vaccine.

The NCOC data showed 2,017,179 doses were administered during the past one day. Overall 187,996,736 (187.9m) doses have been administered. While 111,408,710 (111.4m) people have received at least one dose, 87,052,879 (87m) of them have become fully vaccinated. Besides, 3,114,587 (3.1m) people have also received booster shots.

As the country managed to administer record over 2m doses in a day, Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Faisal Sultan in a congratulatory message tweeted: "Highest daily vaccine doses administered yesterday in



Pakistan. Over 2 million. Well done everyone!."

However, according to the NCOC data, 37 patients died and 2,799 more cases were detected in past 24 hours. There were as many as 1,668 patients in critical care on Tuesday. As the number of cases reported on a daily cases dropped, major cities including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad reported less than 10pc positivity while seven cities mainly in northern parts of the country reported over 10pc positivity.

Karachi that had been showing around 40pc positivity just a few

weeks ago reported 7.65pc positivity, Islamabad's positivity rate fell to 8.53pc, Lahore 4.19, Rawalpindi reported 2.36pc, whereas 2.2pc positivity was recorded in Faisalabad.

The highest positivity rate was reported in Peshawar where 22.39pc samples tested positive. Gilgit reported 19.63pc, Mardan 19.24pc, Nowshera 15.48pc, Hyderabad 15.08pc, Abbottabad 12.44pc and Mirpur reported 10.61pc positivity. Since its outbreak, the deadly virus has claimed 29,553 lives. Of those patients, 38pc aged above 81 years, followed by 21pc of those between 71 and 81 years.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan finally owns woman languishing in Indian jail

Pakistan has finally issued a citizenship certificate for Sumaira, a woman languishing in an Indian detention centre, paving way for her return to Pakistan with her daughter soon.

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed announced on Thursday that his ministry had issued a citizenship certificate for Sumaira, who is languishing in a detention centre in the Indian city of Bangalore, after verification of her family tree by the National Database and Regulatory Authority (Nadra).

He said the certificate had been sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan's High Commission in New Delhi would issue a travel document to her, allowing her to return to Pakistan along with her four-year-old daughter.

The issue of the Pakistani-origin woman languishing in a Bangalore detention centre along with her daughter was raised in the Senate on Monday by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Irfan Siddiqui.

According to a BBC report, a family bearing Pakistani citizenship was living in Qatar. There, a Pakistani girl called Sumaira married an Indian boy who took her to India without a visa. Later, Sumaira was arrested and subsequently sentenced to three years in prison. Two months later, she gave birth to a baby girl. Her husband left her during the period when she was under custody.

After her release from prison, Sumaira is living at a Bangalore detention centre with her daughter.

Sumaira's lawyer Sahana Biswa Patna said she had been trying to contact the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi and the foreign ministry in Pakistan for the last six months to verify Sumaira's citizenship, but to no avail.

While expressing sympathy over the case of an Indian girl, Muskaan, Senator Siddiqui had said in the Senate that "something should also be done for Pakistan's daughter Sumaira". He asked Leader of the House in Senate Dr Shahzad Wasim to take up



the matter with the government. The Senate chairman issued a ruling that Senator Siddiqui and the leader of the house should work out a plan of action in this regard.

The issue was raised again by Senator Siddiqui in the house on Thursday, when the opposition members were staging a walkout.

"I raised the issue in the house on Feb 14 and five days down the road not a word has been said about Sumaira by the foreign ministry or the government," he said. The PML-N senator also said the government's "indifference towards the plight of Sumaira and her daughter is deplorable".

"She remained in jail for four years.

No one came to her rescue. The people of Bangalore collected and paid a fine of Rs100,000 for her release from jail, but our embassy in Delhi remained asleep."

In response, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad Khan promised that the government would take notice of the issue and the house would be informed of the progress made in this regard.

Senator Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar supported the demand made by Senator Siddiqui. The Senate chairman then directed the interior and foreign ministries to submit progress reports on the steps taken in Sumaira's case on a daily basis to the Senate Secretariat.

Courtesy: Dawn

PM Imran looking to reinvigorate ties during Russia trip

Prime Minister Imran Khan would during his two-day official visit to Russia, which begins from Wednesday, seek to further cement bilateral relations with Moscow.

