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Forces ready to repel aggression, says President on the eve of Pakistan Day celebrations



Islamabad: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, President Asif Ali Zardari, Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif watch the fly-past during the Pakistan Day parade at Shakarparian Parade Ground in Islamabad.

President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday 23 March, in a message directed at the country's hostile neighbourhood, said Pakistan's sovereignty was sacrosanct and that the armed forces stood ready to respond to any aggression.

Mr Zardari in his speech at the main Pakistan Day ceremony in Islamabad on the March 23 armed forces parade said, "Pakistan wants relations with all our neighbours. We are a peace-loving country and a responsible nuclear state. However, let me make it clear that we will not compromise on our sover-

eignty."

Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud was the guest of honour at the ceremony, which was also attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, federal cabinet members, services chiefs, foreign diplomats and other notable guests.

The March 23 ceremony featured a military parade by the three armed forces wings and paramilitary forces, showcasing their readiness. Aerial displays were a highlight of this parade, with formations of fighter jets such as the J-10C, JF-17, F-16, Mi-

rage, AWACS, and P-3C Orion participated in it.

Among the equipment displayed were advanced tanks, armoured personnel carriers, rocket launchers, comprehensive air defence system, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and a selection of both short and long-range missiles, including the Ra'ad, Nasr, Babur, Shaheen, Ghauri and Ababeel.

The parade also serves as a platform for military diplomacy, with participants from friendly countries. This year, troops from Azerbaijan and China participated in the parade.



Air Force Karakoram-8 (K-8) aircraft perform aerobatic maneuvers while people watch the fighter jets fly by during the Pakistan Day parade.



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PM directs the Ministry to present schedule for PIA privatisation

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday 06 March, sought a final implementation schedule for the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

Chairing a high-level meeting on the airline's privatisation and the restructuring of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the PM directed the Ministry of Privatisation to present the schedule about the PIA's privatisation in two days. The proposed roadmap for the automation of FBR was also approved, in principle.

The PM approved the hiring of a consultant for the restructuring of FBR and directed that legal issues holding up Rs1.7 trillion in stuck-up taxes be resolved.

He also directed the Ministry of Law to present proposals to create a legal department in the FBR for preparation of drafts according to law and hiring of services of lawyers.

PM Shehbaz said that six to seven per cent economic growth was possible with the implementation of reforms, adding that investment was needed to modernise the revenue and tax system.

"We want to bring a system of taxation based on incentives. We desire to reduce the burden of taxes, but the business community has to help by playing a role for the progress of people through social service," he said.

The prime minister asked that an effective third party audit system should be ensured and urged that all tax exemptions should be thoroughly reviewed.

Outgoing finance minister Shamshad Akhtar briefed the meeting on the steps taken to enhance tax collection; refunds' payment to the exporters; expanding the tax net; automation process; stopping tax evasion, institutional corruption and smuggling; and provision of quality services to the people. The Federal Policy Board should prepare a long-term tax plan for the continuity of policy, she added.

The meeting was attended by senators, MNAs and officials from key institutions, such as the State Bank and FBR. Prominent banker and HBL CEO Muhammad Aurangzeb also took part in the meeting via video link.

PIA sell-off now in sight as BoD takes major step

The Board of Directors of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited (PIACL) has taken a significant step towards the privatisation of the national carrier by approving a Scheme of Arrangement (SoA) in its 83rd meeting.

This decision, aimed at restructuring the airline, was sanctioned along with its ancillary modalities and is set to be filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). Pakistan Stock Exchange has been informed on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently approved the reconstitution of the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP), with Minister for Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar appointed as its chairman. Dar is also part of another committee, chaired by the Minister for Defence, tasked with overseeing the marketing of outsourcing airport management and the privatization process of the PIACL.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has been actively involved in the reform ef-

orts concerning PIA since 2023.

At that time, he had formed a committee headed by Dar as finance minister dedicated to devising strategies for the

restructuring, reformation, and revival of the PIA.

The approval of the SoA marks a significant milestone in the PIA's journey towards privatisation.

Seven global investors express interest in PIA, airports

Seven international investors have expressed interest in Pakistan's national flag carrier and airports which the South Asian nation has put up for sale, the aviation ministry said on Tuesday, 26 March.

Islamabad plans to sell the Pakistan International Airline (PIA) and outsource three of its airports in a bid to stem losses and generate foreign exchange reserves at a time when the country's \$350 billion economy faces a balance of payment crisis. An adviser for the deal told ministry of defence production and aviation that "seven international investors including Germany, France, Netherlands, Qatar, UAE, Malaysia and Turkiye have shown their interest" besides local groups, the statement said.

The ministry did not clarify whether the investors are companies or governments.

Islamabad has engaged the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) as an advisor for the outsourcing process, and EY for the airline deal.

The push to expedite the sales comes ahead of Pakistan seeking yet another IMF bailout after a current standby arrangement expires on April 11.



Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir calls on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the PM House on Wednesday, 06 March. In the meeting, they discussed security-related matters, a PM Office press release said. The army chief also congratulated PM Shehbaz on assuming the office and expressed good wishes for him.

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority holds 43rd E- Kachehri

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority held its 43rd E-Kachehri chaired by the Additional Director General CAA (AVM) Taimoor Iqbal. Director Airport Services, A/Director Security, Director Operations, Director Commercial & Estate, Director Engineering Services, Director Air Transport & Additional Director HR assisted Addl. DGCAA during E-Kachehri.

The E-Kachehri commenced with a review of the previous session, which included nine follow-up complaints. Commenting on follow ups, Additional Director General (AdIDG) emphasized the importance of passengers knowing their rights and filing claims for grievances like flight cancellations. The (AdIDG) also mentioned that airlines need to provide more information than just saying 'technical' for cancellations or delays leading to cancellations. The Director of Air Transport (AT) stated that a document is being prepared to ensure airlines are more thorough in such cases. Regarding PIA flights to the UK, the AdIDG hoped for an update in May now that the inspections have concluded. Complaints against Serene Air and PIA were addressed, with assurance that the matter will be followed up with the airlines.

In response to a complaint about FIA staffing at immigration counters, the AdIDG explained that the agency is responsible for assigning personnel to the immigration counters, especially during peak hours. The issue has been raised multiple times and will be pursued further, he added. Replying to a question about drones, the AdIDG informed a document on drone policy is being prepared, covering various aspects, and will be available on the PCAA website once finalized. The Chair, in response to a question regarding the investigation report on the PK 8303 crash, clarified that there are specific procedures and requirements that must be adhered to in order to ensure accountability. Also, the AdIDG, when addressing a complaint about the lack of proper signage at Quetta International Airport's parking lot, instructed to designate spaces for special persons and to install clear and visible markings to assist passengers and other visitors. In a conversation with another complainant regarding the shortage of trolleys, the Director General mentioned that an adequate number of luggage trolleys have been recently provided at airports, but still requested the complainant's contact information, flight

number, date, and time to investigate the specific incident. AdIDG CAA, responding to an inquiry



about commencing flights from Dera Ghazi Khan (D. G. Khan) to Dubai, stated that currently no airline operates to D. G. Khan due to airlines finding it economically non-

viable, despite the airport being fully prepared for flight operations. The AdIDG concluded the session by expressing gratitude

to all participants for their time and suggestions, emphasizing that the purpose of these sessions is to address passenger complaints and improve their overall experience.

PIA flights to UK may resume in May

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has expressed the hope that the Pakistan International Airlines flights to the United Kingdom would likely resume in May as inspections in this regard have been completed.

CAA Additional Director General Taimur Iqbal stated this while presiding over the 43rd E-Kachehri. A spokesman for the CAA said on Monday, 18 March, that E-Kachehri commenced with a review of the previous session, which included nine follow-up complaints.

Commenting on the follow-ups, the additional director general emphasised the importance of passengers knowing their rights and filing claims for grievances like flight cancellations. He said airlines needed to provide more information than just saying 'technical' reasons for cancellations or delays leading to cancellations.

About PIA flights to the UK, the additional DG expressed the hope for an update in May as inspections have been completed.

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immigration counters, he said the agency is responsible for assigning personnel to immigration counters, especially during peak hours.

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In reply to a question about commencing flights from D.G. Khan to Dubai, he stated that currently no airline operates to the district due to it being economically non-viable.

Federal Minister Khawaja Muhammed Asif briefed on Ministry of Aviation in Islamabad



Federal Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation Khawaja Muhammed Asif chaired a meeting spanned more than four hours wherein he was given detailed briefing by the secretary aviation on role of aviation ministry, National Aviation Policy 2023, the challenges faced by Pakistan Aviation industry, the opportunities, and the air services agreements with other countries.

The minister was also briefed on the entities working under the ministry including Pakistan Airlines corporation Ltd, Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, Pakistan Airport Authority, Bureau of Air Safety Investigation, Air Port Security Forces and Pakistan meteorological department.

While being briefed on PIACL, the minister remarked that the privatisation of PIACL would be the priority of this government. He also commended the joint venture for mix use re-development of Roosevelt Hotel.

Federal minister Khawaja Muhammed Asif showed his resolve to grow the aviation industry of Pakistan in terms of enhancing its contribution to country's GDP.

International Finance Corpora-

tion (IFC) apprised the minister about latest development of outsourcing of three major airports including Islamabad International Airport, Jinnah International Airport Karachi and Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore in first phase.

The meeting was attended by secretary aviation Saif Anjum, CEO PIACL Air Marshal Aamir Hayat, DG PCCA Khaqan Murtaza, DG ASF Major General Asif Adnan Jah, Chairman PIA-IL Shoukat Ali, DG PMD Sahib Zad Khan, team IFC and other senior officers of the ministry.

SHC issues notices on plea against privatisation of PIA

The Sindh High Court on Monday 18 March, issued notices to the ministries of law, aviation and finance as well as other respondents on a petition filed against proposed privatisation of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

An employees' union of the PIA and the Society of Aircraft Engineers of Pakistan (SAEP) have jointly moved the SHC and submitted that the federal government was taking steps to privatise/sale the PIA and the Privatisation Commission had also appointed a British firm as financial adviser for this purpose.

Referring to some rulings of the apex court, the petitioners contended that only an elected government could take major policy decisions.

They asked the court to declare all ac-

tions taken by the caretaker set-up for the privatisation of the PIA null and void and without lawful authority.

They also impugned the amendments in the PIAC (Conversion) Act, 2016 authorising the federal government to issue fresh shares or cancel any shares as it may deem fit.

They argued that such an amendment was made in violation of the company law and the authority in this regard was not vested with the government; whereas the impugned amendment had also been carried out to facilitate the privatisation of the national flag carrier.

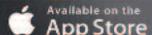
After a preliminary hearing, a two-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi issued pre-admission notices to the respondents for April 3.

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PIA pilots advised not to fly while fasting

Pilots and cabin crew of the national flag carrier have been advised against flying while fasting as it will not only risk their lives but also that of others too in the aircraft and on the ground.

