

Maryam visits Khokhar Palace

LAHORE: PML-N senior vice president Maryam Nawaz has visited Khokhar Palace and termed the demolition of Khokhar Palace a political victimization by Punjab government. She met Khokhar brothers therein. During the meeting Party leaders including Saif-ul-Malik Khokhar, Afzal Khokhar and others and workers of the party were also present during the meeting. Maryam Nawaz said these leaders and workers of PML-N are being subjected to political vendetta for their affiliation and support for Nawaz Sharif. —Online

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Fazl contradicts media reports of quitting PDM chairmanship

ISLAMABAD: Maulana Fazlur Rehman has refuted the media reports of quitting chairmanship of PDM by him terming them baseless and unfounded. He said the news items being relayed on different channels in this regard are baseless. Those fomenting such false news are scared of PDM popularity. However no cracks can be created in the ranks of PDM through such false news items. No such talks were held with Nawaz and Asif Zardari. —

CAA removing ICAO concern over pilots licencing

KARACHI: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has adopted effective measures to remove the concerns of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regarding the issuance of pilots' licences, citing sources.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) prepared a response to the ICAO's Significant Safety Concerns (SSCs) which would be sent before the February 3, sources said.

The ICAO had identified Significant Security Concerns (SSCs) regarding the personnel licencing and training in relation to the licencing of pilots and sought a response by the country's aviation authority till February 3.

Sources said that Pakistan is in talking with the British Civil Aviation Authority to adopt a UK-like system to ensure transparency in licencing and examinations of pilots.

The UK aviation authority had offered installation of a system as per international standards which would assist Pakistan to remove concerns of ICAO besides raising the standards of pilots' licences issued by CAA.

It emerged that the British system for conducting pilots' examinations and other processes will make the licences of Pakistani pilots acceptable all around the world.

According to CAA spokesperson, the pilots' examination and licencing system is linked to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) bio-metric system in order to ensure transparency. —DNA

'Opp to face no hurdle from govt in long march'

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has said that the opposition parties can launch a long march whenever they wish to do so, adding the government will not create any hurdle in their way.

"The opposition has the right to come to the federal capital and there will be no obstacle in their way. That's what is called democracy," said the minister while talking to a private news channel on Wednesday. When asked about Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's consultations with Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif, Rashid said, "Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has backtracked from their initial agenda and they do not have a clear strategy anymore."

"Even two members of the JUI-F are preparing to take part in the by-elections of the national and provincial assemblies, while the party prepares to participate in the Senate elections," he said, adding, "They plan to launch the long march in a month or a month-and-a-half, but they may do so now."

The interior minister further said that the PDM's recent protest in front of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was an ordinary protest. Regarding the Broadsheet saga, he said that it will turn into an important case for the country in the coming days. "It is going to become the next Panama Leaks for the country." —TLTP

Pak ranked at 6th in Asia with most internet users

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has been ranked at sixth position amongst the top ten countries with the biggest share of internet users in Asia in 2020.

According to a report published by Statista, a German company specialising in market and consumer data, the geographic analysis of the audience showed that China accounted for 37.1 percent of internet users in Asia as of May 2020, followed by India with 24.3 percent. Pakistan came in at sixth position on the chart with 3.1 percent internet users.

The spike can be attributed to increased online activities by educational institutions and businesses and, 'work from home' policy adopted by individuals and organisations, according to a Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) press release. "This is the highest surge we have seen ever. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Netflix are the most popular social media apps being used during these days, and most of the trends on social media apps are related to Covid-19 developments and initiatives taken by the govt in this regard," PTA spokesperson Khurram Mehran said. —TLTP



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner, Christian Turner calls on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Abdul Hafeez Sheikh at Finance Division. High Commissioner accompanied by head of Development Ms. Annabel Gerry on the occasion.

International Customs Day observed

CCR destroys drugs, illegal goods worth millions of rupees

By M Jahangir Hayat

LAHORE: The Customs Central Region (CCR) has destroyed millions of rupees contraband, illegally imported goods and illicit drugs on the occasion of the International Customs Day.

All Collectorates of Customs Central Region gathered illicit drugs and other contraband items for destroying at the Wahga Land Frigate Unit (LFU). The purpose of destructing the illicit items and drugs was to save the public, trade and industry from the harmful effect of the illegal items. The illicit goods, liquors and drugs are collected throughout the year for destruction on January 26 every year.

"We usually set the illicit goods on fire and crush liquors on the International Customs Day. However, goods and drugs harmful for human lives and trade industry are also destroyed around the year," Central Region Chief Collector of Customs Faiz Ahmad Chadar said, adding that destruction is more concerned with the message that anyone who dares to do business in the illegal trade will meet the same fate in term of money and valuables.

