

IHC asks Interior Secy to place the matter of missing persons before new cabinet

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) while ordering to place the matter of missing persons before the new federal cabinet has summoned interior secretary on next hearing.

The court has directed interior secretary to appear before it in person.

The court remarked the federal government is being given another chance to evolve policy. Interior secretary should seek directives from the federal government regarding enforced disappearances and inform the court.

The petitions seeking recovery of Mudassar Naro and other missing persons came up for hearing before a single bench of IHC presided over by the Chief Justice (CJ) IHC Athar Minallah here Friday. The court ordered interior secretary to put up the matter before the new federal cabinet. The latest report of Enforced Disappearances Commission was filed in the country.

IHC summoned proposals from amicus curiae and other respondents on this matter. The court remarked one more chance is being given to the federal government to work out policy. Interior secretary should seek directions from the federal government and inform the court. The counsel for missing persons told the court there is commission report of March that 76 persons went missing. This is still continuing.

The mother of Mudassar Naro told the court "I have not read law. But even if anyone is thief he is bailed out. The court remarked Mudassar Naro family is having authentic report. Interior secretary should contact Mudassar Naro family. Interior secretary should file report about recovery of Mudassar Naro in the court.

Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Syed Tayyab Shah requested the court to give him three weeks time to file reply. The court while addressing the registrar of com-

mission remarked "first bring sympathy in your proceedings. You should approach them by yourself. Satisfying the families of missing persons by the Enforced Disappearances commission is must. If the complaint from the missing persons comes again then the court will hold commission responsible. When Mudassar Naro family has authentic information then as to why interior secretary did not see them.

The hearing of the case was adjourned till May 17.

World Earth Day observed
World Earth Day was observed on Friday. This year the theme of the day is Invest in Our Planet.

Earth Day is a global event that works to educate and raise awareness of climate change and environment protection. The event was first held on 22 April 1970, and has been commemorated every year since. In his message, the Chairman of Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani

has said that through celebrating "Earth Day" the importance of the environment is being highlighted all over the world. "Climate change is directly or indirectly affecting human lives," the Senate chairman said in a special message. The Chairman underlined that steps were being taken within the country as per SDGs set by the UN and all over the globe to combat the threats posed by climate change/Global Warming. Landmark steps have been taken in the recent past and these initiatives have been acknowledged worldwide. The Parliament of Pakistan has played an effective role in this regard and has adopted a comprehensive strategy along with legislation to make the environment humane and minimize the negative effects of climate change", the Chairman observed. The Chairman Senate has appealed to the citizens of Pakistan to support "Earth day" by showing love to the Planet in true spirit and with great fervour. —Online

Moin Akhtar remembered on his 11th death anniversary

ISLAMABAD: Iconic Moin Akhtar was remembered on his 11th death anniversary on Friday.

He was not only the one of the most beloved host and actor, but a great kind human being too. Moin Akhtar stepped into the show-business back in sixties and ruling the industry with his spontaneous performance and intelligent interaction with others.

He was born on December 24, 1950, and was considered as a comedian of extremely high standard in Pakistan with experience of entertaining his audience for a long time. From theater to silver screen, Moin Akhtar's work introduced nonstop laughter for everyone and became popular among the entertainment loving audience.

Moin was liked for providing humor for people of all ages, and with a style that remains unmatched. His attempts to avoid vulgarity in his humor rendered him a favorite amongst family audiences. He was fluent in several languages, including English, Bengali, Sindhi, Punjabi, Memon, Pashto, Gujarati and Urdu. He performed not only in Pakistan but played in several stage shows like Bakra Qiston Pe and Buddha Ghar Pe Hai with Umer Sharif in India too.

In recognition of his work, he was awarded Pride of Performance in 1996 by the Government of Pakistan and Sitara-i-Imtiaz awarded in 2011. He left his fans on April 22, 2011, at the age of 61. He was survived by his wife, two daughters and three sons. —Online

New auto-policy to uplift auto-industry, says minister

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Syed Murtaza Mehmood said Friday country's auto-industry will mark immense progress through new auto-policy.

According to details, CEO Engineering Development Board on Friday briefed the federal minister on auto-industry's performance and yield.

Minister was told through briefing that 92 percent of tractors, 95 percent motorbikes, and 55 percent of cars have been localized in Pakistan. Seven new auto-companies installed their plants in Pakistan according to the 2016-21 auto policy.

Federal Minister was told that value-addition will be increased to 30 percent as per the 2021-26 auto-policy. New auto policy focuses on exports and promotion of electric vehicles. Four billion rupees have been returned to the consumers for late delivery of their cars, the briefing added.

Makhdoom Murtaza Mehmood was briefed that 215000 cars were built in Pakistan last year. The minister said auto sector will have to increase usage and production of eco-friendly vehicles.

Sanjrani condemns attack on security post in Awaran

Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani on Friday severely condemned the terror attack on security forces' check post in

Balochistan's Awaran.

In his condolatory statement, Sadiq Sanjrani expressed grief over the loss of precious Pak Army soldiers and said that such cowardly attacks can never shatter our determination.

Sanjrani said terrorists want to sabotage country's developmental process which will never be allowed at any cost. Army and security agencies have given exemplary sacrifices in war against terror.

On Friday, Military's media wing ISPR announced that an Army officer has embraced martyrdom in an exchange of fire with terrorists in Kahan, near Awaran, Balochistan.

According to ISPR, terrorists attacked a security forces post last night, which was repulsed. The escaping terrorists were pursued into the nearby mountains.

At one of the blocking positions established to cut off fleeing terrorists, a heavy exchange of fire took place between terrorists and security forces.

During the skirmish, a valiant son of soil Major Shahid Basheer embraced Shahadat and another soldier got injured while causing heavy losses to the terrorists.

Security forces, in step with the nation, remain determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan. —Online



Britain and India in new defence and security partnership: Johnson

NEW DELHI: Britain and India agreed a "new and expanded" defence and security partnership under-fire British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on a visit to New Delhi.

Johnson travelled to India as he faces criticism at home and the embarrassing prospect of a probe into whether he lied to parliament over the lockdown-breaking "Partygate" scandal.

New Delhi is part of the Quad grouping with the United States, Japan and Australia that is seen as a bulwark against an increasingly assertive China.

But India also has a long Cold War history of cooperation with Moscow, still its biggest military supplier, and has refused to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

"The threats of autocratic coercion have grown even further," Johnson said alongside his Indian

counterpart Narendra Modi, in an apparent reference to Beijing.

"And it's therefore vital that we deepen our cooperation, including our shared interest in keeping the Indo-Pacific open and free."

The new partnership was "a decades-long commitment", he added, hailing the relationship between "one of the oldest democracies, and India, certainly the largest democracy".

But relations between Britain and India have long been coloured by the legacy of colonial rule - when London saw the world's second-most populous nation as the jewel in the crown of its empire but hundreds of millions of Indians chafed under its authority.

Modi's Hindu nationalist government regularly emphasises the independence struggle as a vital component of India's national identity. It has built giant statues of key independence leaders and created a

museum to one of them in Delhi's world heritage-listed Red Fort. It was "historic" that Johnson's visit to India came in the 75th year of its independence, Modi said.

"We discussed several regional and international developments and stressed a free, open, inclusive and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific," he added.

Exact details of the security partnership were not immediately available. But Johnson said the two had agreed to work together in defence procurement "to meet threats across land, sea and air, space and cyber, including partnering on new fighter jet technology, maritime technologies to detect and respond to threats in the oceans". New Delhi has long sought to bolster its domestic military manufacturing capacity, partly to reduce its dependence on Moscow and partly as a contribution to its "Make in India" campaign. —Reuters

WHO 'strongly recommends' Pfizer's virus pill

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) it "strongly recommended" Pfizer's COVID-19 antiviral pill Paxlovid for patients with milder forms of the disease who were still at a high risk of hospitalisation.

However the UN agency warned it was "extremely concerned" that the inequality in access seen with COVID-19 vaccines would again leave low- and middle-income countries "pushed to the end of the queue".

US pharma giant Pfizer's combination of nirmatrelvir and ritonavir was the "superior choice" of treatment for unvaccinated, elderly or immunocompromised people with COVID-19, the WHO's experts said in the BMJ medical journal.

For the same patients, the WHO also made a "conditional (weak) recommendation" of the antiviral drug remdesivir made by US biotech firm Gilead - which it had previously recommended against.

The WHO recommended Paxlovid over remdesivir, as well as over Merck's molnupiravir pill and monoclonal antibodies.

Pfizer's oral treatment prevents hospitalisation more than the "available alternatives, has fewer concerns with respects to harms than molnupiravir, and is easier to administer than intravenous remdesivir and antibodies", the WHO's experts said.

The new recommendation was based on the findings of two trials involving almost 3,100 patients which showed that Paxlovid reduced the risk of hospital admission by 85 per cent.

The trials also "suggested no important difference in mortality" and "little or no risk of adverse effects leading to drug discontinuation".

The recommendation applies to people over the age of 18, but not to pregnant or breastfeeding women.

It also does not apply to patients with a low risk of complications from the disease, because the benefit would be minimal.