The Foreign Office announced the prime minister's trip, saying Mr Khan will visit Russia on Feb 23-24 on the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including members of the cabinet, on the "official visit", the FO said.

"The visit of the prime minister will contribute to further deepening of the multifaceted Pakistan-Russia bilateral relationship and enhancement of mutual cooperation in diverse fields," it added.

The announcement was made amidst growing uncertainty about the visit due to fears of a likely war between Russia and Ukraine, and the evolving political scenario at home.

It will be the first bilateral visit by a Pakistani prime minister to Russia in nearly 23 years. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif last visited Moscow in 1999.

The FO said Mr Khan's meeting with President Putin would be "the highlight of the visit".

The two leaders would during their meeting review the state of bilateral cooperation, especially in the energy sector, besides exchanging views on regional and global issues. The FO identified Afghanistan and Islamophobia as the two issues that they are expected to discuss.

The visit in fact resulted from PM Khan's call to President Putin on Jan 17 for praising him for his criticism of the incidents of blasphemy in Western countries.

The prime minister had on that occasion tweeted that he had called President Putin "primarily to express appreciation for his emphatic statement that freedom of speech could not be a pretext to abuse our Holy Prophet (PBUH). He is the first Western leader to show empathy & sensitivity to Muslim sentiment for their beloved Holy Prophet (PBUH)".

Mr Putin appreciated Mr Khan's gesture as it reinforced the perception that he was sympathetic to Muslim causes, especially in view of the Russia's nearly 25 million strong Muslim community.

Relations between the former cold war foes have gradually improved over the past nearly 12 years. They were brought closer by developments in Afghanistan, transformation in geo-political environment and Russian concerns about terrorism and narcotics trafficking.

The upward trajectory in bilateral ties is visible from high-level engagements the two sides have held over these years and the institutional mechanisms they have established to sustain this momentum.

The two developments that in particular supported this rapprochement were the signing of a bilateral defence cooperation agreement in 2014 and Pakistan's inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation



with Russian backing in 2017.

Both sides say their ties are marked by "mutual respect, trust and convergence of views on a range of international and regional issues".

Although Islamabad-Moscow ties continue to remain security oriented, at the same time efforts are afoot for expanding economic cooperation. Russia is particularly interested in the energy sector and is likely to invest in the construction of the 1100km-long Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline that is planned for transporting gas from Karachi to Kasur. The two sides are currently negotiating shareholding and facilitation agreements of the project.

In an interesting balancing act ahead of Prime Minister Imran Khan's upcoming visit to Moscow, Pakistan on Monday expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Ukraine's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Emine Dzheppar tweeted that Pakistan's Ambassador retired Major Gen Noel Israel Khokhar met her and expressed support for her country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. "Grateful to Pakistan for supporting Ukraine's

sovereignty and territorial integrity," she said.

The timing of the meeting is being seen as very significant as it took place days before PM Khan will be visiting Russia at a time of its heightened tensions with Ukraine.

Analysts have read it as a balancing act by Pakistan. For over a decade now, Pakistan's ambassador in Kyiv has been a retired military officer. Defence cooperation between Pakistan and Ukraine, particularly in the field of defence production, has been growing as several projects are under way on the basis of transfer of technology and joint ventures between both sides.

In 2020, Ukraine won the contract for repair of IL-78 air-refueller. Meanwhile, Ukrainian-built T-80UD tanks are crucial part of Pakistan's armoured corps.

Ukraine has, moreover, emerged as a major market for wheat import for Pakistan. In 2020-21, Pakistan imported nearly 1.2 million tonnes of wheat from Ukraine.

Any escalation in the Ukraine-Russia crisis can, therefore, also impact Pakistan's food security.

Courtesy: Dawn

PIA plans direct flights from Karachi, Lahore to Baku

The country's national flag carrier has finalised a plan to operate direct flights from Karachi and Lahore to Azerbaijan's capital and commercial centre, Baku.

A spokesman for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) said in a press release on Thursday that it would operate two direct flights a week to Baku; one from Karachi and the other from Lahore.

The first flight was scheduled to depart from Karachi's Jinnah International on Wednesday, while the other will take off from Lahore's Allama Iqbal International on March 19.

The spokesman said these flights would cater to the long-standing demand of citizens of both countries, especially Pakistanis residing in Azerbaijan.



