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Saudi deputy defence minister meets COAS Bajwa at GHQ

RAWALPINDI: Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defence Minister Prince Khalid Bin Salman met Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa during his visit to General Headquarters (GHQ) on Monday, said Inter-



Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement.

Prince Khalid Bin Salman and General Qamar Javed Bajwa exchanged views on matters of mutual interests, defence and security cooperation between both countries.

The ISPR spokesperson said the current situation of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) also came into discussion. Moreover, they held consultations over military training programme and the situation of the regional security situation in the meeting. Read: COAS Bajwa, Saudi commander discuss regional security.

The Saudi deputy defence minister praised professional capabilities of Pakistan

armed forces and announced complete support to Islamabad for the establishment of peace in the region, said ISPR. Earlier, in November last year, Saudi Assistant Defence Minister Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al



Ayesh had met COAS Qamar Javed Bajwa at GHQ in Rawalpindi.

ISPR said. According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), both leaders exchanged views on issues of mutual interest. Matters pertaining to defence, security cooperation between both countries and overall regional security situation came under discussion during the meeting.

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ISLAMABAD: Four months after its soft launch, the Ehsaas undergraduate scholarship programme was formally launched by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday with a commitment that there will be no political interference in all social welfare programmes introduced by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government for the poor and low-income groups.

Under the Rs24 billion programme, 50,000 high-achieving undergraduate students will get scholarship through the Higher Education Commission (HEC) every year, with 50 per cent quota fixed for girls. 'Scholarships and benefits from other social welfare programmes will be given on merit and there will be no political interference in such initiatives,' PM Khan vowed while addressing the scholarship distribution ceremony.

The programme is aimed at providing scholarships to a total of 200,000 students belonging to low-income groups from across the country in four years. Its soft launch was held on Nov 4, 2019.

Lauding the youth of the country, Mr Khan said Pakistani youths have more drive and passion than those studying in Bradford University, UK. He expressed the hope that the students with the scholarship would not only be able to help themselves but would also be shouldering responsibilities of their families and the country. The students who do not belong to rich families are more intelligent and passionate than those studying in top educational institutions like us who study in [colleges like]

Atchison,' he said. About social security nets, PM Khan

ment was providing livestock and poultry to womenfolk in villages to

Social Safety Dr Sania Nishtar said the initiative was the biggest-ever

adherence to transparency and merit,' she said.

Dr Nishtar said about 50 per cent quota in the scholarship programme was fixed for female students and 2pc quota for the disabled.

She said the HEC had completed the first phase of the process for awarding scholarships for the year 2019-20. The next phase would commence in June, she added. A total of 200,000 students would benefit from this programme, she related.

She elaborated that the scholarship programme 'covered the tuition fee' besides a monthly stipend of Rs4,000. Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training

Shafiqat Mahmood said the programme for the first time, had focused upon undergraduates who would be immensely benefited. He said apart from this programme, about 170,000 youths were getting high-end skill training in different fields including software technology. Termining the initiative a game-changer for deserving undergraduates, HEC Chairman Tariq Banuri emphasised that students from the deprived areas must avail themselves of this opportunity.

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support their income.

Besides, he said, about 170,000 youths were being imparted skills development training.

The prime minister said 170 shelter homes had been set up to provide decent facilities to the homeless people. He said that the number of shelter homes would be increased.

The government was also planning to provide legal assistance to the poor people, he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Special Assistant on Poverty Alleviation and

the less privileged segments of society were getting health treatment facilities through the health cards distributed by the government.

'In Punjab, health cards have been distributed among six million families so far, whereas the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to extend this facility to all the deserving families,' the prime minister said.

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Inaugural session of Pak-UAE bilateral political consultations

Islamabad: The inaugural session of the Pakistan-United Arab Emirates bilateral political consultations (BPC) was convened in Islamabad today



to people. The two sides reviewed the progress achieved so far in implementing Prime Minister Imran Khan's directive to

The treatment of minorities, particularly the persecution of Indian Muslims, was highlighted, emanating from the BJP's extremist Hindu's ideology and policies of discrimination.

Read More: UAE announces \$200 million financial aid to PM's youth programme Views were also exchanged on regional developments, including the Afghan peace process and peace and stability in the Gulf/Middle East.

Read More: Saudi Deputy Defence Minister delivers 'important message' to PM Imran. Both sides agreed that the BPC provides a useful mechanism for a regular, in-depth exchange of views on all issues of common interest. To further deepen existing friendly ties, it was decided to enhance the momentum of bilateral exchanges and high-level visits.

transform Pakistan-UAE relations into a "Long-Term Strategic Economic Partnership" and identified steps to translate this vision into concrete actions. Read More: Saudi Deputy Defence Minister delivers 'important message' to PM Imran. Both sides agreed that the BPC provides a useful mechanism for a regular, in-depth exchange of views on all issues of common interest. To further deepen existing friendly ties, it was decided to enhance the momentum of bilateral exchanges and high-level visits.

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8 suspected coronavirus patients tested negative: Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Monday said efforts are underway to purge the Sindh province of the novel coronavirus, reported ARY News.