He said that Customs Central Region is

taking an all out effort to control the smuggling and other illegal trade. Though we have scarce resources yet our officers of the region are determined to give their maximum inputs in this regard. Collector Customs Lahore Preventive Compliance and Enforcement Basit Maqdood Abbasi said that goods and drugs are destroyed in the best public, trade and industry interest.

"We have conducted the record seizures of billions of rupees that have created an intense deterrence. Our officers are well chasing to smugglers even in markets and godowns on information."

Multan Collector Customs Muniza Majeed said that the Multan Collectorate has brought five containers to destroy. We have more liquor and illicit goods and items which will be destroy afterward.

"We have adopted zero tolerance policy against the smuggling activities as the smuggling of both illicit goods and drugs are harmful to both human and economic health of the country," she added.

On the sideline of the destruction event, Punjab Governor Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar said that Pakistan Customs is playing an important role in curbing smuggling. Addressing a ceremony held in

connection with the International Customs Day at Wagha Border late Tuesday, he said that all the institutions are working in close coordination due to which Pakistan is becoming economically strong.

He said that even today many countries of the world are facing curfew-like situation due to Coronavirus. The Governor also announced certificates of appreciation for the customs officers and personnel working on the frontline during the Pandemic. A large number of Customs officers, including Mohsin Rafique, Asad Raza Rizvi, Sima Inam, Sima Shahzad, Ali Touqeer, Munib Server, Summar Tara and others were present on the occasion.

It is pertinent to mention here that the International Customs Day is celebrated on January 26 every year with a theme. This year the ICD was dedicated to the united efforts of Customs to emerge from the coronavirus crisis and support people and businesses by strengthening the global supply chain, reinforcing collaboration, harnessing technology and putting "people" at the centre of the transformation process, with the slogan "Customs bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a sustainable supply chain".

Pak receives Geographical Indicator tag for Basmati

By Our Special Correspondent

LAHORE: Pakistan has received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati on January 26, 2021. REAP made major contributions in preparing the Book of Specifications for Basmati.

This Book of Specifications lays down the criteria of characteristics for Basmati which needs to be followed by any producer or operator in Pakistan if they desire to obtain the license to use this name. Since REAP is a trade body which has been involved in exporting Basmati to the world and it is representative of Pakistan's exporters of Basmati, it was best suited to offer insight into Basmati's trade, characteristics, regions and history. When REAP was consulted on the matter it provided technical and commercial assistance in preparing the Book of Specifications. REAP's input was highly appreciated.

The registration of Basmati as a GI in Pakistan required the cooperation between the public and private sector. Trade and Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) was designated as a Registrant of Basmati by the Federal Government.

TDAP made an application to register Basmati to Intellectual Property Organization (IPO). IPO sought assistance from Rice Research Institute Kala Shah Kaku and REAP. IPO mapped the regions where Basmati is grown by taking recommendations from all provinces.

The process followed by IPO has been an inclusive one and it brought all the stakeholders on one table. Through intra-provincial and public-private cooperation, Pakistan has obtained the GI tag for its Basmati which will strengthen the case against India in European Union.

Since Basmati rice fetch higher prices than non-Basmati rice in international markets, India has attempted to block Pakistan's trade in EU by declaring that its Basmati is the geographically original one. Pakistan has challenged this claim and by registering its own GI for Basmati it will claim the same protection of its Basmati in EU as India. REAP as a trade body has been representing and safeguarding the interests of rice exporters in Pakistan since 1994, we will continue to uphold the interests of all our members who together make Rice Exports Pakistan's second

largest Export Industry, after textiles.

Pak seeks US new leadership direct market access at zero duty

Pakistan Wednesday demanded new US leadership direct market access at zero duty and Joint Ventures (JVs) in economic sphere in the wake of war against terrorism.

Founder Chairman Pak US Business Council and veteran trade leader Iftikhar Ali Malik said US should convene meeting of TIFA to move forward for result-oriented progress. There is already a GSP plus status for Pakistan in the US but new steps could be taken for getting maximum benefits of trade preferential facility, he further added. He said that what is Pakistan needs is to opt the model of joint ventures on the pattern of Egypt and some African countries to enhance trade ties with biggest economies like the US.

Iftikhar said the last meeting of TIFA was held in May last in which both sides had discussed ways to improve access to products such as agricultural goods and medicines in either markets. He said Pakistan had been keen to explore potential trade concessions as it could import more

Ministers seek HEC's directions on exams policy

LAHORE: Minister for Federal Education Shafiqat Mahmood and Punjab Minister for Higher Education Raja Yasir Humayun have agreed to request the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to provide clear directions to universities on examination policy.