He said Baku enjoyed a good reputation as a tourist destination and now, passengers would be able to easily travel directly from Karachi and Lahore to Baku on direct PIA flights.

PIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Air Marshal Arshad Malik has congratulated airline officials on finalising the flight arrangements, adding that plans to add more locations to the PIA network were also in the pipeline.

The CEO also directed the airline marketing and other sectors to provide best services to passengers in the light of the prime minister's vision to promote tourism in the country.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Iran form joint working group on border issues

Pakistan and Iran established a joint working group of their interior ministries to deal with border-related matters. The group was set up during a daylong visit of Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi.

The Iranian minister met Prime Minister Imran Khan, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed and Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Bajwa. The discussions, which took place in the backdrop of recent terrorism incidents in Balochistan, were dominated by border security.

Mr Vahidi's visit followed close on the heels of ISI Chief Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum's unannounced trip to Iran over the past few days.

Before his departure, the Iranian minister told IRNA that during his meeting with his Pakistani counterpart a joint working group of the interior ministries of Iran and Pakistan was formed. The members would remain in regular contact.

Iranian interior minister meets his Pakistani counterpart, PM, COAS. The joint working group has a broader mandate covering both security and non-security matters pertaining to the border with an aim to promote bilateral cooperation. It would deal with terror-related con-

cerns, cross-border crimes, drug trafficking, issues related to border crossings, and construction and operation of border markets.

Mr Vahidi acknowledged that border security was one of the main topics discussed in the meetings. "Border security is important for both neighbours as certain elements want to create differences between the two friendly and brotherly countries of Iran and Pakistan and damage the bilateral ties," he maintained.

Statements from PM Office and Inter-Services Public Relations also underscored border security.

While meeting Mr Vahidi, PM Khan called for "joint cooperation to address security issues".

Gen Bajwa made a similar pitch in his meeting with the visiting Iranian minister.

"Terming Pak-Iran border as border of peace and friendship, COAS highlighted the need to put in collective efforts to deny any space or liberty of action to be exploited by miscreants along the Pak-Iran border," the ISPR stated.

Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, meanwhile, emphasised



early completion of border fencing. According to the interior ministry, Mr Ahmed said territories of Iran and Pakistan could not be used against each other.

Border security has long remained a major cause of distrust in Pak-Iran ties. The two countries share a 909km-long border infested with criminal gangs, militants and drug traffickers, while there have been several violent incidents in which security forces were targeted.

Steps taken by the two countries, including institution of several border mechanisms, and border fencing have helped improve the situation. However, the incidents that happen from time to time keep straining the relations.

Mr Vahidi proposed making the bilateral border commission more

active and streamlining the process of interaction and cooperation between the border guards of the two countries.

The two sides in their meeting deliberated on operationalising of border markets.

Mr Vahidi said activation of border markets was important for the people of border regions and there was consensus between the two sides on this issue, but there were some infrastructure issues that needed to be urgently resolved.

"The prime minister also stressed early completion and operationalisation of the border sustenance markets for economic uplift of the people living on both sides of the border," according to the PM Office.

Courtesy: Dawn

PIA to operate special flights for Ukraine-based Pakistanis in Poland

The Pakistan International Airline has decided to run two special flights to Poland on Sunday, February 26. They will bring back Pakistanis evacuated from war-torn Ukraine.

Air Marshal Arshad Malik, CEO of the national carrier, said the airplanes will land in Poland's capital Warsaw after Pakistanis are transported there from Ukraine.

"PIA is in contact with the Pakistan embassy and its officials," he assured, adding that two flights are being run because cities bordering Poland and Ukraine don't have airports that can accommodate bigger airplanes.



There are approximately 1500 Pakistanis stuck in Ukraine at the moment. Nearly 500 of them are students. So far, 35 of them have been evacuated to the Polish capital.

The situation in Ukraine worsened after Russian President Vladimir Putin initiated a military operation against the neighbouring country earlier this week.

On Friday, the Pakistan Embassy in Ukraine told students to travel Ternopil where the embassy would help transport stranded Pakistanis, including students, "for onward evacuation". The announcement came after a video of Pakistani students stranded at a metro station in Kyiv surfaced over the internet. They claimed that the embassy had proved unhelpful.

They have requested Prime Minister Imran Khan to get them evacuated by whatever means it was possible. They said they had nothing to eat or drink at the metro station and had run out of cash because ATMs were not working.