Chairing a fifth meeting in connection with measures to counter the infection, he said samples of eight people suspected to be carrying the virus were sent to National Institute of Health for testing which came back negative.

The chief minister was informed that so far 2,301 people have returned from Iran. Read More: Fears of coronavirus outbreak in schools still persist: Saeed Ghamheer was further briefed that the government's meas-



ures are yielding positive results. Murad Ali Shah expressed gratitude to all the authorities concerned over timely efforts to contain the deadly disease.

It is noteworthy that so far four confirmed cases of the coronavirus have emerged in the country with two of them reported from Sindh. Read More: Coronavirus: Schools registration suspended over violating closure orders Earlier, on Feb. 29, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Health, Dr Zafar Mirza had reported two more positive cases of coronavirus in the country, taking the tally of those diagnosed.

Karachi projects inaugurated on March 7

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan will visit Karachi on March 7 to inaugurate five federal funded projects in Karachi, ARY NEWS reported.

Governor Sindh Ismail while confirming the visit, said in a message on his Twitter account that he invited the prime minister to inaugurate the projects and the premier accepted his invitation and would visit the city on March 07.

According to sources, the prime minister would inaugurate five federal projects in the city including the three flyover projects at RDA Chowranghi, Five Star Chowranghi and Sakhi Hasan roundabout.

The premier will also inaugurate roads projects at

Nishtar Road and Maghpor Road phase-I project,' he said adding that Imran Khan would also head a meeting of coalition partners in the city during his visit.

It is pertinent to mention here that on Sunday Federal Planning Minister Asad Umar announced that Prime Minister Imran Khan will visit Karachi to inaugurate flyover projects constructed in Karachi.

NAB files case over misuse of foreign gifts

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) filed in an accountability court on Monday a fresh reference against former President Asif Ali Zardari and ex-prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Yousuf Raza Gilani for allegedly misusing official gifts given to them by foreign states.

Two main accused in the fake bank accounts case Khawaja Anver Majid and his son Khawaja AbdulGhani Majid were also nominated in the reference for money laundering and helping Mr Zardari in obtaining luxury vehicles from Tosha Khana (a department which keeps gifts given to Pakistan's heads of state and prime ministers by other states). According to rules, the presidents and prime ministers have to deposit these gifts in Tosha Khana.

However, the rulers had reportedly misused their authority and illegally kept the gifts for their own or their family's use during their terms in power or at their departure from their offices. As per the rules, in case they want to retain such gifts they have to pay a concessional amount to the national exchequer.

According to a NAB document, the Supreme Court had directed the anti-graft watchdog that if it considered expedient and appropriate to conduct further probe, inquiry or investigation into the matters in the wake of a report by a joint investigation team (JIT) on the 'fake bank accounts scam' to determine the facts, it shall be free to do so at Islamabad. Accordingly, the NAB Rawalpindi director general authorised an inquiry against the holders of public office, legal persons and others for alleged falsifying vehicles from 'Tosha Khana' and paying import duty/taxes from fake bank accounts.

The NAB document stated that the evidence collected during the course of inquiry and investigation established that Mr Gilani had, in order to extend illegal benefit to Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif,

illegally allowed the retention of vehicles gifted to them by different foreign states and dignitaries, which at that time belonged to Central Pool of Cars of the Cabinet Division, by relaxing the procedure of Tosha Khana, and both the former prime ministers, through dishonest and illegal means for their personal benefit and interest, retained these vehicles against a nominal payment of 15pc of the total value of vehicles.

Mr Zardari had allegedly made payments and duties of these vehicles through Omni Group chief Khawaja Anver

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The need of eco-friendly step

After the successful tree plantation campaign which increased forest cover in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this is another important initiative taken by the PTI government to protect environment from plastic bags that are greatly harming our environment and natural resources including streams, rivers, seas and fertile agriculture land. These bags take much longer to degrade than paper bags. Under best circumstances, high-density polythene bags will take more than 20 years to degrade and this is the reason that several countries across the world including those in Africa have completely banned plastic bags. In our country also, ban was imposed on these bags in different provinces in the past yet this was never implemented in letter and in spirit due to by concerned departments and the result is that these bags are still being used by our people to carry and store essential commodities. According to studies storing food in plastic bags is also dangerous for health as plastics are not natural materials and their manufacturing process involves a cocktail of harmful chemicals that seep into the stored food and contaminate it. Despite unimaginable hazards of these bags, the fact of matter is that we still use around 55 billion plastic shopping bags each year with 15 per cent increase per annum. In yet another environment IN yet another environment that should be emulated by other provinces as well, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has banned the use of plastic bags in the entire province with directions issued to district administrations to take strict action and impose heavy fines on those producing or selling these non-biodegradable bags. According to Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency over 760,000 people were dependent on this industry directly or indirectly. Therefore, apart from taking punitive action against producers and sellers of these bags, the KP government also needs to take steps that ensure availability of Paper or biodegradable bags in our markets and shops. Those producing plastic bags should be provided resources to turn their businesses to manufacturing biodegradable bags.