The WHO's experts also declined to give an opinion for patients with severe forms of the disease, due to a lack of data. The WHO stressed the limitations of such antiviral treatments. "The medicine can only be administered while the disease is at its early stages," they said.

This means the patients must quickly test positive and be prescribed the pill by a doctor - all of which can pose obstacles for low- and middle-income countries, the WHO said. Yet COVID-19 pills have been seen as a potentially huge step in ending the pandemic as they can be taken at home. —Reuters

Ukrainian fighters hold on as Putin claims victory in Mariupol

KYIV: Ukrainian fighters were clinging to their last redoubt in Mariupol after Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed victory in the biggest battle of the war, declaring the port city "liberated" following weeks of relentless bombardment.

The United States, however, disputed Putin's claim and said it believed Ukrainian forces still held ground in the city. Putin ordered his troops to blockade a giant steel works where the Ukrainians are holding out, having refused an ultimatum to surrender or die.

Ukraine said Putin wanted to avoid a final clash with its forces in Mariupol, as he lacked troops to defeat them. But Ukrainian officials also appealed for help to evacuate civilians and wounded soldiers.

In a televised meeting at the Kremlin, Putin congratulated his defence minister and Russian troops for the "combat effort to liberate Mariupol" and said it was unnecessary to storm the industrial zone containing the Azovstal steel plant.

"There's no need to climb into these catacombs and crawl underground through these industrial facilities ... Block off this industrial area so that not even a fly can get through," Putin said.

Mariupol, a major port in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, sits between areas held by Russian separatists and Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Moscow seized in 2014. Capturing the city would allow Russia to link the two areas.

Even as Putin claims his first big prize since his forces were driven away from the capital Kyiv and northern Ukraine last month, it falls short of the unambiguous victory Moscow has sought after months of combat in a city reduced to rubble.

In a late-night address, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia was doing all it could "to talk about at least some victories", including mobilising new battalion tactical groups.

"They can only postpone the inevitable - the time when the invaders will have to leave our territory, including from Mariupol, a city that continues to resist Russia regardless of what the occupiers say," Zelenskyy said.

Russia stepped up its attacks in east Ukraine this week and made long-distance strikes at other targets including Kyiv and the western city of Lviv.

In an early Friday update, Ukraine's general staff said Russian forces had in-

creased attacks along the whole front line in the east and were trying to mount an offensive in the Kharkiv region in the northeast.

Russia calls its invasion a "special military operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" Ukraine. Kyiv and its Western allies reject that as a false pretext for a war that has killed thousands and uprooted a quarter of Ukraine's population.

The United States authorized another US\$800 million in military aid for Ukraine on Thursday, including heavy artillery and newly disclosed "Ghost" drones that are destroyed after they attack their targets.

"We're in a critical window now of

time where they're going to set the stage for the next phase of this war," US President Joe Biden said.

Asked about Putin's victory declaration in Mariupol, State Department spokesman Ned Price said it was "yet more disinformation from their well-worn playbook".

Mariupol, once home to 400,000 people, has seen not only the most intense battle of the war that started when Russian forces invaded on Feb 24, but also its worst humanitarian catastrophe.

Ukraine estimates tens of thousands of civilians have died there. The United Nations and Red Cross say the civilian toll is at least in the thousands.

Journalists who reached Mariupol during the siege found streets littered with corpses, nearly all buildings destroyed, and residents huddled in cellars, venturing out to cook scraps or bury bodies in gardens.

Ukrainian fighters remain inside the Azovstal steel complex, one of the biggest metallurgical facilities in Europe, covering 11sqkm with huge buildings, underground bunkers and tunnels.

Mariupol's mayor, Vadym Boichenko, told Reuters that Putin alone could decide the fate of the 100,000 civilians trapped in the city.

"The lives that are still there, they are in the hands of just one person - Vladimir Putin. And all the deaths that will happen after now will be on his hands too," Boichenko said in an interview.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said 1,000 civilians and 500 wounded soldiers needed to be brought out from the plant immediately, blaming Russian forces for the failure to establish a safe corridor that she said had been agreed. —AFP



Australia targets Putin's daughters, Russian senators

SYDNEY: The Australian government has imposed sanctions and travel bans on two daughters of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's daughter, it said in a statement.

It follows similar measures undertaken by other Western nations including the United States and Britain and takes the total number of people and entities in Russia subject to Australian sanctions to nearly 750.

It did not name the two Putin daughters but the Russian president is known to have two adult daughters, Katerina Tikhonova and Maria Vorontsova. The statement added President Putin and Lavrov were added to the sanctions list on Feb 27.

The fresh round of sanctions also targets 144 Russian senators who provided support to President Putin by approving the "illegitimate" recognition. —AFP

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