Courtesy: Samma

Bill Gates lauds Pakistan's 'inspiring' efforts to end polio

Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates had a chock-a-block schedule on Thursday during his first trip to the country that included meetings with the prime minister, the president and other national and provincial leaders, a luncheon and a ceremony to confer on him one of the country's highest civil awards.

Mr Gates also visited the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) and chaired a meeting of the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) on polio. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) is part of a global initiative between governments and international organisations fighting the crippling disease.

Welcoming Mr Gates, Prime Minister Imran Khan thanked the BMGF for its continued support and partnership with the government in polio eradication.

"Polio eradication is a top priority for our government," said Mr Khan. "We are working at all levels to ensure every child is protected with the polio vaccine and are grateful for the continued partnership and support from the BMGF and our other polio partners. We have a clear plan to eliminate this virus, and I am committed to seeing it implemented in full so that Pakistan can help secure a polio-free world."

Microsoft co-founder meets top officials, receives Hilal-i-Pakistan on maiden visit

With Pakistan and Afghanistan being the only two countries fighting wild polio circulation, PM Khan also spoke about the situation in the neighbouring country. "Afghanistan being the primary



source of polio incidence in our two bordering provinces requires urgent international support to avert a humanitarian crisis, including a health emergency. Pakistan is providing full support for the sake of 40 million Afghans in the provision of basic amenities," he stressed.

The premier directed deputy commissioners of the districts adjoining Afghanistan, particularly those of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to remain vigilant and proactive against spread of poliovirus.

While calling Pakistan's commitment to ending polio "inspiring", Mr Gates said the country was near the end-game against the disease. "Pakistan's commitment to ending polio is inspiring," he said. "Government leaders, health workers, and parents are working tirelessly to ensure this disease never paralyses a child again. This is the final, and hardest, phase of the eradication effort, but by keeping up the momentum and staying vigilant, Pakistan has an opportunity to make history by ending polio for good."

Mr Gates thanked PM Khan for inviting him and extending warm hospitality on his first-ever visit to Pakistan. He acknowledged that despite Covid-19 restrictions, Pakistan performed amazingly and

continued to administer the polio vaccine.

The National Task Force on Polio Eradication paid tribute to the 36 frontline workers and 14 law enforcement personnel who had lost their lives during vaccination campaigns across the country.

The meeting was attended by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Shah Farman, the chief ministers of Punjab, KP and Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan Niazi, the health ministers of Sindh and Balochistan, representatives of international organisations and other senior officers. Deputy commissioners from across Pakistan joined via video link.

Earlier, Prime Minister Khan held a one-on-one meeting with Mr Gates and also hosted a lunch in his honour. The lunch was also attended by federal ministers Shaukat Tarin, Asad Umer, Fawad Chaudhry, Khusro Bakhtiar, Dr Sultan and others.

Later, at the Presidency, President Dr Arif Alvi conferred the Hilal-i-Pakistan one of the country's highest civil awards on Mr Gates in recognition of his philanthropic

services for humanity, eradication of polio and betterment of the people of Pakistan.

"Pakistan is trying to improve the nutritional needs of mother and child and in this regard Ehsaas has a very good programme. Pakistan is looking forward to an outstanding cooperation with Microsoft in the IT sector. The country has a huge youth bulge that could enormously help to meet the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution," the president said.

The Microsoft co-founder also met with the PM's Special Assistant on Poverty Alleviation Dr Sania Nishtar to discuss the progress in poverty alleviation through the Ehsaas programme, and later visited the NCOC where he received a briefing.

Then at the NEOC, he was briefed on the successes and challenges of polio eradication in the country and also visited the operations room. Dr Faisal Sultan, Health Secretary Amir Ashraf Khawaja, NEOC Coordinator Dr Shahzad Baig and Deputy Coordinator Dr Akram Shah accompanied him during the visit.

Dr Sultan highlighted the contributions of the federal and provincial governments, the polio staff, and frontline healthcare workers towards reaching the eligible population during routine vaccination campaigns in the country.

"We are focused on building the capacity of district government-led teams, especially in high-risk areas of south KP, to provide leadership in identifying challenges, design, and implement corrective actions to reach the goal of a polio-free Pakistan," he stated.

Courtesy:Dawn

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