Kashif Shamim Siddiqui
where hunger is undoubtedly the worst weapon of mass destruction and is the cause of most evils. Pakistan has 22 per cent of its population undernourished whereas 80 percent of the population is still facing food insecurity. This is due primarily to limited economic access by the poorest and most vulnerable – particularly women – to an adequate and diverse diet. According to the Global Food Security Index 2016, out of 113 countries, Pakistan ranks at 78th with a score of 47.8 whereas on the 2017 IFPRI Global Hunger Index, country ranked at 105 among 119 countries, with a score of 32.6. An average Pakistani household spends 50.8 per cent of monthly income on food, and shocks, including high food prices, flooding, and significant population displacement in the north-west since 2008 exacerbate the situation.

(i) Lack of education (ii) Corruption (iii) Large scale

of Import (iv) Materialism (v) Division of agriculture land (vi) Policies of the government, and last but not the least, (vi) Non-sympathetic behaviors can be considered as prime reasons for making Pakistan "food insecure". Vastage of food is also one of the major reasons of hunger in our country. According to an estimation, almost 40 percent of food is wasted in Pakistan. On one side, people are dying due to hunger, and on the other, there is an abundance of food that goes to waste. Food shortage and hunger is a grim reality of our country. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the inflation indicator surged to 3.9% in September 2017, against 3.4% a month earlier, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The impact of this on the food and beverages category is devastating for the common man as the price of monthly groceries soars. Even items

that were once considered a poor man's staple like vegetables and lentils have become expensive while meat and fish are almost unaffordable. Gender of the country. At the highest level, women and children are being victimized. The latest national nutrition survey found that 15 percent of children under 5 suffer from acute malnutrition, the second highest rate in the region. Close to 44 percent of children in the same age group are stunted, 32 pc are underweight and the majority of children under 2 consume less than half of their daily energy requirements, with low level of vitamins and minerals. There is an utmost need to take effective measures to ensure nutrition security. We have to raise awareness about balanced diet, food habits and healthy living. Some charitable organizations are playing excellent role in fulfilling the food needs. Their free food

"Dastarkhwan" services available around the cities of the country have become a lifeline for hundreds of people. Such steps are mandatory for rest of the hungry humans too, in the absence of comprehensive steps and policies taken by the government. Hunger can be eliminated in our times, this requires comprehensive efforts to ensure that every man, woman and child enjoys Right to Adequate Food; women are empowered; priority is given to family farming and food systems everywhere are sustainable and resilient. There is an utmost need to take effective measures to ensure nutrition security. We have to raise awareness about balanced diet, food habits and healthy living. Across the globe, many different events are organized to raise awareness of problems in food supply and distribution and to raise money for cultivation of food plants and the distribution of food.

Similarly, we need to organize symposia, conferences, workshops and presentations of particular issues like food production, distribution and security. There should also be micro-projects to help small-scale farmers at the grassroots level. The projects aim to help farmers be more productive and improve both local communities access to food and farmers' cash income. Some charitable organizations are playing excellent role in fulfilling the food needs. Their free food "Dastarkhwan" services available around the cities of the country have become a lifeline for hundreds of people. Such steps are mandatory for rest of the hungry humans too, in the absence of comprehensive steps and policies taken by the government. Hunger can be eliminated in our times, this requires comprehensive efforts to ensure that every man, woman and child enjoys Right to Adequate Food; women are empowered; priority is given to family farming and food systems everywhere are sustainable and resilient. There is an utmost need to take effective measures to ensure nutrition security. We have to raise awareness about balanced diet, food habits and healthy living. Across the globe, many different events are organized to raise awareness of problems in food supply and distribution and to raise money for cultivation of food plants and the distribution of food.

Courtesy: PO

Challenge of region

Rehan Pasha

INDIA is the birthplace of a number of major global religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. Unlike Abrahamian monotheistic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, most of the Indian religions are theoretically pluralistic. The Jewish law categorically warns the Jews to refrain from polytheism. In the Hebrew Bible the sovereignty of Yahweh as the only God is the key pillar of a chosen community of Israel. Some Christians have argued that religious pluralism is an invalid or self-contradictory concept. Other Christians have held that there can be truth in other faiths and traditions. Protestants hold that only

believers who believe in certain fundamental doctrines know the true pathway to salvation. However, the Age of Enlightenment in Europe served to transform public attitudes towards religion after the French Revolution (civil and political rights, freedom of thoughts, separation of Church and State, etc.), which paved the way for religious pluralism. The acceptance of religious pluralism within Muslims remains a topic of debate, because in the Holy Quran and Hadiths, Muslims have been given varying guidelines regarding their interaction with the non-Muslims according to the ground and temporal realities. In several Surahs, Quran asks Muslims not to believe in the same

other Quranic verses have been interpreted to imply pluralism. Islam allows Muslim men to marry Jew or Christian women which implies that co-existence of the followers of different faiths under one roof is not an issue in Islam. The Muslim Sufi saints (mystics) such as Rumi, Ghazali, etc., devoted their lives to spread the message of peace, tolerance, pluralism and love for all. The views of Sufis have inspired a large number of scholars belonging to other religions. Rumi served as a unifying figure for people of different faiths and his followers include Muslims, Christians and Jews. Even today, Rumi's popularity and his message of peace and harmony transcends religious and geographical boundaries.

Hinduism is considered naturally pluralistic. A well-known Vedic hymn says: "Truth is one, though the sages know it variously". The Hindu religion has no theological difficulties in accepting degrees of truth in other religions. It emphasizes that everyone worships the same God, whether one knows it or not. The earliest reference to Buddhist views on religious pluralism is found in the Edicts of Emperor Ashoka. "All religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart". The principle of relative pluralism is one of the basic principles of Jainism. In this view, the truth or the reality is perceived differently from different points of view, and no single point of view is the

complete truth. Sikh Gurus (religious leaders) propagated the message of "many paths" leading to the one God and ultimate salvation for all souls who tread on the path of righteousness. Sikhs are told to accept all leading faiths as possible means of attaining spiritual enlightenment, provided the faithful study, ponder and practise the teachings of their prophets and leaders. Majoritarianism is a political philosophy that asserts that a majority (categorized by religion or some other basis) of the population is entitled to primacy in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society. The rise of Hindu Majoritarianism during the first quarter of 20th century, led to the transformation of Indian society from a religiously

and culturally pluralist to an exclusivist, paved the way for the partition of India. Gino Battaglia, a UK-based researcher, in an article titled: "Neo-Hindu Fundamentalism: Challenging the Secular and Pluralist Indian State", has pointed out that while rejecting the rise of Hindu Majoritarianism, leftist leaders of All India Congress, like Nehru, "thought that modernity would overcome recognized Majoritarianism, which is a remnant of the past. They were confident that a political culture based on pluralism and tolerance would become the foundations of the new society. This is exactly what Hindu Majoritarianists object to i.e. building the national identity without Hinduism".

Courtesy: PO



Ayyan Ali's flat in Karachi to be auctioned on court's order

Karachi: A special customs court on Tuesday directed to confiscate a flat owned by Model Ayyan Ali in Karachi while ordering to put it on auction.



As per a report, submitted in customs court of Rawalpindi by district judge of Rawalpindi, the court session judge of Karachi South, Flat No. 804 of Ayyan Ali was seized and Judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta released the order to auction

the property of the accused in currency smuggling case. The prosecutor of customs said the money which will be recovered after selling the flat will go into the

smuggling case. Judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta had issued perpetual arrest warrants for her. He observed that the accused was repeatedly summoned but she failed to turn up in the court. Her bailable and non-bailable arrest warrants were also issued but to no avail.

He added in March 2015 authorities, acting on a complaint, arrested her at the VIP lounge of Benazir Bhutto International Airport in Islamabad on money laundering charges before she could board a flight to Dubai. It is pertinent to mention here that under Pakistan laws, a citizen is barred to carry over \$10,000 on a flight. However, the authorities had found \$508,800 tucked in her luggage. She was released on bail in July 2016 and her lawyer claimed she had no intention to take money outside Pakistan.

Key eyewitness identifies MQM worker in Baldia factory case

KARACHI: Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) worker Zubair Charya was present at Baldia factory when it was being set on fire, a key eyewitness in the inter-city case testified before an anti-terrorism court on Tuesday. News media reported. The eyewitness, who had gone into hiding fearing for his life, appeared in the ATC and recorded his statement.

He picked out Zubair as one of the accused persons, who were present inside the factory at the time when it

September 11, 2012. Accused Abdul Rehman alias Bhola, a former sector-in-charge of the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), had earlier confessed to the crime before investigators. In his confessional statement, Bhola stated that he with Zubair, alias Charya, set the factory ablaze on the instructions of then chief of the MQM organizing committee, Muhammad Siddiqui after the factory owners declined to pay protection money.

The anti-encroachment

PM urged to take notice of water shortage in Badin

Karachi: People of Badin district on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Imran Khan to take notice of acute water shortage in the area, ARY News reported.

As per details, Matli, Tando Bago, Talhar and other areas of the district are facing severe water shortage from last six months. "We are deprived of potable drinking and irrigation water", the citizens complained. In order to divert attention of the Sindh government to this important issue, the citizens have protested, observed sit-ins and shutter down strikes, but the provincial government had turned a blind eye to the people who were forced to drink highly contaminated water and the farmers' plight despite their continuous protests.

The people of aforesaid areas are compelled to migrate from their ancestral homes. The water supply has been suspended over political differences", residents alleged. Appealing the prime minister to take immediate notice of the matter as

the matter can turn into a huge human tragedy. The irrigation officials are allegedly involved in stealing water whereas over a million population living in tail-end and coastal areas was suffering in order to divert attention



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Jamshed Quarters fire deaths: Husband kills wife and kids

KARACHI: The fire incident that claimed the lives of two children and their mother in Jamshed Quarters of the city, was a planned murder, committed by the head of family Junaid to marry with a woman in Malaysia.



der, the police said. According to News reports, police officials have claimed that the March 22 incident at a house in Bijli Nagar, was an arson attack

Sufiyan, and five-year-old daughter, Hunaza. The police has arrested accused Junaid, who was staying in Malaysia for job and returned Pakistan on March 16. The accused had secretly return to Pakistan and contacted with his wife on March 22 night, according to the police. He asked his wife Shumaila to keep his return secret and promised her that he will take her and children to Malaysia without anyone come to know about it, police said. According to police, Junaid entered in house from the back entrance. He entered the room where his wife was sleeping with children, sparked fire and fled from the scene, police officials said.

was being put on fire. He said the accused took plastic bags containing something out of his pockets and tossed them over clothes present in the industrial unit's godown. He said Zubair Charya was smiling as the people were burning in the fire. During cross-examination, the witness told the court that he had gone to the Punjab as he feared for life. The hearing was adjourned till April 3. At least 285 workers were killed and many others were injured after a fire broke out at the factory, dubbed the Baldia factory for its location in Baldia Town, on

operation had been resumed in different parts of the metropolis on March 19 after getting go-ahead by the Supreme Court (SC) on February 26, directing relevant authorities to cooperate and continue removing illegal constructions and grabbed land. It is pertinent to mention here that the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) had handed over control of Hill Park to Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) in 1972. The plots on the hillside land had been illegally distributed by Pakistan Employees Cooperative Housing Society (PECHS), the notice stated.

Khurram Sher Zaman criticises over law & order situation

KARACHI: Reading over an attack on Federal Minister for Narcotics Control, Muhammad Mahir, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Karachi Division President Khurram Sher Zaman on Tuesday said its Sindh government responsibility to provide security to the elected representatives. Speaking to journalists after inquiring about health of Mahir in Karachi, the PTI leader said law and order situation is worsening with every passing day in Sindh and the elected provincial government to take strict measures. "PPP government is answerable over the law and



order situation in the province", Khurram Sher Zaman said. He said around six to seven people barged into the

Muhammad Shaharyar Khan Mahram commented that the incident seemed to be an attempted robbery. "Mr Mahir had sustained non-serious wounds in resistance during the robbery," he said. Former chief minister of Sindh Ali Muhammad Mahir was wounded by suspected robbers, who stormed his house in the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) late on Monday. According to police, six armed men forced their way into the house of the former chief minister and injured him with the butt of a gun when he tried to stop them. As a result,

International Monetary Fund's tough conditions will increase inflation

KARACHI: Under the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) tough conditions, the government is set to introduce another structural reform soon that will allow the central bank to stop printing money for budgetary financing and will help control inflation in the country. The central bank used to print money to finance the deficit in budgetary spending by the government. This type of money printing was a cause for inflation in the country. The government is going to amend a relevant "SBP Act" to legally prevent this type of money printing. This will be another institutional reform which will help to control the inflation," said State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Reza Asif.

Baqir expressed these views while speaking to members of the National Executive Committee of the English Speaking Union of Pakistan on Monday. The central bank would soon propose an amendment to its relevant law to parliament through the Ministry of Law, it was learnt. Earlier, the government agreed with the IMF on making such an amendment to make the central bank a more autonomous financial institution.

To recall, the government has already stopped borrowing from the central bank since July 2019 under the ongoing IMF loan programme worth \$6 billion signed in May 2019. The federal and provincial governments have been making such borrowing from commercial banks since July last year.

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported that inflation increased 12.4% in February compared to a nine-year high of 14.6% in January. With this, the average rate of inflation stood at 11.7% for the first eight months of current fiscal year compared to SBP's projection of 11-12% for the full year. Reforms delivered by the central bank has remained confident that the economic reforms introduced under the current IMF programme will continue to deliver, Baqir stated. Earlier, the central bank had introduced a market-based rupee-dollar exchange rate in May 2019 and increased the benchmark interest rate under the reforms drive. "The new exchange rate mechanism has helped strengthen the rupee," he said.

The measures have helped to increase the country's foreign currency reserves by \$5.5 billion in the current

fiscal year to around \$12.5 billion, he pointed out. "The SBP is very confident the reforms will continue to deliver. We are confident inflation will drop further," he said. Negative return on the investment made in the National Savings Schemes (NSS), he said. For many people, the return on investment from NSS is the only source of income. However, the rate of return (ie 11%) on such investments remained negative when compared with the prevailing average rate of inflation at 11.7%, he noted. The high interest rate has also not stopped exporters from making new investment and importing raw material. The central bank offers subsidised financing at the rate of 3% for the import of raw material by the exporters and offers long-term project financing at 5% to textile exporters.

Earlier in the day, it emerged that the number of taxpayers in Pakistan has increased by 700,000 over a year's

Doctors, surgeons found involved in tax evasion by FBR

KARACHI: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued notices to the renowned hospitals of Karachi, the metropolis of Pakistan, to disclose income details of physicians and surgeons.

News media reported on a large number of doctors and surgeons found involved in tax evasion despite having registered with Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), revealed in the FBR documents. The revenue authority sent notices to the 30 major hospitals of Karachi in order to seek income details of doctors and surgeons along with their computerised national identity card (CNIC) numbers and names.

Earlier in the day, it emerged that the number of taxpayers in Pakistan has increased by 700,000 over a year's

period, according to statisticians by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). As per the FBR's stats, the total number of people who filed their tax

returns rose by 700,000 to a total of 2,154 million. Of these, some 700,000 are salaried people. The FBR further said proposals to impose fixed taxes were being mullied to bring the small and big business owners into the tax net.

Hailing the rise in numbers of people filing tax returns, Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry tweeted on Sunday that so far 2.1 million people had filed their tax returns, which was the highest in the FBR's history.

"FBR has projected a target to enhance these returns numbers to 4 million for the tax year 2019," he wrote.

FBR collects Rs2.72tr in taxes, misses target

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has provisionally collected Rs2.72 trillion in taxes, missing its eight-month target by a record margin amid failure to increase the number of income tax return filers that has dropped by nearly 13% to only 2.45 million.

From July through February of the current fiscal year 2019-20, the FBR collected Rs2.72 trillion in taxes, according to provisional figures. The collection fell short by a

filling income tax returns ended on Friday and till the closing time, the FBR had received 2.45 million tax returns for tax year 2019, according to FBR officials. However, for tax year 2018 over 2.8 million taxpayers had submitted the returns.

The number of income tax returns has dropped by nearly 358,000 or 13% as compared to the last tax year.

Under the Income Tax Rules of 2002, the FBR publishes the new Active



record Rs490 billion when compared with the original target of Rs5.555 trillion. The Rs2.72-trillion revenue collection was higher by 16.5% or Rs385 billion as compared to the same period of the previous fiscal year.

However, the growth rate was less than half the needed rate of 38%, which the FBR was required to achieve to hit the Rs5.5-trillion annual target. Last year, the government had collected Rs2.332 trillion in the same period.

The eight-month revenue target of Rs3.207 trillion was against the annual target of Rs5.555 trillion, which the IMF has agreed to revise downwards to Rs5.238 trillion. However, the federal cabinet has not yet revised the budget estimate for the fiscal year 2019-20. PM urges FBR to restore taxpayers trust. The Ministry of Finance is expected to officially seek the cabinet's approval for the revised revenue target in the Budget Strategy Paper 2020-21.

When compared with the IMF's revised target, the eight-month collection fell short of the goal by Rs209 billion. But ambiguity remains about what actual target the IMF has now given to the FBR after both sides reached a staff-level agreement on Thursday.

Taxpayers List on March 1 every year. The list is expected to be made public on Monday aimed at fulfilling the legal requirement.

The date of filing income tax returns was not to be extended further, Dr Hamid Aliq Sarwar, the FBR spokesman, told The Express Tribune.

The statutory date for filing income tax returns is September 30 each year but the FBR has powers to extend the date.

The FBR has remained without a permanent head for the past one month after Shahbaz Zaidi stopped attending the office. The government has given the charge of looking after the FBR affairs as chairperson to Naushan Javed. However, her status remains unclear as neither the government has decided to permanently appoint her nor has communicated her to continue at least till June 30. Javed on Friday transferred Zubair Bilal, a grade-20 officer, who was serving as special assistant to the FBR chairman. Bilal has again been sent to Multan as director intelligence and investigation. In Bilal's place, Javed has brought in Zulfiqar Ali Memon, a grade-19 officer, as special assistant to the chairperson. Memon was earlier serving as the commissioner.

Pakistan's trade deficit contracts 27% to \$15.7b

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan booked a trade deficit of \$15.7 billion in first eight months of current fiscal year, down 27% due to suppression of imports, amid rekindled hopes for the revival of exports that bounced back after contracting for three months in a row.

In February, export receipts showed an increase of 13.8% and amounted to \$2.13 billion, giving a reason for celebration to members of the government's economic team, who immediately started sending congratulatory tweets.

Export receipts in February hit the highest level in nine months. Last time in May 2019, the exports had risen to \$2.1 billion, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) figures. Since then, exports have fluctuated between \$1.7 billion and \$2 billion, which does not reflect the true potential. Historically, exports have stayed around \$2 billion a month. The Ministry of Commerce took to Twitter to announce the trade statistics, which otherwise is the responsibility of the PBS.

Total exports increased 3.6% to \$15.6 billion in July of the current fiscal year.

Commerce Secretary Ahmad Nawaz Sukhera through his Twitter handle. In absolute terms, Pakistan managed to increase exports by \$547 million from July through February.

The cumulative increase in exports was appreciable when compared with the export trend in Pakistan's competing countries and

the global economic situation, stated the commerce secretary.

Imports during the eight-month period dropped 14.4% to \$31.3 billion,

annual target of \$26.8 billion while imports were equal to 80% of the target of \$51.7 billion. In the ongoing financial year, due to global slow-



according to the commerce secretary. In absolute terms, imports contracted \$5.3 billion, which provided some relief for the government.

After the first review, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected that the trade deficit of Pakistan in the current fiscal year would narrow down to \$24.3 billion, also slightly lowering its projections due to weakening exports. The IMF had earlier predicted that exports would grow to \$26.8 billion but in its latest report the estimate was revised down by nearly a billion dollars to \$25.7 billion.

Overall, the trade deficit, which stood at \$21.5 billion in the first eight months of previous fiscal year, shrank to \$15.7 billion in the same period of current fiscal year. In absolute terms, there was a reduction of \$5.8 billion in the trade deficit and 91% of the improvement came from the import side. Eight-month exports were equal to 58.2% of the

down and other factors such as Brexit, exports of India declined 1.9% and Bangladesh's exports fell 5.2% while Pakistan's exports increased 3.6%, said Aliya Hamza Malik, Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce and Industry. She said the textile sector was running on full production capacity and food exports were also rising significantly.

Successive governments have been providing subsidised loans, gas and electricity to the exporters but they have always asked for more. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has once again reached an understanding with the exporters, promising them to provide cheaper electricity and gas.

Over a year ago, the PTI government had also given huge benefits to the exporters and in return they promised to revive 200 closed units. But no one talked about the revival of units after winning concessions.

IMF gives deadline for track & trace system

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has asked the government to ensure that the system to electronically monitor the production and supply of cigarettes and other products of tobacco is completely operational by March 2020.

The lending agency has also directed the relevant departments that to meet this deadline, the bidding process should be completed by September 2019 and successful bidding company should be issued the license to implement this Track & Trace System. The IMF has also asked the government to withdraw the legal provisions aimed at limiting the tax audit. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has assessed Pakistan's gross financing requirement at \$25.5 billion in this fiscal year on

the back of mounting debt repayment whereas the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has indicated that it will provide \$10 billion



over a period of five years. Against the need for \$25.5 billion in fiscal year 2019-20, the IMF year 2019-20, the total inflows at nearly \$30 billion, according to a staff-level report the global lender released on Monday. Additional bor-

rowing of over \$4 billion would be used to build the foreign currency reserves, showed the report. The release of the IMF report

Alhambra Theatre Festival kicks off with a play about Partition

Karachi: The week-long Alhambra Theatre Festival kicked off at the Alhambra Art Center, The Mall on Tuesday with the inaugural play Permeshar Singh by

groups. Maas Foundation presented its evergreen production Permeshar Singh, a play adapted from short story of legendary Ahmad

other central character, a Sikh man called Permeshar Singh. Permeshar proceeds to save the boy from an unruly mob, eventually adopting him against the initial reluctance of his wife. Forced to make the boy adopt the ways of the Sikh community to survive, Permeshar's character is in contrast to the people around him. He encourages Akhtar to recite his lines from the Quran, fights to protect Akhtar's identity as a Muslim and goes all lengths to take the boy back to his mother, regardless of how close he is to the boy. The story ends on a sad note, with Permeshar's efforts going waste, and the innocence of a young boy ring out loud in the face of unsympathetic coldness.



Maas Foundation. Despite heavy rain a good number of theater fanatics came to attend the 21st festival organised by the Lahore Arts Council. The festival will feature six plays by different theater

Nadeem Qasmi, and got a good response from the audience. The play is about a young Muslim boy, Akhtar, who gets separated from his mother during the partition. The boy is soon found by the story's

Pakistani documentary 'Armed with Faith' nominated for an Emmy Award



A Pakistani documentary has made it to the Emmys. Armed with Faith tells the story of the lives of the brave Pakistani men of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bomb Defusal Squad.

"We are going to the Emmys! Yay!" co-producer Haya Fatima shared on Facebook. "Our documentary film Armed With Faith tells the story of the lives of the brave Pakistani men of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bomb Defusal Squad." Directed by Asad Faruqi and Geeta Gandbhir, the documentary has been nominated in Outstanding Politics and Government Documentary category. "Asad has shot this film in a way that lends a lot of respect to the people in the film," Fatima added. "This

led by the brave Pakistani men of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bomb Defusal Squad." Armed with Faith was co-produced by two time Oscar winner Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy alongside Fatima. A Pakistani documentary has made it to the Emmys. Armed with Faith tells the story of the lives of the brave Pakistani men of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bomb Defusal Squad.

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"Asad has shot this film in a way that lends a lot of respect to the people in the film," Fatima added. "This film made me fall in love once again with the kind people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the amazing grace they continue to possess in the face of adversity and injustice," concluded Fatima. Armed with Faith was co-produced by two time Oscar winner Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy alongside Fatima. A Pakistani documentary has made it to the Emmys. Armed with Faith tells the story of the lives of the brave Pakistani men of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bomb Defusal Squad.

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PTI govt allows export of onions stuck at port

KARACHI: The government has allowed export of 170 containers of onion that were stuck at port following issuance of a notification imposing ban on export of the commodity. The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet had banned the export of onion, fearing it would create shortage of the commodity in the domestic market and further inflate the inflation reading.

The Ministry for National Food Security and Research also released a notification, restricting the export of onion till May 31, 2020.