A letter to all cabin crew members with instructions regarding “in-flight fasting” stating that as advised by Corporate Safety Management and the



Aircrew Medical Centre, it is perceived that flying while fasting is a possibility, but in such a case the element of risk is considerable and margin of safety is minimal.

In any emergency situations with complications, wrong and delayed actions may lead to serious consequences due to impaired judgment and incapacitation. It needs no emphasis that the sanctity of fasting is undeniable. While fasting, one has to go for a change in normal routine, therefore, fasting and flying may not be confined to religious reasons as there are defined relaxations on fasting while traveling, it said.

During fasting, attention and decision-making ability decrease, reflexes begin to slow down, stamina also decreases, so after considering all the factors, it is clear that flying while fasting is not only harmful to you but that of others too, in the aircraft and on the ground.

It is therefore necessary that all cockpit/cabin crew who are observing fast are advised “not” to fly.

A spokesman for the national flag carrier said that a circular had already been issued in this regard and compliance is ensured.

According to Civil Aviation Rules (CARs) 1994 rule 41(3) no crew member shall exercise the privileges of his/her license as a crew member while fasting.

12 - MARCH 2024

Saudi delegates visit Karachi airport to review arrangements for 'Road to Makkah' project

Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Maliky and other senior officials from the kingdom have visited Karachi

International Airport is determined, Saudi officials will proceed with the installation of the necessary counters and equipment,” he added.



airport to evaluate potential areas within the premises where Saudi immigration facilities could be established to assist Haj pilgrims in connection with the ‘Road to Makkah’ project.

Under the project, intending pilgrims would be provided with immigration facilities at Karachi airport by Saudi authorities and they would be exempted from the process at Saudi airports.

The Road to Makkah project has already been successfully implemented at Islamabad Airport.

A spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority said that the delegation met with CAA Deputy Director General Sadiqur Rehman and key representatives of the Federal Investigation Agency, Airport Security Force, Anti-Narcotics Force, Customs, and immigration.

“Once the final location for the lounge, hall, or terminal at Jinnah

Saudi envoy meets CM

On Wednesday 06 March, the Saudi ambassador called on Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and discussed with him the Road to Makkah project.

The chief minister said that the project was very important and he was keen to see it implemented for the pilgrims of Sindh at Karachi airport.

The Saudi envoy informed the CM that the pilot Road to Makkah initiative was implemented in 2019 at Islamabad Airport. More than 50,000 pilgrims had been benefitted from this initiative since 2019, he added.

After successful completion, the Prime Minister’s Office directed for up-scaling of the said initiative to Karachi, Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar airports.

The CM was told that almost all the formalities had been completed to start the project.

Air France expands capacity ahead of Olympic games

As Paris prepares to host the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Air France is ramping up its capacity as part of the French national carrier's expansion plans. Long-haul capacity for summer 2024 will see an in-



crease in capacity of 9%, with flights now serving 85 destinations. This includes the resumption of daily flights to Minnesota, an extended direct service to North Carolina, and a new direct route to Arizona scheduled to run three times a week. Outside North America, long-term destinations include increased frequency on 'key African and Indian Ocean routes,' more flights to Japan and Abu Dhabi, etc.

Emirates launches 2024's shortest Airbus A380 Flight



The route was last served by the quadjet in 2020 when it was not the shortest offering.

It has taken over four years, but Riyadh will again welcome the A380. It is because of Emirates, which will deploy the double-decker quadjet to the city in April. When it resumes, it will be the third Middle East destination to see the carrier's superjumbo aircraft, joining Amman and Jeddah.

Britain provides training hardware to CAA

The UK government provided Aviation Security Screeners Computer-Based Training and Checking

efforts were underway in this regard, but an exact time could not be specified at the moment.



Programme to the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Tuesday 19 March, along with computers for the authority's Directorate of Aviation Security.

With this development, the CAA "achieved another significant milestone with the support of the UK Department for Transport", the authority said in a statement.

CAA's Director of Aviation Security Shahid Qadir and Airport Manager Aftab Gillani received the equipment from Mohammed Gaffar, first secretary at the British High Commission, at a ceremony held at the Islamabad International Airport.

The computer-based 'Threat Image Recognition' training programme and its hardware would enable timely compliance with another ICAO requirement of checking screeners in the aviation industry, including airlines, the Airports Security Force, cargo, etc., through a computer-based system.

PIA flights to UK Meanwhile, a day after the CAA's additional director general said that PIA flights to the UK would likely resume in May as inspections in this regard have been completed, the authority explained that the additional DG's response referred to the upcoming European Union Air Safety Committee meeting in May and not to the resumption of flights to the UK.

As for the resumption of direct flights to the UK, a CAA spokesperson said the

Embraer commercial aviation 20% growth for 2023

Embraer has reported a consolidated revenue of \$5,269 million in 2023, an increase of 16% compared to the year prior; with commercial aviation and executive aviation taking a



20% and 13% share respectively. Services and support also accounted for a 12% share in total consolidated revenue. For the whole year, adjusted EBIT was \$350 million and the adjusted EBIT margin was 6.6%, an increase of \$79.9 million year on year 'because of higher volumes across all business units and other operational income'. The Brazilian manufacturer delivered 25 commercial aircraft in the full year 2023. Commercial aviation revenues totalled \$1,847 million.



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Emirates is now selling 5th freedom Boeing 777 tickets between Singapore & Phnom Penh

The latest service comes shortly after it announced another fifth freedom route.

Fifth freedom routes are an exciting part of aviation, especially if they involve an exotic airline or unusual airports – and if tickets are inexpensive. Assume an airline flies A-B-C, where A is an airport in its

home nation. It may gain traffic rights to carry passengers from B-C and vice versa, legs that do not touch its homeland, which is the definition of a fifth freedom operation. Emirates recently added Dubai-Miami-Bogota on this basis – and another route has been announced.



FAA recruiting pilots attending SUN 'n FUN for research study

The FAA is recruiting pilots attending the SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo in April 2024 to participate in a paid research study.

For the study, the FAA needs pilots who have flown at least once in the last six months (including training simulator time), and who hold a current FAA medical certificate (not BasicMed).

For pilots holding a Class I or II medical certificate, the FAA is recruiting pilots 60 or older. For pilots holding a Class III medical certificate, the FAA is recruiting pilots 25 or older.

The study session takes about four hours and pays \$300, \$400, or \$500 (depending on medical certification class). Payment is dispersed immediately following participation.

Participation involves completing two computerized cognitive tests related to tasks such as working memory, attention, mental rotation, and multitasking performance.

The purpose of the study is to obtain pilot data for computerized tests. The FAA uses these tests to help recertify pilots for flying following a medical event (e.g., stroke, head injury, certain medication).

Korean Air Building Asia's largest engine MRO facility

Korean Air has started construction of a new aircraft engine maintenance cluster in Unbuk, near Incheon International Airport. When completed in 2027, it will be billed as Asia's largest engine facility, that will more than triple KAL's annual MRO engine capacity to 360 from 100 powerplants.

KAL's current engine maintenance facility is at Bucheon, with an test cell in a separate facility in Unbuk. Spanning more than 140,000 m² (1.5 million ft.²) across seven floors, the new KRW578 billion (\$439 million) building will allow streamlining of the two facilities into a central-

ized site.

The flag carrier now can maintain the

Pratt & Whitney PW4000 and PW1100, CFM56 and General Electric GE90-115B.

This will be expanded to include the GENx and CFM Leap-1B.

KAL also says it is exploring the possibility of servicing Asiana Airlines' engines, particularly the Rolls-Royce Trent XWB on its Airbus A350-900s. KAL is in the process of a merger with Asiana, which is awaiting a handful of regulatory approvals.

KAL says its new maintenance cluster is expected to generate over 1,000 new jobs, to bolster the domestic aviation MRO industry's competitiveness and reduce dependence on international maintenance services.



Rendering of Korean Air's planned Unbuk engine maintenance facility.

Bidding deadline for airport's outsourcing extended

The government has decided to extend by two months the deadline for submission of bids for the outsourcing of management and operations of the country's three major airports following the requests of foreign investors and recommendations of the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

The decision was taken at a meeting of the steering committee on outsourcing of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore airports held under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday 15 March.

The meeting was attended by the ministers for planning, development and special initiatives and law, justice and human rights (online), secretaries of the ministries of aviation and law, senior officials and the IFC country director.

The IFC official recapitulated the progress made on the project of airports' outsourcing and informed the committee that multiple efforts of continuous engagement with prospective investors have yielded positive results and with the new political government in office, the confidence of investors to invest in Pakistan has augmented.

Bidders from Qatar, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkiye, the UAE and Malaysia and local consortia sought extension

With this intent, international bidders from Qatar, the UAE, Germany, Turkiye, the Netherlands and Malaysia and local consortia have requested for an extension in the bid submission timelines to complete their due diligence, the meeting was told.

The foreign minister assured the meeting of his ministry's fullest support in engaging the investors through economic diplomacy and expeditious process for achieving successful outcome of the project.

Considering the requests made by the interested bidders and recommendations by the IFC, the committee decided to extend the bid submission date for 60 days till May 15.

The government had decided to outsource the managements of Jinnah International Airport, Allama Iqbal International Airport and Islamabad International Airport to international operators to attract foreign investment.

Italy launches visa service from Lahore

Embassy of Italy First Secretary Augusto Palmeiri says Italy has launched its visa service from Lahore with plans to extend the facility to other major cities in the country soon.

He was speaking at a meeting with traders at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on Wednesday, 06 March. LCCI President Kashif Anwar, Senior Vice President Zafar Mahmood Chaudhry and executive member Chaudhry Khadim were present on the occasion.

Augusto Palmeiri emphasised the importance of strengthening the ties between Italy and Pakistan, both in terms of relations and business ventures.

He stressed the potential to elevate bilateral trade to new heights, setting an ambitious goal of reaching \$5 billion and pledged continuous efforts towards achieving this objective. He extended an invitation to attend upcoming expos, highlighting it as the initial step towards boosting business ties.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar said the chamber and Embassy of Italy signed an MoU in March 2018 and they would certainly like to renew it to further deepen the mutual ties.

Kashif Anwar said that Italy holds great economic importance for Pakistan as one of the largest economies in the European Union with a GDP in excess of 2 trillion dollars. Italy is an important trading partner of Pakistan in Europe which comes at 8th place among the top exporting destinations for Pakistan.

He added that according to the State Bank of Pakistan's data, Pakistan's exports to Italy were around \$1.15 billion in 2022-23 while imports from Italy were \$527 million in the same period.

The LCCI president said Pakistan's exports to Italy are heavily concentrated in textiles, leather and rice while the imports are dominated by pharmaceutical products, scrap and machinery etc. There is a tremendous potential for Pakistan to enhance its exports to Italy in the sectors of processed food, sports goods and surgical instruments, etc.

Indonesian pilots fall asleep mid-flight

Indonesia's transport ministry said on Saturday, 09 March, it would open a probe into local airline Batik Air after two of its pilots were found to have fallen asleep during a recent flight.

A pilot and co-pilot were simultaneously asleep for 28 minutes during a flight from South East Sulawesi to Jakarta on Jan 25, a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) said.

The incident resulted in a series of navigation errors, but the Airbus A320's 153 passengers and four flight attendants were unharmed during the two-hour-and-35-minute flight.

Batik Air said in a statement on Saturday 09 March, that it "operates with adequate rest policy" and that it was "committed to implement all safety recommendations".

The pilots involved in the incident had been temporarily suspended, the statement added.

The KNKT report was uploaded to the agency's website late last month.



One of the pilots had not rested adequately on the night before the flight, according to the report.

About half an hour after the plane took off, the captain asked permission from his second-in-command to rest for a while, with the request being granted.

ACTSI obtained FAA approval for Wheel and Tire Shop Services

Aviation Concepts Technical Services Incorporated (ACTSI), is pleased to announce it has recently

completed and obtained FAA approval for Wheel and Tire Shop Services (WTSS) under its current Limited Accessory Rating.

WTSS offers tire change, tear down and build up with NDT (as required) on 19 different wheel assembly part numbers ranging from Gulfstream models G280, GIV-X (G350/G450), GV-SP (G550),

G650/G650ER, Textron Beechcraft King Air B200 / B300 models, and Bombardier Global XRS and Global 7500.

With safety and quality always at the forefront, ACTSI remains committed to



pushing the boundaries through unparalleled customer service and experience.

The WTSS compliments ACTSI's current component support services such as their Sheet Metal Repair Shop and Battery Repair Shop (NiCad and Sealed Lead Acid Battery (SLAB)).

"We are in constant pursuit of redefining MRO standards in the region and adding the Wheel and Tire shop to our suite of support services helps bolster our existing repair station services. This in turn helps solidify ACTSI's reputation as a key player in the MRO sector in Asia," commented Mr. TJ Trinidad, Vice President - Business Development at ACTSI.

The new Qatar Airways CEO is planning to bring back first class cabins

Qatar Airways CEO Badr Mohammed Al Meer disclosed that the airline is developing a new first-class product that is nearing completion. Meanwhile, the carrier is also looking to place new aircraft orders from major manufacturers as part of a broader long-term strategy.

Badr Mohammed Al Meer has been at the helm of the Gulf carrier for just over four months after taking over from H.E. Akbar Al Baker, who stepped down from the position late last year, which he had held for nearly 27 years. Since November 2023, Al Meer, who had served as the Chief Operating Officer of Doha Hamad International Airport (DOH), has made some changes at the airline as it entered a "new era" after the transition.

In an interview with CNBC, the head revealed the airline's plans to unveil a new high-yielding first class concept for its cabins. It is reportedly in the final stages of development and will hopefully be announced soon. Speaking in the interview, Al Meer said,

"We wanted to combine the experience of flying commercial and flying on a private jet and develop something new. We

are 70% to 80% ready. We are only finalizing colors and small touches, but hopefully, we will be able to announce it very soon."

Over the last few years, several airlines have abandoned first class seating, opting to enhance their business class product and utilize more aircraft space. Last year, under the leadership of Al Baker, Qatar Airways announced that it would eventually move away from first class on its long-haul routes, as it was deemed unnecessary. However, the new CEO has different views on the matter.



PIA plane back from Muscat after engine replaced

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Boeing 777 plane, which made an emergency landing at Muscat International Airport due to engine failure 13 days ago, returned home on Monday 11 March, after its engine was replaced with another one.



The engine was replaced with one removed from another Boeing 777 plane grounded at Jinnah International Airport.

The engine was airlifted to Muscat on March 10 on a C-130 cargo plane.

Flight PK-714 from Madina to Islamabad carrying 392 passengers had to make an emergency landing at Muscat airport after one of its engines suddenly stalled and failed at 35,000 feet.

The aircraft, with 357 passengers and 35 crew members, had taken off from Madina one hour and 50 minutes late. After attaining an altitude of 35,000 feet, the pilot noticed some problem in the engine.

The plane was flying over Muscat when its left engine (engine number 1) suddenly stopped working. The cockpit crew decided to land at Muscat as it was the nearest airport.

After getting permission for landing, the aircraft safely landed with one operational engine in Muscat at 10.21pm.

The passengers were offloaded and were sent to the airport lounge.

Shortly after the plane landed at the airport, a group of engineers were sent to Muscat from Pakistan to get the engine repaired, but after examining it the engineers decided to ground the plane as the engine was damaged, probably after having been hit by an external object.

Later a relief flight was sent to bring back the passengers stranded at Muscat airport. After replacement of the engine, the PIA aircraft took off for Karachi.

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The continuing search for MH370

It has been 10 years since Malaysia Airlines passenger flight MH370 disappeared on March 8 2014. To this day, it remains one of the biggest aviation mysteries globally.

It's unthinkable that a modern Boeing 777-200ER jetliner, with 239 people on board, can simply vanish without any explanation. Yet multiple searches in the past decade have still not yielded the main wreckage or the bodies of the victims.

At a remembrance event held earlier this week, the Malaysian transport minister announced a renewed push for another search.

If approved by the Malaysian government, the survey will be conducted by United States seabed exploration firm Ocean Infinity, whose efforts were unsuccessful in 2018.

What happened to MH370?

The flight was scheduled to fly from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Air traffic control lost contact with the aircraft within 60 minutes into the flight, over the South China Sea.

Subsequently, it was tracked by military radar crossing the Malay Peninsula and was last located by radar over the Andaman Sea in the northeastern Indian Ocean.

Ten years and multiple searches since the Malaysia Airlines passenger plane with 239 on board went missing, a new effort will seek to provide closure to the family of those who perished

Later, automated satellite communications between the aircraft and British firm Inmarsat telecommunications' satellite indicated that the plane ended up in the southeast Indian Ocean, along the 7th arc [an arc is a series of coordinates].

This became the basis for defining the initial search areas by the Australian Air Transport Safety Bureau. Initial air searches were conducted in the South China Sea and the Andaman Sea.

To date, we still don't know what caused the aircraft's change of course and disappearance.

What have searches for MH370 found so far?

On March 18, 2014, ten days after the disappearance of MH370, a search in the southern Indian Ocean was led by Australia, with participation of aircraft from several countries. This search continued until April 28 and covered an area of 4,500,000 square kilometres of ocean. No

debris was found.

Two underwater searches of the Indian Ocean, 2,800km off the coast of Western Australia, have also failed to find any evidence of the main crash site.

The initial seabed search, led by Australia, covered 120,000 square kilometres and extended 50 nautical miles across the 7th arc. It took 1,046 days and was suspended on January 17, 2017.

A second search by Ocean Infinity in 2018 covered over 112,000 square kilometres. It was completed in just over three months but also didn't locate the wreckage.

What about debris?

While the main crash site still hasn't been found, several pieces of debris have washed up in the years since the flight's disappearance.

In fact, in June 2015, officials from the Australian Air Transport Safety Bureau determined that debris might arrive in Sumatra, contrary to the ocean currents in the region.

The strongest current in the Indian Ocean is the South Equatorial Current. It flows east to west between northern Australia and Madagascar, and debris would be able to cross it.

Indeed, on July 30, 2015, a large piece of debris — a flaperon [moving part of a plane wing] — washed up on Reunion Island in the western Indian Ocean. It was later confirmed to belong to MH370.

Twelve months earlier, using an oceanographic drift model, our University of Western Australia (UWA) modelling team had predicted that any debris originating from the 7th arc would end up

in the western Indian Ocean.

In subsequent months, additional aircraft debris was found in the western Indian Ocean in Mauritius, Tanzania, Rodrigues, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa.

The UWA drift analysis accurately predicted where floating debris from MH370 would beach in the western Indian Ocean. It also guided American adventurer Blaine Gibson and others to directly recover several dozen pieces of debris, three of which have been confirmed to be from MH370, while several others are deemed likely.

To date, these debris finds in the western Indian Ocean are the only physical evidence found related to MH370.

It is also independent verification that the crash occurred close to the 7th arc, as any debris would initially flow northwards and then to the west, transported by the prevailing ocean currents. These results are consistent with other drift studies undertaken by independent researchers globally

Why a new search for mh370 now?

Unfortunately, the ocean is a chaotic place, and even oceanographic drift models cannot pinpoint the exact location of the crash site.

The proposed new search by Ocean Infinity has significantly narrowed down the target area within latitudes 36°S and 33°S. This is approximately 50 km to the south of the locations where UWA modelling indicated the release of debris along the 7th arc. If the search does not locate the wreckage, it could be extended

Continued on Page 21



The planned route, final route and initial search area for MH370 in Southeast



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Lack of professionalism blamed for aviation industry's downfall

The Aircraft Owners and Operators Association (AOOA) has issued a white paper on the failures of the aviation industry, claiming that a lack of professionalism caused pilot licence issues, leading to a ban on operations of Pakistani airlines in EU countries.

Posting the right people in the proper jobs was one of the recommendations made in the white paper, which outlined the reasons behind the aviation industry's downfall and suggested measures to improve it.

The AOOA said former aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan, due to

lack of understanding of the sensitivity of the matter, was wrongly briefed by



the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that a number of pilots possessed fake licences. It destroyed the whole industry,

and Pakistani airlines were banned from operating in Europe and the United States.

“Now, it is proven that there are no fake licences, and the court has dropped the charges against pilots... However, the present CAA director general is not even accepting the court orders and is unable to restore the image of the country which is causing further delays in lifting the ban on PIA and other airlines for Europe and US,” says the white paper.

It regretted that legislation is done without following the proper system of getting input from the stakeholders through parliamentary committees.

The AOOA suggested measures for improvement and increase in revenue, such as outsourcing of unused airports to local governments/entities. It also called for renewing all lapsed air transport licences of airlines and other air operators on a perpetual basis to generate economic activity and create jobs.

The AOOA also suggested reforming aviation policies by eliminating exorbitant fees, reevaluating DG's powers, and reconsidering age limits on aircraft imports to stimulate industry growth, prevent closures, and retain jobs.

Red panda seized as Thai airport stops Indian smugglers

Thai customs officials have arrested six Indians for attempting to smuggle a red panda and 86 other animals out of the kingdom, including snakes, parrots and monitor lizards, officials said on Wednesday 06 March.

The illicit menagerie was discovered hidden in the suspects' checked luggage at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport as they tried to fly to Mumbai.

Thailand is a major transit hub for wildlife smugglers, who often sell the animals in China and Vietnam, although recent years have seen an uptick in trafficking to India.

“We have found out that the animals include 29 black throat monitor lizards, 21 snakes, 15 birds, including parrots —

a total of 87 animals. The animals were hidden inside the luggage,” the Customs Department said in a statement.

Photos released by the department showed the red panda — an endangered species — peeking out of a wicker basket, and a parrot shut in a plastic container with air holes crudely drilled in the lid.

More plastic tubs held lizards, while snakes were seen coiled together in cloth bags. The suspects face a maximum of 10 years in jail or four times the amount of import duties.

Last month a Mongolian man was arrested at the same airport for trying to smuggle Komodo dragons, pythons and two dozen live fish out of the kingdom.



A red panda that was found in the luggage of a group of Indian nationals at Bangkok airport.

The continuing search for MH370

north.

Since the initial underwater searches, technology has tremendously improved. Ocean Infinity is using a fleet of autonomous underwater vehicles with improved resolution. The proposed search will also use remotely controlled surface vessels.

In the area where the search is to take place, the ocean is around 4,000 metres deep. The water temperatures are 1–2°C, with low currents. This means that even after 10 years, the debris field would be relatively intact.

Therefore, there is a high probability that the wreckage can still be found.

If a future search is successful, this would bring closure not just to the families of those who perished, but also for the thousands of people who have been involved in the search efforts.

*The writer is professor of Coastal Oceanography at the University of Western Australia
Republished from The Conversation*

New CEO Sialkot International Airport

Air Vice-Marshal (R) Tanveer Ashraf Bhatti, Sitara-i-Imtiaz, has assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer at Sialkot International Airport in February 15th, 2024. He was in the Pakistan Air Force serving as the Additional Director General of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority since 4 July 2018. He was commissioned in the GD (P) Branch of the Pakistan Air Force in December 1988. He holds a master's degree in "National Security & War Studies".

He is a graduate of the Combat Commander's School, Air War College and the National Defence University.

He has been awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military).



Air Vice-Marshal (R) Tanveer Ashraf Bhatti, CEO, Sialkot International Airport.

Oman Air to start flight operations from SIAL

Oman Air is set to commence flight operations from Sialkot International Airport (SIAL), with plans to fly to Muscat four times a week starting in mid-May 2024.

SIAL, which currently accommodates eight foreign and domestic airlines, serves as a hub for flights to various destinations worldwide.

Among these airlines, Emirates offers daily flights to Dubai, Qatar Airways operates daily flights to Doha, Gulf Air provides five weekly flights to Bahrain, Salam Air offers three weekly flights to Muscat, Fly Dubai operates eleven weekly flights to Dubai, Air Arabia has daily flights to Sharjah, PIA offers fifteen weekly flights to destinations such as Dammam, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Dubai, and Kuwait, and AirSial operates four weekly flights from SIAL, two to Jeddah and two to Muscat.



Gul Group commemorated International Women's Day to honor their remarkable contributions worldwide, picture shows their staff pose for group photo on the occasion.

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Emirates & Etihad offer Iftar meals while Qatar Airways allows more baggage for Ramadan



The holy month of Ramadan is currently underway. With many passengers of the Islamic faith traveling during this period, the big three Middle Eastern carriers have offered special conveniences to make their journeys more comfortable. This includes specially curated meals and even more baggage allowance on a particular route.

Emirates' iftar boxes

Emirates is handing out meal boxes to fasting passengers both onboard and at boarding gates. At the airline's lounges at Dubai International Airport (DXB), passengers can find traditional Arabic sweets, dates and coffee during Ramadan.

The lounges also offer a selection of hot and cold Arabic mezze, as well as lentil soup. For main course, there is Ara-

bic mixed grill with tahina and chicken kabsa served with dakous and raita. And the selection of desserts includes kunafa pistachio cream, basbousa saffron, walnut kathayefashta, and ice cream flavors of Arabic coffee and dates or baklawa, alongside a host of traditional Arabic sweets and pastries.

At select Emirates gates, fasting passengers are being offered complimentary iftar boxes to help break the fast. These contain water, laban, a banana, and dates. Onboard, customers breaking their fast across all cabins on select routes will be given nutritionally balanced Ramadan meal boxes.

These include light bites from hummus with spinach and Arabic bread to tabbouleh with baba ghanoush, alongside sandwiches of Moroccan or zaatar chicken with pickled garlic mayonnaise. Desserts include almond chocolate or Arabic baklawa, cashew nut and pine seed baklawa flowers, traditional dates, and laban.

Those who wish to break their fast at these lounges can have warm harira soup and lobster machbous ravioli to chicken biryani. For dessert, guests can have au-



thentic Ramadan treats with a modern twist, such as Vimto cheesecake, rose and pistachio mahalabia and rangeena.

Premium travelers onboard Etihad planes are being given lentil soup with fried chaami cheese, lamb and date meatballs with saffron rice, and the classic warm umm ali dessert. Those looking for lighter options can go for an iftar salad.

Economy passengers can enjoy Arabic mezze, braised lamb with vermicelli rice, fried onion, and almond, and for dessert, they will be served Vimto mousse with khabeesa. Etihad guests who break their fast before landing are being given iftar bags decorated with traditional Emirati artwork, containing



Etihad's offerings

At Etihad's lounges in Abu Dhabi, New York, Washington DC, and London Heathrow, passengers are being offered laban, Vimto, karkade, date milk, hydrating cucumber refresher, and rose milk.



Laban, water, and dates.

Qatar Airways offers extra luggage allowance

Qatar Airways is doing its bit during the holy month by offering an extra 15kg baggage allowance free of charge to passengers flying between Doha and Jeddah from March 15 to April 10.

The carrier operates 35 weekly flights to Jeddah from its hub at Hamad International Airport, and its overall network in Saudi Arabia comprises 10 destinations – AIUla, Dammam, Qassim, Jeddah, Medina, Neom, Riyadh, Tabuk, Taif, and Yanbu.





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Spacecraft carrying first Belarus woman cosmonaut lifts off



NASA astronaut Tracy Dyson, Oleg Novitskiy of Russia and Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus wave while leaving for a pre-launch preparation at Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome.

Marina Vasilevskaya, Belarus' first woman cosmonaut, was aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft that blasted off successfully on 23rd March, headed for the International Space Station, Moscow's Roscosmos space agency said.

"The Soyuz took off from Baikonur" in Kazakhstan at 1236 GMT, a Roscosmos statement said, adding that the spacecraft went into orbit "as planned". Initially programmed for 21 March, the take-off was delayed on the launchpad at the last moment in another high-profile setback for Russia's space programme that has been hit by financial problems, scandal, corruption and failure.

Roscosmos chief Yuri Borisov said a "voltage dip" had occurred in a chemical

power source during the final pre-launch preparations. But on Saturday, 23rd March, the Soyuz MS-25 mission took off from the Baikonur space port without apparent problems and carrying three astronauts — experienced Russian cosmonaut Oleg Novitskiy, Tracy Dyson from the United States and 33-year-old Vasilevskaya. "Everything is fine on board," Novitskiy said shortly after lift-off in a video broadcast by Roscosmos.

The Soyuz craft was due to dock on Monday, 25 March, at 1510 GMT with the Russian segment of the International Space Station (ISS). Moscow's once pioneering space programme has faced multiple setbacks since it won the first leg of the space race more than 60 years ago.

Boeing plane lands without panel in US

The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating how a United Airlines Boeing 737-800 lost an external panel before landing safely in Oregon on Friday, 15 March.

United Flight 433 landed at Medford Airport around 1:45pm carrying 139 passengers and six crew after departing from San Francisco, the FAA and airline said. The FAA said a post-landing airline inspection of the 25-year-old airplane revealed a missing panel.

United said it will also investigate and

said no emergency was declared because there was no indication of the damage during flight.

"We'll conduct a thorough examination of the plane and perform all the needed repairs before it returns to service," the airline said in a statement. Boeing did not comment, directing questions to United Airlines.

According to FAA records, the plane was built in late 1998. The Rogue Valley Times posted a dramatic photo of the airplane with the missing panel. Traffic was briefly halted at the airport to search for the

panel.

In the aftermath of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 mid-air emergency prompted by a door plug blowout, US aviation incidents are getting more attention.

Boeing has been under heavy regulatory scrutiny following the Jan 5 Alaska Airlines incident, with probes into the company's safety and quality standards in its production process.

Khawaja Asif expects EASA clearance for PIA flights by mid-May

Federal Minister of Aviation Khawaja Asif has claimed that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flights to the UK will resume soon after clearance from the European Aviation Safety Agency by mid-May.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Aviation on Friday, the minister's remarks were based on conversations with "relevant quarters".

The minister also hoped that EASA's clearance to fly to Europe would make the national carrier more valuable and attractive to private investors. The ministry's press release said Mr Asif and Minister for Privatisation Abdul Aleem Khan chaired a consultative meeting on the privatisation of the national flag carrier.

The secretaries of aviation privatisation and finance divisions attended the meeting. A team from advisory firm Ernst & Young (EY), which is leading the privatisation process, presented a summary of the restructuring and segregation plan, which was being carried out with the cabinet's approval.

The financial advisors highlighted different pre- and post-bidding areas of concern about core and non-core assets and liabilities and presented phase-wise solutions.

The meeting also discussed challenges and risks, including debt reprofiling with commercial banks, a six-month cash flow plan and a transfer of liabilities to a holding company. The privatisation minister also emphasised swift completion of the privatisation process, the statement added.



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Parting Gift

By: Zeenat Iqbal Hussain

The year 1950

Mark was born in London during the post war period, in the east end of London, which has been largely rebuilt since World War II when it suffered much damage from bombing. London at that time was crippled because of the depression which was an after math of the war. The birth of Mark brought relief to his parents – relief from a devastated world. You had to struggle to survive, as London was economically shattered also. It was hard to make ends meet. Even in those days Mark's house was full of guests. Their family was known for its hospitality. One instance Mark remembered of his childhood was of his Mom's spending the last of her saving's to feed a less fortunate family. 'Give and you receive', she used to say. This image of his mother remained with Mark in his adult years.

She worked in a garments factory, which was a part of the textile industry that was established by France, an ally from the war. She brought home samples of dresses that fitted Mark's sister, Elizabeth. 'She's such a Doll', remarked a friend of Mom's and she'd go pink in the cheek.

His father accepted building contracts, which were part of a rebuild London project. This is how they slowly became rich. He, as a building contractor, before putting up a building, used to first look at the site, choose the people who were going to work for him and plan a schedule of work so that he knew which people should be on the site at the right time. The bricklayers and the plasterer's would often get in each other's way. 'I'll finish with the bricks in another couple of hours. 'Oh! So you will, the last time you said a couple, you took eight'. He went off, leaving the bricklayer to finish, who was envious of his long break. He complained, 'Boss, we both should get equal pay for the hours of work we put in. Mark's father would tackle the situation, and he planned shifts, so that no body would have any objection.

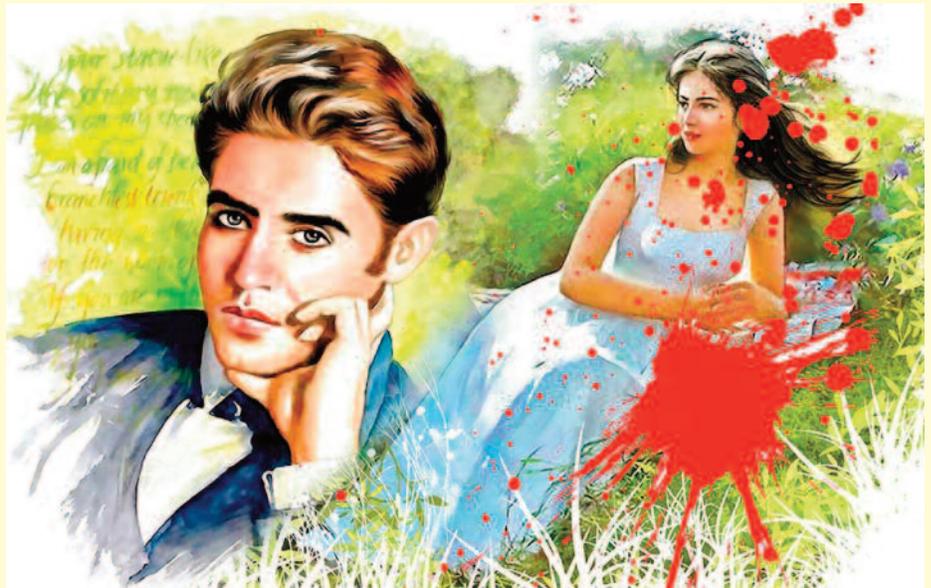
Then there was the time when Elizabeth contracted an infection after swimming in the pool. They gave her a Penicillin shot (which she was allergic to), but it was too late before they found out that she was allergic. She developed a rash, as if the infection were not enough. But they were a close knit family and that saw them out of such situations. Mark

held her hand and teased, 'your face looks like its full of Polka Dots'. 'You'd know what it feels like if you had them'. Elizabeth, on the verge of tears, told him.

About the same time, in Stalin's Russia, Susan was born – in a communist setting. Later, she would question Mark about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. 'Because they deserve to be so'. He'd reply. Many other questions came to her mind, especially about reli-

an opinion of hers on many matters.

During his school days Mark enjoyed playing Cricket, and kept himself up to date with the score board of County Cricket. 'The night watchman just might level the score'. 'Not if the weather does not permit'. His friends enjoyed the game too. In 1882 Australia beat England at the Oval in London and after the match the 'Sporting Times' invented the term 'The Ashes'. The paper told its readers of the



gion, but her differences were not confirmed. Originally she remained a Christian. A product of the west, although she cherished faint memories of the large farms set up as collective units which were usually worked by 100 to 500 families, who reaped what they sowed. She was impressed and affected by the equal opportunity. And this would reflect, in her life, later on as would the prosperity of Hampstead heath, which is a large tract of countryside of London. (The latter as told by Mark to her). Her childhood memories would reflect in her adult life.

Once during a shortage of wheat (in London – where they were to stay after marriage), she observed that those collective farmers never went hungry whereas England imported wheat every year – and it was expensive. Mark would tease her, 'the average income of a Londoner affords him the necessities as well as the luxuries'. 'Capitalist thinking, that', she retorted. With her there would remain a distinction between a necessity and luxury. 'If it's not necessary, why do it', was

'Death of English Cricket.' The Ashes (from a stump burnt during the England tour of Australia in 1883) are kept in an urn at the Museum at Lord's. Mark took pride in showing his guests this urn.

A fortune teller once told Mark that after his marriage he would be blissfully happy, but then he somehow did not want to reveal something to Mark – something terribly sad. He further added that Mark would have to part from someone he deeply loved. He said that an evil spirit would be the cause of his parting from someone he deeply loved. He further asked Mark to practice religion. Mark was not religious.

Who could tell that after so many years, life would be different.

Flash-forward to 1970

They were madly in love. Happiness glowed on their cheeks when they faced the colourful world. Mark and Susan were the children of prosperous parents. Life had been kind to them but God's blessings were only bestowed on a few as would be proved later on. Kind as in material pos-

sessions. Mark's house was full of guests. It was there that in fact he met Susan. The first meeting was followed by a series of them. They decided to seal their relationship and with the consent of their parents they got engaged. Mark was a handsome boy. Girls did vie with each other for his attention. One such girl was his parents' choice for his partner. Obviously she was his mother's friend's daughter. Very compatible, because she was in and out of their house very often and was almost a family member. Mark liked her – but the liking was never to turn into love.

Mark was a businessman; and his commitments kept him busy for the day. 'The stocks of the company are experiencing a low'. He told a colleague. 'The clients are not satisfied and are not ready to invest'. 'We'll have to work the nights'. But he spared some time every day for his beloved. Sometimes with flowers, sometimes over a meal, sometimes just to remind her that he loved the colour of her eyes, he always had time for such sentiments.

After a brief engagement they married. They went off on their honeymoon

Having made a special trip to separate them, guess who else was there. The same girl. She had not accepted defeat. She tried to blackmail him, by using his mother. Her befitting attitude towards his mother was a result of her long association with him. She was a good cook, unlike his mother and as they say, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. She once cooked a meal that was so tasty that they licked their fingers clean. Susan's ego was offended.

But there was always Mark's shoulder to lean on. He assured and reassured her. There was no need to worry. The 'uninvited guest' would never change his love for her. Other couples saw them as ideals for a perfect married life. His mother would tell him that marriage was not a bed of roses and not to be disappointed if anything went against his wishes. She went on, saying that Mark's father had been short tempered at the start of their marriage and many times she kept quiet when he had an anger fit. Mark's retort, 'I know mom, I think I can handle it. You make it sound so difficult, when it is actually not'. 'The situation would get out of control,

An ultra sound showed that it was a girl. Yet their elders were reluctant to make any baby clothes or other things for the baby before hand. They felt that others would be envious, and that was not a good sign.

'I can't wait to see her'. As he felt the baby turn in Susan's belly. 'Then you'll say you're pressed for time, because she is a handful'. 'That will never happen'. 'We'll see'. She got the last word.

The name, what should the name be. Natasha was selected. Natasha was a Russian name. Susan's parents had spent some years in Russia. Her father had held a good post in the Pakistan Embassy there. Her mother liked the name and had wanted to name her grandchild Natasha.

The delivery time was near. She experienced contractions. The doctor and nurses were by her side. But God's blessing escaped them. Susan's life was in danger. On their knees they prayed – the parents. 'Oh! God, save her – if they are our sins you hold against us, do not make her pay, please God, please'. Some complications developed. Could it be that the evil spirit had entered Susan's body? The evil spirit that the fortune teller had warned Mark against. Could it be that the profound effort of giving birth and the effort of fighting the evil spirit broke down a weary and tired Susan and finally killed her? Mark awoke to religion as he had been advised by the fortune teller – better late than never. The doctor tried his utmost best to save both mother and child. It was touch and go. They all huddled together outside the operation theatre, looking at each other for strength. The doctor arrived, his face sullen. The message he was about to convey to them was obvious.

Susan breathed her last on a shocked Mark's lap. The parting gift, Natasha, lay in the nurse's hands. Caught between sorrow and happiness, he had to decide, to get over his sorrow for Natasha, Susan's and his Natasha.

Even to this day holding Natasha's finger he visits the grave, talks to her and gets her response. It seems like she tells him, do not give up, for Natasha. And little Natasha clasps her hands in prayer, taught to her by her father. In a whisper, she recites ----- in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Ghost. Amen. He walks away with the child, a smile on his face, ready to take on the world. And still in the race is the girl, who however much she tries will not change matters or should she try through Natasha. She would not give up. Mark was worth it. They do not make them quite like him nowadays.



to Switzerland. Switzerland was an ideal place. A place without an army. A peaceful setting, detached from the morbid states engaged in war. Amongst so many people, from all around the world, the two of them saw only each other. Walking in the shadows of the Alps, hand in hand, they made a commitment never to let this end. 'Wear your skis. I'll race you'. 'I'm too scared'. 'Take the plunge'. 'oo---oop---oops'. She was out of sight. Discovered in a pile of snow. 'I thought I told you to watch it at the curve'. Seeing her red nose poke through the snow he stifled a giggle.

otherwise'. She advised him, as any mother would her son.

Susan conceived a child in their first year of marriage. Their first child was not going to be planned. The gynaecologist examined her every month. A girl was a great help for the mother and they desired a girl as their first born. Frills, bows all in pink with linen to match, Susan visualised her daughter's frocks and her room. Susan's mother had good taste, which showed in Susan's attire. She was nominated for the best dressed person at a party once.

It was the eight month of pregnancy.

Security pledges for workers as CPEC set to expand

Pakistan on Friday, 22 March, assured Chinese workers of top-level security as it pushed for the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through the launch of five special industrial zones.

At a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong, Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal assured the Chinese side that Pakistan had made significant efforts to safeguard the security of Chinese workers and would further implement top-level security measures for Chinese personnel.

He said security was a prerequisite for development, and Pakistan acknowledged the full recognition of CPEC construction and security risks. However, these risks would not disrupt work on CPEC projects, he added.

The two sides agreed to intensify efforts to establish a new working group on five new economic corridors under the second phase, aligning with the Five Es framework — export, energy, equity, environment and e-Pakistan — already prepared by the planning ministry.

The Chinese ambassador congratulated Mr Iqbal on assuming the role of planning minister for the fourth time.

“Both sides have agreed to expedite Phase 2 of the CPEC, while deciding to establish a working group on five new economic corridors, including the Corridor of Job Creation, Corridor of Innovation, Cor-

ridor of Green Energy, and Inclusive Regional Development,” an official statement said.

Both the planning ministry and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China will prepare separate concept papers on the new economic corridors, which will provide a clear roadmap for each sector in the future. These concept papers will be consolidated before presentation at the upcoming Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting, which is expected later this year, the statement said.

The planning ministry has already initiated the implementation of the Five Es framework. This framework will be aligned with the five new economic corridors to advance Pakistan’s prosperity in each sector under the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Mr Iqbal told the meeting, highlighting the importance of accelerating Pakistan’s export capabilities through enterprise development and job creation.

During the meeting, Mr Iqbal outlined a strategic approach to maximise the success of special economic zones (SEZs) within Pakistan. He proposed a “One plus Four” model, wherein each SEZ in Pakistan would be partnered with one province from China, one industry group to develop specialised clusters within these zones, one zone from China to provide technical expertise, and a state-owned en-

terprise to spearhead SEZ development.

Mr Iqbal said this collaborative framework would speed up establishing and growing special economic zones in Pakistan, enhancing their competitiveness and attractiveness to investors.

“The Chinese envoy appreciated Pakistan’s efforts to implement the CPEC, particularly the initiation of Phase 2,” the statement said.

Addressing Pakistan’s need to boost the efficiency of special economic zones to increase foreign exchange, the Chinese envoy suggested that officers in charge of the zones must visit Chinese industrial parks to observe firsthand the efficiency measures practised by Chinese authorities.

The minister noted that the success of special economic zones was dependent on their ability to become clusters of specific industries, fostering economies of scale and creating a vibrant ecosystem conducive to innovation and growth.

The discussions also focused on enhancing regional connectivity, emphasising critical infrastructure projects like the Gwadar Port and the M-8 motorway, which will strengthen trade links and facilitate regional integration.

Mr Iqbal also appreciated Chinese assistance in helping Pakistan develop its exports and conceded that Pakistan’s current challenge was to determine how quickly it could build its exports through earned foreign exchange, not borrowed money.



Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal holds a meeting with the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong, in Islamabad.

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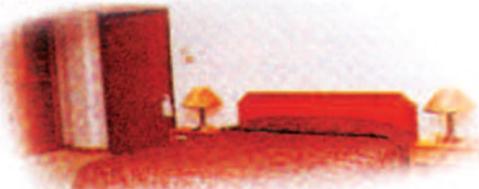


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PR completes trial-run of longest goods train

The Pakistan Railways on Friday, 15 March, successfully completed trial-operation of the first-ever longest goods train in the history of the country, paving the way for launch of a regular goods train operation in near future.

According to a PR spokesman in Lahore, the train carrying coal in 50 high-capacity wagons started journey from Karachi and reached the Kotri station with a speed of 38km per hour.

Having 3,000 tonnes of load, the goods train was pulled by the most powerful giant diesel engine GEU-40. "Had this load been sent by road, it would have required 94 22-wheeler trucks."

The spokesman said the regular operation of such trains in future would not only help reduce traffic burden on highways but also contribute to reducing vehicular emissions.

"The core objective of this trial operation was to check whether our existing track is fit for such a huge load," the spokesman told to media. He said the train consisting of 50 wagons reached Kotri where its load/coal was shifted to various small goods' trains for onward dispatch to the Sahiwal coal-fired power plant," he said. He said since it was a trial operation up to Kotri, the regular operation of long goods' trains would be launched after carrying out a study of the main line.

"For a regular operation of such trains, we need a timetable, adequate staff, goods/load etc for which we will require some-time to arrange," he added.



Textile exports rise to \$1.4bn

Pakistan's textile and clothing exports increased by double digits for the third consecutive month in February, indicating a recovery in orders from international buyers, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Friday, 15 March.

The sector's exports rose 19.20 per cent to \$1.407 billion in February from \$1.18bn during the same month last year.

However, in the first eight months of FY24, textile and clothing exports shrank 0.65pc to \$11.14bn from \$11.21bn in the corresponding months last year.

The decline was attributed to escalating production costs due to higher energy prices and a liquidity crunch.

Mobile phone imports surge 156pc in July-February

A few months ago, the Ministry of Commerce announced that the government would soon offer regionally competitive energy tariffs to textile exporters and resolve their cash flow issues by releasing pending sales tax refunds. However, the decision has yet to be implemented.

The PBS data showed the exports of readymade garments rose 20.32pc in value in February and 18.74pc in quantity, while knitwear grew 21.24pc in value and 52.79pc in quantity. Bedwear posted a growth of 24.53pc in value and 38.67pc in quantity.

Towel exports increased by 13pc in value and 23.73pc in quantity, whereas those of cotton cloth by

12.13pc in value and 58.91pc in quantity.

However, yarn exports increased by over 41.16pc in February from a year ago. The exports of made-up articles, excluding towels, increased by 24.98pc, and tents, canvas and tarpaulin went down by 44.12pc in February from a year ago.

The import of textile machinery increased by 23pc in February, a sign that expansion or modernisation projects were now a priority. The growth in textile machinery was observed after two and a half years.

The import of synthetic fibre increased by 35.44pc, synthetic and artificial silk yarn by 2.23pc and other textile items by 31.22pc during the month. The import of raw cotton declined by 91.18pc. However, the import of worn clothes posted a growth of 24.56pc. In the first eight months of FY24, the total exports increased by 9pc to \$20.35bn over the last year.

Oil imports dipped by 10.93pc in the first eight months of FY24 to \$10.57bn from \$11.87bn a year ago, the PBS data showed.

According to the PBS, imports of petroleum products declined by 23.16pc in value during July-February and 15.77pc in quantity. Imports of crude oil increased by 5.78pc in quantity while the value decreased by 3.80pc.

Similarly, liquefied natural gas imports increased by 2.55pc and LPG by 1.82pc during 8MFY24 on a year-on-year basis. Machinery imports increased by 21.43pc to \$5.04bn in July-February from \$4.15bn in 8MFY24, mainly due to an increase in imports of office machinery, electrical machinery, telecom equipment, including mobile phones, agriculture machinery and implements. All other categories of machinery recorded a negative growth.

Mobile phone imports surged by 156.43pc to \$1.148bn in 8MFY24 from \$447.85m over the last year. This represents the single largest share of overall machinery import value in the first eight months of FY24.

Other mobile apparatus saw a growth of 9.76pc to \$286.41m in 8MFY24 from \$260.94m last year.

Food exports surge 35pc in February

The export of raw food products recorded a growth of 35.38 per cent in February to \$702.46 million, up from \$518.87m over the corresponding month last year, forcing the local consumers to pay higher prices.

With this growth, raw food exports increased for the seventh consecutive month during the current fiscal year despite the highest food inflation in the country's history, according to data compiled by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

These unchecked exports drove food inflation to a stunning 20.2pc in February as prices rose, limiting cash-starved people's access to key goods such as wheat flour, rice, onions, sugar, meat and vegetables.

With the beginning of Ramazan, prices of vegetables such as onions, potatoes and tomatoes and those of fruits like bananas, apples and guava have reached new highs.

The new fiscal year began with a negative growth of 7.56pc in export of raw food products, but it improved to positive growth of 4.07pc in August, while export proceeds grew further by 60.89pc in September, 59.90pc in October, 60.65pc in November, 111.63pc in December and 105.29pc in January.

Food exports grew 54.05pc in the first eight months of FY24 to \$4.96bn from \$3.22bn in the corresponding months last year.

With the shortage and rising exports, the onion coming from Sindh had witnessed the highest increase of Rs300 per kg in its price, forcing the caretaker government to impose a ban on its export, as well as banana whose price rose by up to Rs300 per dozen.

Responding to a calling-attention notice raised by PPP MNA Naveed Qamar in the National Assembly, Commerce Minister Jam Kamal assured the house that the ban would be lifted after Ramazan.

The temporary ban on exports of bananas and onions during Ramazan aims to ensure an adequate domestic supply of these essential commodities during the holy month.

Analysts say the surge in food exports can be attributed to the unprecedented rupee depreciation. In addition, persistent disruptions in the supply chain and higher prices in the international market have led to soaring demand for food products.

The PBS data showed the country's

rice exports rose 85.83pc in July-February FY24 led by basmati rice, which had been falling since last year. India's recent decision to impose a ban on rice exports to protect the interest of domestic consumers has emerged as a key driver behind the surge in basmati rice exports from Pakistan.

The export of basmati rice experienced a notable surge of 39.43pc, reaching \$539.42m in July-February FY24 from \$386.88m in the corresponding period last year. The export of non-basmati rice rose 104.37pc to \$1.97bn in July-February 2023-24 from \$967.87m in the same period last year.

Due to a sustained surge in export figures over the past two years, the average price of basmati rice has surged to Rs390 per kg from Rs150, restricting buying from domestic consumers.

Pakistan exported \$333.85m worth of meat in 8MFY24 from \$256.28m over the same period last year, showing a growth of 30.16pc. The reason for the increase in meat exports is the introduction of new markets like Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations, Malaysia and Uzbekistan.

Furthermore, one meat exporting company was granted market access for heat-treated meat shipments to China.

Prices of meat in the domestic market have experienced an unparalleled surge in

recent years. In two and a half years, the average price of buffalo meat has jumped from Rs700 per kg to Rs1,250. This increase has caught the attention of market observers and stakeholders alike. The price of chicken has also experienced an unprecedented surge, reaching its highest level over the last two years.

The export of all other food products saw an increase of 23.27pc to \$792.14m in 8MFY24 from \$642.62m in the corresponding months last year. The export of vegetables reached \$277.06m in eight months this year against \$198.94m over the corresponding months last year. Fruits' exports saw a growth of 13.89pc to \$246.46m in 8MFY24 against \$216.41m over the corresponding months last year.

On the other hand, Pakistan imported 778,112 tonnes of wheat in February, up 194pc from 264,430 tonnes over the corresponding month last year. The country began importing wheat in September 2023 despite the government's claims of having a bumper wheat crop.

The import of sugar also saw an increase of 28.07pc as it stood at 315 tonnes in February FY24 from 246 tonnes over the corresponding month last year. The average sugar price in the country is around Rs160 per kg.

In eight months, the import bill of tea reached \$43667m this year, up 10.13pc from \$396.49m over the same period last year.



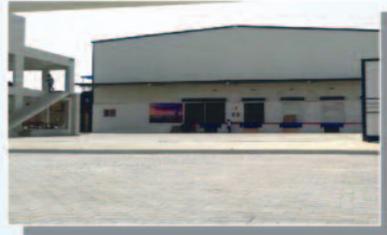
Hindu pilgrims enter Pakistan through the Wahga Border recently, to participate Maha Shivratri celebrations at the Kataraj Temple in Kallar Kahar.



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Fears grow over impact of cheaper dollar

The government does not like to see further devaluation of dollar against the rupee as it impacts both imports and exports, said currency dealers and experts in the interbank market.

The dollar fell to a five-month low against the rupee, causing serious concerns for exporters. At the same time, the government fears that a cheaper dollar could lead to higher imports, which may disturb the current equilibrium between imports and exports.

“The inflows are not very high, but the State Bank of Pakistan assures [there is] no excess dollar liquidity in the banking market. The higher dollar demand means no dollar devaluation, and the PKR remains cheaper for exporters,” said Atif Ahmed, a currency dealer in the banking market.

The dollar fell to a five-month low against the rupee, reaching Rs278.77 on Friday, triggering fear among exporters. Exporters have a strong lobby in the power corridor, but their demand for cheaper energy was rejected by the IMF.

The caretaker government had a proposal to provide electricity to exporters at the rate of nine cents per unit, down from the current rate of 14 cents per unit, but the IMF rejected the proposal. Governments in Pakistan are bound to follow IMF guidelines as they need financial support for running the economy.

“We are already under pressure due to a very high interest rate of 22 per cent, making the cost of doing business the highest in the region,” said Amir Aziz, an exporter of textile finished products. He highlighted record-high electricity, gas, and petroleum prices,

along with the persistent 22pc policy interest rate, which have rendered exporters unable to compete in international markets.

“The impact of the high cost of production would be significant and will be felt in the next 12 months as we have been fulfilling previous orders,” he said.

The newly appointed finance minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, recently hinted at a gradual cut in the interest rate. The high interest rate has badly impacted economic

growth, and another poor performance is expected in FY24, with a growth rate of hardly 2pc.

The central bank is scheduled to announce its monetary policy recently. The financial market is full of speculation about the interest rate, but a number of experts said it depends on March inflation, which may rise due to Ramazan food price hikes.

Mr Atif said the cheaper dollar could push up imports and ultimately it will increase the twin deficits, trade and current account deficit. The country succeeded in slashing the trade deficit, while the current account deficit in the seven months was about \$1 billion. This is a significant achievement for a country that has to pay up to \$24bn in debt servicing in FY24.

Hundreds of nappers celebrate World Sleep Day

In one of Mexico City’s busiest neighbourhoods on Friday 15 March, about 200 people took a collective nap in the middle of the street to celebrate World Sleep Day.

Lying in the heat on synthetic mats, their necks resting on pillows and their eyes covered by masks, participants tuned out the chaos of Mexico’s capital as part of what organisers described as “a peaceful demonstration for the right to sleep.”

“The idea is that sleeping well, or having this event attract attention, can help launch new public policies” to promote rest, said Guadalupe Teran, a doctor with the Centre for Sleep and Neuroscience, which organised the event with the Mexican government.

“We have long working days, but there are no spaces at workplaces to

guarantee the time for a siesta,” she said.

Thanks to a guided meditation session, some nap participants sank into a deep sleep while others at least managed to relax for a moment.

“Sleeping and resting well is very good for mindfulness. I need to do it more, but I think this dynamic is very cool, it encourages rest,” said Alexia Gonzalez, a 24-year-old psychotherapist from the central state of Morelos, who was visiting the capital.

Another napper, retiree Victor Sanchez from southern Mexico City, said he was interested in professional advice on how to get a good night’s sleep.

“It’s a bit far, but I had to come because it’s important to me,” the 64-year-old said.



People participate in a massive nap to mark World Sleep Day at the Monument to the Revolution.

Will AI save humanity? US tech fest offers reality check

Artificial intelligence aficionados are betting that the technology will help solve humanity's biggest problems, from wars to global warming, but in practice, these may be unrealistic ambitions for now.

"It's not about asking AI 'Hey, this is a sticky problem. What would you do?' and AI is like, 'well, you need to completely restructure this part of the economy'," said Michael Littman, a Brown University professor of computer science.

Littman was at the South By Southwest (or SXSW) arts and technology festival in Austin, Texas, where he had just spoken on one of the many panels on the potential benefits of AI.

"It's a pipe dream. It's a little bit science fiction. Mostly what people are doing is they're trying to bring AI to bear on specific problems that they're already solving, but just want to be more efficient." "It's not just a matter of pushing this button and everything's fixed," he said.

With their promising titles

"How to Make AGI Beneficial and Avoid a Robot Apocalypse", and the ever-presence of tech giants, the panels attract big crowds, but they often hold more pragmatic objectives, like promoting a product.

At one meeting called "Inside the AI Revolution: How AI is Empowering the World to Achieve More," Simi Olabisi, a Microsoft executive, praised the tech's benefits on Azure, the company's cloud service.

When using Azure's AI language feature in call centres, "maybe when a customer called in, they were angry, and when they ended the call, they were really appreciative. Azure AI Language can really capture that sentiment, and tell a business how their customers are feeling," she explained.

'Smarter than humans'

The notion of artificial intelligence, with its algorithms capable of automating tasks and analyzing mountains of data, has been around for decades.

But it took on a whole new dimension last year with the success of ChatGPT, the generative AI interface launched by OpenAI, the now iconic AI start-up mainly funded by Microsoft.

OpenAI claims to want to build artificial "general" intelligence or AGI,

which will be "smarter than humans in general" and will "elevate humanity," according to CEO Sam Altman.

That ethos was very present at SXSW, with talk about "when" AGI will become a reality, rather than "if." Ben Goertzel, a scientist who heads the SingularityNET Foundation and the AGI Society, predicted the advent of general AI by 2029.

"Once you have a machine that can think as well as a smart human, you're at most a few years from a machine that can think a thousand or a million times better than a smart human, because this AI can modify its source code," said Goertzel.

Wearing a leopard-print faux-fur cowboy hat, he advocated the development of AGI endowed with "compassion and empathy," and integrated into robots "that look like us," to ensure that these "super AIs" get on well with humanity.

David Hanson — founder of Hanson Robotics and who designed Desdemona, a humanoid robot that functions with generative AI — brainstormed about the plus and minuses of AI with superpowers.

AI's "positive disruptions... can help to solve global sustainability issues, although people are probably going to be just creating financial trading algorithms that are absolutely effective," he said.

Hanson fears the turbulence from AI, but points out that humans are doing a

"fine job" already of playing "existential roulette" with nuclear weapons and by causing "the fastest mass extinction event in human history." But "it may be that the AI could have seeds of wisdom that blossom and grow into new forms of wisdom that can help us be better," he said.

'Not there yet'

Initially, AI should accelerate the design of new, more sustainable drugs or materials, said believers in AI.

Even if "we're not there yet... in a dream world, AI could handle the complexity and the randomness of the real world, and... discover completely new materials that would enable us to do things that we never even thought were possible," said Roxanne Tully, an investor at Piva Capital.

Today, AI is already proving its worth in warning systems for tornadoes and forest fires, for example.

But we still need to evacuate populations, or get people to agree to vaccinate themselves in the event of a pandemic, stressed Rayid Ghani of Carnegie Mellon University during a panel titled "Can AI Solve the Extreme Weather Pandemic?" "We created this problem. Inequities weren't caused by AI, they're caused by humans and I think AI can help a little bit. But only if humans decide they want to use it to deal with" the issue, Ghani said.



With temperature rising during the day, the sea breeze makes for pleasant weather close to iftar time and a large number of picnickers through the greenbelt at Seaview beach witness sunset and break their fast, on Sunday, 17 March.

Pakistan Day celebrated with zeal across Sindh

People across the province celebrated Pakistan Day with traditional zeal and fervour on Saturday, 23rd March.

In Karachi, the day dawned with 21-gun salute and the national flag was hoisted on major government installations. Governor Kamran Khan Tessori said on Saturday 23rd March, that people should forget all political differences and become one nation.

Speaking to the media after paying his respects at the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, he said that independence could only be valued by those who lived in a free and independent country.

“This day will be remembered till the end of the world because today the idea of an independent state was presented. The dream came true and we are living our lives with freedom,” he added.

The governor said that the country was facing internal and external conspiracies and, therefore, urged all stakeholders to come on the same page.

“The nation will no more forgive those who are hindering the progress of the country,” he added.

Earlier, the governor offered fateha and laid a wreath at the grave of the founder of the nation and prayed for the progress of the country on the occasion of Pakistan Day.

Earlier, provincial minister Sharjeel Memon received the governor at the Quaid’s mausoleum.

Mayor Murtaza Wahab said that March 23 was the most important day in the history of Pakistan. “The Resolution of Pakistan became the foundation for our beloved homeland,” he added.

“Inshaallah we will fulfill the dream that the workers of Tehreek-i-Pakistan had seen,” he vowed.

He was talking to the media after laying a floral wreath at Mazar-i-Quaid and reciting fateha along with Deputy Mayor Salman Abdullah Murad. Municipal Commissioner SM Afzal Zaidi, PPP Deputy Parliamentary Leader in City Council Dil Muhammad and others were also present.

In Jamshoro, teachers and students of the Sindh University, took out a big rally, which was led by Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Muhammad Siddique Kalhoro.

The participants carrying the national flag and raising slogans of ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ marched from SU’s Arts Faculty

Building to its central library.

Addressing them, VC Kalhoro highlighted importance of the March 23, 1940 Resolution, which eventually led the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent to win freedom from colonial rulers and have their own homeland.

SU Registrar Prof Dr Mushtaque Ali Jariko said that Muslims faced numerous threats under the colonial rule but despite suffering all sorts of atrocities, they continued their struggle for their homeland.

In Sukkur, a number of rallies were taken out and various celebratory programmes were held at schools, colleges and universities as well as government departments in many cities and towns of Sukkur, Ghotki, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Khairpur and Kandhkot-Kashmore districts to mark Pakistan Day.

Flag-hoisting ceremonies were held at the offices of deputy commissioners of the upper Sindh districts.

Students took part in a declamation contest at Govt Al-Falah High School, Sukkur, by making speeches in English, Urdu and Sindhi languages. Groups of students also performed on national anthem and songs.

Thousands of people took part in the rallies taken out in almost all cities and towns of the districts.

In Nawabshah, Pakistan Day rallies and programmes were held in various cities and towns of Shaheed Benazirabad, Naushahro Feroze and Sanghar districts on Saturday, 23rd March.

The main event in Nawabshah was held at DC office, where Deputy Commissioner Zahid Hussain Rind hoisted the national flag at a ceremony attended by members of Pakistan Ex-servicemen Society and Pakistan Zindabad Movement. They along with people from all walks of life took part in a rally from Golwala Complex that culminated at the local press club. A similar ceremony was held at the office of the Naushahro Feroze deputy commissioner, who hoisted the national flag and addressed the participants to highlight significance of the 1940 Resolution.

The ceremony was attended by officials of various departments, students, scouts and members of the general public.

In Badin, a grand ceremony was held at the Thar Foundation Primary School, Thario Halipoto, on Saturday to mark the Pakistan Day.

Students of the school participated in a declamation contest, performed on national anthem and songs and presented tableaux after a flag-hoisting ceremony performed by Lt-Col. Zafar of the Pakistan Army along with the foundation’s CSR department officer Imam Ali Detho and senior education officer Sonia Chachar. Later, a big rally organised by Defenders of Pakistan Movement (DOPM), Badin, was taken out from the school to the local press club. It was led by the organisation’s leaders Gul Hussain Mallah, Khamiso Ansari and others.

Another rally was held in Matli which was led by Assistant Commissioner Syed



Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, along with Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon, arrives at the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah to pay his respects on the occasion of Pakistan Day on 23rd March.



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Noor Hussain and chief officer of the Matli municipal committee.

Students, revenue officers as well as employees of other departments along with people from all walks of life participated in the rally.

In Mirpurkhas, several rallies were taken out in different cities and towns of this district to mark Pakistan Day on Saturday.

One of the rallies was led by leaders of Pakistan Meghwar Ittehad Narain Das Jaipal, Dileep Kumar and others. The participants started the rally from Station Chowk and ended it outside the local press club.

Another rally was taken out from Gulistan-i-Baldia Lawns to the press club. It was organised by the 'Mirpurkhas Zindabad Movement', led by Mohammad Ali Panhwer. A Pakistan Day programme was held at the Govt Boys Higher Secondary School, Digri.



“We met all the basic requirements for a standardised survey, though the findings do not reflect the assessment of the whole city and it would be premature to say whether the population of house sparrows has increased or declining.”

Mr Mahar, however, did describe the findings to an extent as healthy.

According to him, Sindh has four species of sparrows including house sparrows; yellow-throated sparrow, Spanish sparrow (winter visitor) and Sindh sparrow.

“The breeding season of sparrows has just begun and the best way to express our love is to help them find nesting sites that they have lost on account of our concrete building structures,” he said.

The survey covering the eight districts of Karachi recorded a total of 9,035 birds, indicating the presence and resilience of sparrows in the city’s urban environment.

The age-group of 25-35 showed the highest participation. Of them, 82pc were men and the rest women.

A total of 124 individuals actively participated in the survey. The participation of District South (31 percent) was the highest followed by Malir (22.2pc), Karachi Central and Korangi (14pc each) and the rest in West, East, Kaemari and DHA.

According to experts, the avian population across the city has declined drastically over the years. They blame multiple factors for this phenomenon including shrinking green spaces, growing urbanisation, use of pesticides, release of hazardous radiation from mobile phone towers as well as rampant poaching.

Over 9,000 house sparrows counted in wildlife survey

Over 9,000 house sparrows were recorded by nature enthusiasts in a recent informal survey launched by the provincial wildlife authorities to assess the population of these little birds struggling to survive in an increasingly polluted environment of the city.

Part of World Sparrow Day marked every year on March 20, the counting exercise was the first of its kind in the country. It covered five per cent of the total area of Karachi.

Sharing the survey’s findings at a select-gathering organised at the wildlife museum on Wednesday, Sindh Wildlife Conservator Javed Ahmed Mahar explained that the exercise’s aim was to promote sparrow protection and conservation and not to pay too much attention to data.

“The objective was to create public interest in these birds that have been part of almost every household for a long time. And, the result has been awesome. We saw people sending videos and data in writing about their counted birds across the city,” he said, while emphasising that the survey couldn’t have been materialised without the support of nature enthusiasts, especially wildlife photographers.

Asked whether the survey was scientifically organised, he said that it wasn’t unscientific.

Nauroz celebrated with traditional spirit

Afghan and some local families in and around the provincial capital celebrated the ancient annual festival fondly called Nauroz (first day) here on Wednesday, 20 March with traditional spirit.

The festival being 3,000 years old has its roots in ancient traditions welcoming the turn of the first day of the Persian calendar that coincided with the advent of spring season.

As usual, a group of poets arranged a trilingual poetry recitation session in Afghan Colony. Poets read out poems in Pashto, Persian and Urdu laden with messages for peace, mutual harmony and hope for a better future. Abid Ghazi, a young poet, chaired the event.

Afghans along with locals celebrated the festival by serving Sofreh Haft Seen, tablecloth decorated with seven different items names of which start with 15th letter (Seen) of Persian alphabets — Seer, Somagh, Serkeh, Senjed, Samanu, Sabez and Sib each symbolising the colours of sunrise, patience, love, affluence, rebirth and beauty.

Roshana Khalil and Siala Khalil, both residents of Peshawar, told this scribe that they had been celebrating Nauroz for the last three decades. “It is a lovely tradition. We enjoy it with our family members and also share

photos with our distant cousins on social media,” said the duo.

Shafqat Afghan, a young poet, said that the seven items — garlic, a crushed spices, vinegar, dried fruits, sweet pudding, lentil sprouts and apple — were considered healthy for human and symbolised hope, mutual love, renewal and prosperity with coming of New Year.

“This year the festival fell on March 20. Most Afghans wished Nauroz greetings to their families and friends on social media due to the month of fasting. However, some enthusiasts arranged special iftar parties serving Haft Seen table,” said Jan Wali Mehraban.

He said that the festival also known as Haft Mewa was celebrated in different ways across the world since the immemorial times as the tradition had been reshaped with local cultures but decorating tables with seven different fruits remained almost unchanged.

“Great Pashto poet Khushal Khan Khattak too composed poems and highlighted significance of the ancient festival where people wish greetings, put on new clothes, sing songs and serve guests, relatives and friends with Haft Seen table,” Adam Khan Meena Gul, another Afghan, said.



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Documentary on life of country's youngest mountaineer screened

The screening of the documentary *Above the Sleeping Giants* by Bilquis and Abdul Razak Dawood (BARD) Foundation at a local hotel here on Tuesday, 05 March, tells the story of Shehroze Kashif, Pakistan's youngest mountaineer who scaled 13 out of the world's 14 highest peaks.

The film has the young mountaineer talking about his life while sitting amid snowy mountains where he feels that he truly belongs. Shehroze comes to the mountains from humble beginnings. Always inclined towards sports, he was not a good student, which led to an end to his schooling. But, he says laughingly, the same school which had expelled him now has a two-page feature about him in the school magazine.

The documentary also includes original footage during Shehroze's climbs. When he summited Broad Peak in the Karakoram Range, the sense of accomplishment made him want to take up more such challenges and climb higher. So he also summited K2. In fact, he was the youngest mountaineer to do it. Then he went for Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, then the fifth highest. He went up and down various mountains like he was on a roller coaster. He says the tallest mountains of the world at-

tempted by serious mountaineers are all over 8,000 metres in height. There are 14 such peaks in the world out of which he has summited 13.

Of course, all mountains and summits are not the same. He could go on and on about each of his experiences. He said the weather conditions also affect the climbing. His Nanga Parbat experience was a nightmare. He spoke about it in the documentary and then later during a panel discussion moderated by actor and director Umair Rana with Mehroon Dawood and Abdul Razak Dawood as the other two guests.

Shehroze has scaled 13 of world's 14 highest peaks

"Sometimes the mountains are also cruel," said Shehroze, while recalling dear mountaineer friends who he has lost. He said he carries their memories with him wherever he goes. He also said that Nanga Parbat was a lesson for him to learn to conquer his feelings. "I was climbing Nanga Parbat with Fazal, a mountain-climber from Shimshal. We were advised to abort the climb early but we persisted, hiking under the starry sky because we thought we could do it and we did. But trouble engulfed us on our way back," he said, going on to describe how they miraculously survived without food, water, oxygen, dead phone batter-

ies and while also suffering hallucinations. Shehroze has also penned a poem to describe that "white hell" they went through.

Expressing her pride at Shehroze's accomplishments, Mehreen Dawood, a member of the board of directors of BARD Foundation, stated that they feel honored to be part of his journey, and supporting him in his endeavors. "It's a call to all the talented individuals facing challenges in achieving their goals; the foundation actively seeks opportunities to uplift the younger generation, contributing to the bright future of the country," she said.

BARD Foundation President Abdul Razak Dawood also said that success stories of Pakistan's heroes should be highlighted. "Such stories of our heroes inspire the younger generation to relentlessly pursue their dreams, overcome obstacles, and transform aspirations into tangible realities. The names associated with the foundation have always filled us with immense pride, fueling our commitment to persistently work towards providing aid and opportunities to the deserving and capable individuals," he said while telling about their support of sports persons such as young tennis and squash players as well as young technical professionals.



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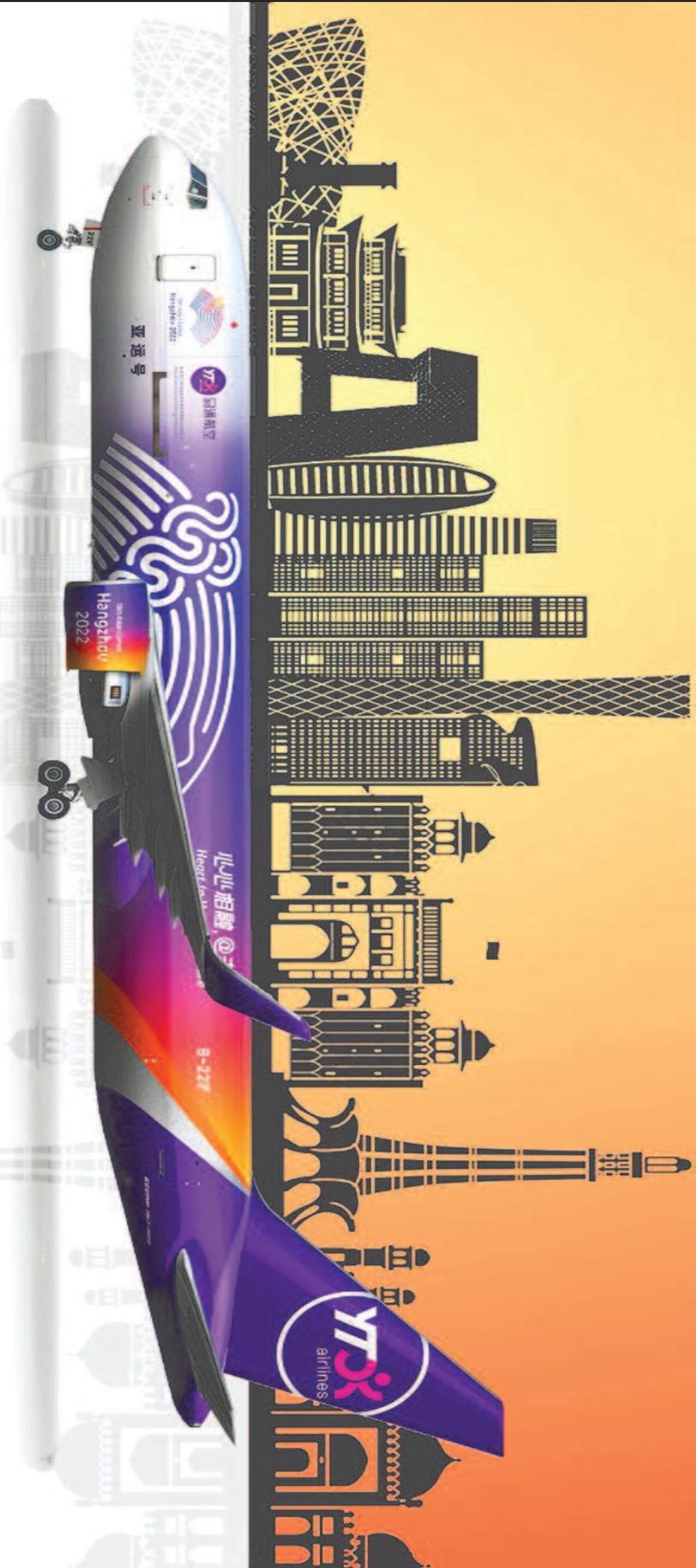
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