Raja Yasir Humayun in a tweet said, "I talked to the federal minister and we agreed to request HEC to give clear directions to all public and private universities regarding examination policy. Also, I want to clarify that giving policy guidelines to universities is the mandate of HEC which is an autonomous entity."

A day earlier, Shafiqat Mahmood took to Twitter as well to address students' concerns regarding online examinations and had said that the decision lies with universities. "Some university students are demanding that their exams should be online as they have been studying online," the minister wrote on Twitter. "This is a decision for the universities to make, but I have asked HEC to consult VCs and see if it is possible given special circumstances this year."

The minister added that universities "should also assess whether they have the technical ability to conduct online exams for all students, stressing that no student should be left behind. "No one can be left behind. It is also necessary to ensure that the online exam system is not misused to get easy grades," he wrote. —TLTP

Pakistan to start assembling mobile phones soon

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan would soon start assembling mobile phone handsets as Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet has already approved the policy to promote local manufacturing of the product.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet approved the Mobile Device Manufacturing Policy to promote local manufacturing and assembly of mobile handsets in May, last year. Under the policy, tax rates for high-end mobile sets have been increased while tax rates for low-end handsets have been either reduced or eliminated.

An official of Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications said, IT exports registered 40 per cent increase during last six months. Exports remittances inflow target for 2020-23 was US \$5 billion. He said IT was growing at a faster rate, earning valuable foreign exchange, creating high paying jobs, improving national productivity and quality of life through innovative technology solutions.

This could be garnered from the fact that IT & IT enabled Services (ITeS) exports remittances comprising computer services and call center services had surged to US \$1.230 billion at a growth rate of 23.71% in the FY 2019-20 in comparison to \$994.848 million during the same period despite current global economic challenges. IT & IT enabled Services (ITeS) export remittances, including telecommunication, computer and information services had risen to \$763.060 million at a growth rate of 39.03% during July-November of FY 2020-21 in comparison to \$548.830 million during July-November of FY 2019-20, he added.

He said the number of PSEB registered IT & IT enabled Services (ITeS) companies as of November, 30 2020 was 2,746 compared to 2,121 valid registrations as of November, 2019. —APP

Virus claims 74 lives in 24 hours

LAHORE: About 74 deaths occurred in the last 24 hours due to coronavirus taking the nationwide tally of fatalities to 11,450 on Wednesday.

According to the latest figures by the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) 1,563 persons tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 24 hours. The number of positive cases has surged to 537,477.

Till now 242,793 coronavirus cases have been confirmed in Sindh, 155,214 in Punjab 65,953 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 40,972 in Islamabad, 18,765 in Balochistan, 8,877 in Azad Kashmir and 4,903 in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Furthermore 4,646 individuals have lost their lives to the epidemic in Punjab 3,925 in Sindh, 1,857 in KP, 469 in Islamabad, 258 in Azad Kashmir, 193 in Balochistan, and 102 in GB. Pakistan has so far conducted 7,764,114 coronavirus tests and 41,285 in the last 24 hours. 492,207 coronavirus patients have recovered in the country whereas 2,165 patients

Frequent raises in energy rates make products uncompetitive

By Our Special Correspondent

LAHORE: The Friends of Business and Economic Reforms President Kashif Anwar on Monday observed that frequent raises in energy rates at the behest of the IMF would make the Pakistani products uncompetitive in the international market. He said that industry is the main victim of this IMF interference, as donors' involvement in the Pakistan's economic matters and dictations to the policy makers for taking harsh measures would add to the economic miseries of the country.

He appealed Prime Minister Imran Khan to withdraw the unwise decision to raise electricity tariff by 15 percent, as it would tarnish the government's export friendly poli-

cies and put a deathblow on the exports, foreign exchange earnings and the most labour-intensive sector.

He observed that the hike in base power tariff will not only have a devastating impact on the export-oriented industries but would also terribly disturb the local production of general industries, besides sabotaging all the efforts being made by the government to enhance the volume of exports. He said that Pakistan is the most frequent customer of IMF and governments often depended on borrowing from IMF and accepted stringent conditions despite the fact that this institution is merciless money lender which always forced Pakistan to adopt bad policies like rupee devaluation, massive increases in the electricity and gas prices.

Kashif Anwar said that the IMF wanted the government to get the Electric Power Act bill in the National Assembly passed, enabling the government to pass on its cost of inefficiency and theft to the power consumers through imposition of surcharges, which is totally unjust.

He said that Pakistan would be loser in many heads if immediate measures are not taken to get rid of the massive loans which are the mother of most of the economic ills.

He said that though it is a tough but not impossible task.

FEBR President also stressed the need for developing regional, product specific and target oriented marketing strategy. New markets and products need to be explored on few commodities and countries.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of FPCCI Office-Bearers led by Qurban Ali, Head FPCCI Capital Office Islamabad in a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong.