

SPORTS

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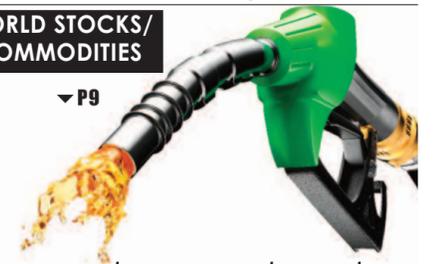
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WORLD STOCKS/COMMODITIES

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Venezuela congress slams oil deals with US, French companies



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Accords with IPPs are a noose around our necks: CJP

Millions paid to IPPs even if they produced electricity or not

By Our Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar on Wednesday remarked agreements made with independent power producers (IPPs) have become a noose around our necks.

Secretary power division, counsels of power companies and representatives of IPPs appeared before the court as a bench headed by the chief justice heard a suo motu case of excessive payments made to IPPs. As the hearing went under way, Justice Ijazul Ahsan turned to the power secretary and said, "As per the report, each IPP was paid an excessive amount of Rs159 million. You made payments based on capacity."

Further, the chief justice remarked, "Millions of rupees of the nation were given away whether they generated electricity or not. Across the world, such agreements are being cancelled."

The secretary power told the court, "Whether electricity is taken or not, payments are made based on capacity." At this, the chief justice said, "Million and billions of rupees are just paid like that. We are sending this matter to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Justice Faisal Arab then questioned, "The government faced a shortfall of electricity, did you not supply it?" The counsel for the power company responded, "National Power Construction Corporation (NPCC) determines the demand and when it tells, IPPs produce electricity."

Commenting on the remarks of the power company's counsel, the chief justice said, "Agreements with IPPs have become a noose around our necks. We don't know

who those people were who made these agreements. Whether electricity was provided or not, money was given. These people were darlings." "The circular debt rose to millions and billions. Neither people nor industries got electricity but IPPs kept getting money," he added.

Turning to the power secretary, CJ Nisar said, "I need to understand this case. You must have made a presentation which you keep showing to the prime minister." The court then summoned Federal Minister for Power Omar Ayub Khan and went on break.

If OLMT is not completed, it will be non-compliance: CJP

CJ Mian Saqib Nisar has remarked Orange Line Metro Train (OLMT) is a gift for people of Lahore and if the project is not completed then it will be considered non-compliance of court's orders.

He further remarked "we will also travel by it when this train runs". A three-member bench of SC presided over by CJP took up Orange Line Train project case Wednesday for hearing.

Naeem Bokhari, counsel for private contractor companies appeared before the court saying that the basic reason behind delay in completion of this project is we are not being paid money for this work.

CJP remarked what payments have to be made by LD A to companies working on orange line train project, their cheques should be deposited in SC.

The contractors can get their cheques with regard to their construction work by depositing bank guarantee in SC.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan chairs meeting on "Ease of doing Business" at the PM's Office.

World Bank predicts growth to slow in 2019

Pakistan, WB sign \$100m accord for 'Sindh Solar Energy Project'

By Our Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The growth of the global economy is expected to slow to 2.9 percent in 2019 compared with three percent in 2018, the World Bank said late Tuesday, citing elevated trade tensions and international trade moderation.

"At the beginning of 2018 the global economy was firing on all cylinders, but it lost speed during the year and the ride could get even bumpier in the year ahead," World Bank Chief Executive Officer Kristalina Georgieva said in the semi-annual Global Economic Prospects report here. The World Bank outlook comes as the United States and China have been engaged in a bitter trade dispute, which has jolted financial markets across the world for months.

The two economies have imposed tariff duties on each other's goods, although there were signs of progress on Tuesday as the two countries prepared to enter a third day of talks in Beijing.

Growth in the United States is likely to slow to 2.5 percent this year from 2.9

percent in 2018, while China is expected to grow at 6.2 percent in the year compared with 6.5 percent in 2018, according to the World Bank. Emerging market economies are expected to grow at 4.2 percent this year, with advanced economies expected to grow at 2 percent, the World Bank said in the report.

Another report adds: The government of Pakistan and World Bank here on Wednesday signed a Financing Agreement worth \$100.0 million for "Sindh Solar Energy Project" with the objective to increase solar power generation and access to electricity in the Province.

The project will support the deployment of solar power in Sindh spanning three market segments: utility scale, distributed generation, and at the household level. Utility-Scale Solar includes development of solar parks to support private sector investment and launching of Pakistan's first competitive bidding for solar power production, starting with an initial 50 MW pilot solar auction.

Distributed solar includes at least 20 MW of distributed solar PV on the

rooftops and other available space on and around public sector buildings in Karachi, Hyderabad and other districts of Sindh Province. Provision of Solar Home Systems to 200,000 households in areas with low or no electricity access.

The total cost of the project is \$105.0 million. The International Development Association (IDA) will extend financing of \$100.0 million for the project and Government of Sindh will contribute \$5.0 million. Public funding will be used to leverage private sector investment and/or expertise in the three segments, with an emphasis on long-term sustainability, developing domestic solar PV experience, and the emergence of self-sustaining markets.

The Project will introduce and showcase international best practice with renewable energy auctions, reduce the headline cost of solar deployment, create sustainable business models for potential replication, build institutional and private sector capacity, and identify opportunities for future renewable energy deployment that address issues of grid integration.

PSX lands in the red after volatile session

By Our Staff Correspondent

KARACHI: Breaking its two-day winning streak, the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) ended the session on Wednesday in red. Indices swung aggressively in both directions until they finally picked the negative path to end lower.

The World Bank has projected Pakistan's economic growth to slow down to 3.7 percent in the current financial year 2018-19, as per latest semi-annual report. During FY2017-18, the growth rate estimated by the bank was recorded at 5.8 percent. After a positive start to the day, the KSE 100 index benchmark reached its intraday high of 39,267.53 (up by 215.03 points) shortly after the commencement of the session.

It then oscillated in both directions thereafter, touching its day's low of 38,816.50.

It finally ended on the lower side at 38,921.69 after losing 130.81 points. The KMI 30 index fell short by 154.46 points to settle at 65,685.24 points, while the KSE All Share index declined by 137.52 points, closing at 28,638.56. The advancers to decliners ratio stood at 101 to 224.

Trading volumes reduced from 166.79 million in the previous session to 133.85 million. Pak Elektron Limited (PAEL +2.38 percent) was the volume leader of the day with 25.12 million shares swapping hands. Unity Foods Limited (UNITY -3.95 percent) and Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGC +4.06 percent) were next in line. The stocks had traded 11.66 million shares and 8.98m shares respectively. Although the overall market trend was negative, the oil and gas exploration sector managed to end with a slight gain of 0.72pc in its cumulative market capitalization. POL appreciated by 3.53pc, while Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDC +0.27pc), PPL +0.79pc and Mari Petroleum Company Limited (MARI +0.06pc) also closed with minor gains.

Major decliners included vanaspati and allied industries sector (-2.47pc), tobacco sector (-2.24pc), jute sector (-1.70pc), engineering sector (-1.69pc) and transport sector (-1.43pc). On the other hand, woolen sector (+4.89pc), synthetic and rayon sector (+2.54pc) and miscellaneous sector (+2.22pc) ended as gainers.



Pakistani passport remains fifth worst globally: Henly index

The Business Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani passport has moved up two spots on the 2019 Henly Passport Index but continues to remain the fifth-worst passport globally, offering its holders visa-free access to just 33 countries.

In the newly unveiled index, Pakistan occupies the 102nd spot as compared to the 104th spot in the previous list, reflecting a two-spot jump for the green passport. However, as was the case with the 2018 index, the Pakistani passport is better than only four other countries: Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Henly Passport Index is a ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. The rank-

ing is based on data from the International Air Transport Association, which maintains the world's largest and database of travel information, and it is enhanced by extensive, ongoing research by the Henley & Partners Research Department.

Japan holds top spot on the Henly Passport Index for the second year running, offering citizens visa-free access to a record 190 destinations, whereas Singapore continues to hold 2nd place, along with South Korea, which has moved up from 3rd place, with citizens able to access 189 destinations.

From the 2nd place it held at the beginning of 2018, Germany now drops to 3rd place, with access to 188 destinations. It shares this position with France.

Denmark, Italy, Finland, and Sweden share joint 4th place, with access to 187

destinations around the globe. The UK, meanwhile, drops from 4th place to 6th place, while the US drops from 5th place to 6th place, with visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 185 destinations.

In further demonstrations of Asian passport power, China moved five places up the rankings from the beginning of 2018, from 74th to 69th, while Cambodia (84th), Laos (86th), and Myanmar (90th) have each moved up four places.

Elsewhere, the Indian passport occupies the 79th spot in the rankings, sandwiched between African nations Ghana and Mozambique. The UAE climbed five places up the rankings, from 27th place at the beginning of 2018, to 22nd place currently. Afghanistan and Iraq continue to hold joint last place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of just 30.

PM forms body to deal with gas shortfall: Fawad

By Our Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Federal Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said on Wednesday that Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced removing the in-charges of Sui Southern and Sui Northern gas companies keeping in view the ongoing gas shortage.

On his Twitter account, the federal minister said that in the recent days the public is facing gas shortage and the PM had constituted an inquiry committee to look into the matter. He said that the report was presented to the PM on Tuesday, after which he made the decision. PM Imran Khan, in a cabinet meeting, had directed concerned authorities to resolve the issue of gas shortfall in the country with a week's time.

The meeting was briefed about steps taken to address gap in demand and supply of gas in the country. The managing director of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) informed the participants about steps taken against the use of gas compressors and that 5,000 gas connections were disconnected over the use of illegal compressors.

Assets of banned outfits frozen, Pak tells FATF

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani delegation on Wednesday told the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) Asia Pacific Group (APG) that the bank accounts and assets of banned outfits have been frozen, a local media outlet reported.

The FATF had placed Pakistan on its grey list in June last year owing to poor Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering of Terrorist Financing (CTF) regulations. A Pakistani delegation held meetings with the APG in Sydney to brief on Pakistan's progress over the matter.

The bank accounts and assets of Jamaatud Dawaa and its welfare wing the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation have been frozen, the APG was informed.

The delegation also added that the bank accounts and assets of ISIS, Taliban, al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Haqqani Network have also been blocked. —Online

Packages found at Pak consulate in Australia

SYDNEY: Australian police are investigating the delivery of suspicious packages sent to foreign embassies and consulates in Melbourne and Canberra, police and embassy sources told media Wednesday. The packages — which are still being examined but are not believed to be harmful — were delivered to facilities in the capital and several addresses across the southern Australian city, police confirmed.

"The packages are being examined by attending emergency services," the Australian Federal Police said in a statement.

The British consulate in Melbourne was among those targeted. We are liaising closely with the (Australian Federal Police) and the local authorities regarding the situation. All our staff are safe and accounted for," said a British High Commission spokesperson. —Online

Take steps to address business constraints in Sindh: PM

By Our Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has emphasized the need for greater focus on addressing issues related to ease of doing business in Sindh, in view of the Karachi's importance as the financial hub of the country.

The PM on Wednesday chaired a meeting to review progress on improving the ease of doing business. It was decided during the meeting that regular ease of doing business meetings would be chaired by the PM in the presence of all chief ministers and provincial chief secretaries.

It was also decided that dedicated EoDB offices would be set up at federal and provincial levels for the purpose of removing bottlenecks and facilitating investors in the smooth

business operations.

The Board of Investment (BoI) Chairman briefed the prime minister about progress on various indicators related to ease of doing business.

The meeting was informed that the number of tax payments has been brought down from 47 to 21, adding that efforts are underway to introduce e-payments of social security contributions in Sindh and Punjab. Similarly, he said, efforts are also being made to improve risk management system to reduce the number of physical audits.

About the ease of starting a business, the prime minister was informed that integration of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan with provincial portals and Employees Old-Age Benefit Organisation (EOBI) has been completed in Punjab and ef-

forts are underway to expedite the launch of a similar portal in Sindh.

On ease in getting electricity, the PM was informed that significant progress has been made to facilitate the provision of power and timely information to the businesses.

The meeting was also briefed about the steps being taken to facilitate trading across borders and reducing clearance time in imports and exports.

Briefing the meeting about various positive developments with regards to investment facilitation, it was informed that MoU on industrial cooperation has been signed with China last month. The meeting was attended by Finance Minister Asad Umar, Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razzak Dawood, Advisor to Prime Minister Dr Ishrat Hussain, and BOI Chairman Haroon Sharif.

PM takes action against gas shortage

Putting responsibility of the acute gas shortage in the country on heads of the gas utilities companies, PM Imran Khan on Wednesday sacked managing directors of the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL).

The decision was confirmed by Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who spoke out on Twitter, saying that in light of the crippling gas shortage being faced by the public, the country's premier had constituted a committee to probe the issue.

Chaudhry added that in view of the inquiry committee's report, Premier Imran decided to remove the heads of the country's gas utilities companies.

PM Imran had received the report on the gas crisis in a cabinet commit-

tee on energy meeting on Tuesday.

Earlier, the petroleum division secretary had held the managing directors of the two companies responsible for the gas crisis. The Petroleum Division secretary, in his report sent to Prime Minister Imran, had said that the management of Sui gas companies was responsible for the gas crisis.

The government had initiated an inquiry into the conduct of the heads of these gas companies, believing they had concealed facts about the operation of gas compressors.

The PM had earlier rejected a fact-finding report on the gas crisis submitted by a committee headed by Ogra Chairman Uzma Adil and directed the Petroleum Division secretary to reinstate investigation in a bid to identify the officials and lobbies responsible for the gas crisis.