"In compliance with the directive received from the collector, the loading of all consignments declared to contain 'fresh onion' falling under PCT 0703.1000 filed in the Web Based One Customs (WeBOC) on or before February 28, 2020 is allowed," read a notice issued by the office of assistant collector export examination. "The loading of all con-

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Rewiring food systems to enhance human health and biosphere stewardship

ISLAMABAD: Upcoming visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to China will be highly important, as during his stay there he will get an opportunity to meet President Xi Jinping and attend the 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) in Beijing.

This was stated by the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Yao Jing while giving a media briefing held on Monday at the Chinese embassy on the preparation of BRF that was also attended by the members of Think-Tank and representatives of Chinese companies.

During the briefing, he also answered questions relating to cooperative partnership, China's financing for CPEC, peace and stability in the region, third-party participation and China's related projects in Gili and Baluchistan. There will be an important interaction between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Xi Jinping on April 28. This will be Imran Khan's second visit to China, during which he will be a 'Guest Honour' at the inaugural session of the conference. The Prime Minister will also attend the International Horticulture Exhibition, scheduled to take place in Beijing on the occasion. The BRF's conference will be participated by 40 heads of States and the governments. Imran Khan will deliver a keynote address at the conference, during which he will apprise the participants about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that is a

major project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Yao Jing was confident that the visit will help expand and promote

year-old and it has emerged as a unique model of international cooperation and connectivity, paving the way of prosperity and well-being at



CPEC at a broader level, bringing some new projects in social and agriculture sector. During the visit, the two countries will sign the 2nd phase of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that will provide maximum concessions to Pakistan Commodities. During his four-day stay in Beijing, the Prime Minister is expected to address an investment conference. There will be important headway on launching of ML-1 Railways project. In this connection, the two sides are likely to sign a formal document. Yao Jing said, the BRI is a five-

all levels, under the concept of shared destiny. The sole purpose of the CPEC, he said, is to participate in the socio-economic development of Pakistan and to improve the living standard of the local community, he added. The ambassador said Pakistan has a bright future and it has an emerging economy. He appreciated the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan and said he was doing his best bringing Pakistan out of the economic crisis. About the BRF, he said there will 12 thematic forums and a CEO conference would

be held on April 25, the opening ceremony and a high-level meeting on April 26, and the leaders' roundtable on April 27.

President Xi will attend the opening ceremony and deliver a keynote speech. He will also chair the leaders' roundtable and brief media from home and abroad about the outcomes after the roundtable.

The theme of the second BRF is 'Belt and Road Cooperation, Shaping a Brighter Shared Future'. The main purpose is to promote the high-quality development of Belt and Road cooperation, which is the common aspiration of countries participating in the Initiative.

The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by Xi in 2013, aims at enhancing all-around connectivity through infrastructure construction, exploring new driving force for the world economic growth, and building a new platform for world economic cooperation. As the host country, China will maintain close communication and coordination with all parties to prepare for the forum with openness, inclusiveness and transparency, upholding the principle of consultation and cooperation for shared benefits. It is believed that the forum will inject stronger impetus into the world economy, open even broader horizon for the development of the countries, and contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

Internet shutdown in IOJ&K, longest ever in a democracy

KARACHI: Authorities have extended restrictions on high-speed internet in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) till March 4, 2020.

It is being said that the internet shutdown in the disputed territory, which was implemented last August to impose a security lockdown and revoking the region's special autonomous status, is the longest ever in a democratic country to know more about the specifics of the ban, and the justification provided by New Delhi. The Express Tribune spoke to Raman Chima, Asia Pacific policy director at Access Now, an international advocacy group dedicated to open and free internet. Excerpt:

ET: Last month, the Indian Supreme Court condemned the months-long internet shutdown in IOJ&K. Has there been any change on the ground since the ruling?

Chima: Subsequent to the Supreme Court's ruling, Indian authorities issued new orders on limiting internet services to users. They partly increased the internet services (2G) to users, but banned the usage of 3G and 4G connectivity that is otherwise available to the rest of India. They also issued orders banning access to many social media services and issued a 'whitelist' of websites that should be accessed by residents in the affected areas.

ET: Police have reportedly initiated a crackdown against virtual private networks. Are VPNs still working in IOJ&K?

Chima: Indian authorities continued with orders calling on surveillance and monitoring of internet connections, and have recently initiated prosecution of users using VPN services. Charging them under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act — an unprecedented first in India, which has been condemned by civil liberties organisations as unconstitutional and illegal.

VPN access and usage is otherwise not banned in the Republic of India, and is not legally blocked at the national level.

Selective policing: Internet shutdown in Kashmir and beyond

ET: What legal argument has the Indian government presented before the top court to defend the internet blackout?

Chima: In defending the shutdown, lawyers for the Indian government argued that it was required for national security and upholding law and order, including allegations of cross-border disinformation, and the usage of online communications by accused extremist organisations.

The Supreme Court of India held that the use of the internet was crucial to the fundamental rights of speech and expression, and the right to life and liberty under the Indian constitution, and any restrictions on that had to be judicially checked to ensure that the executive action had not exceeded constitutional standards, including that of necessity and proportionality.

ET: Is the internet shutdown in the disputed valley the longest ever in a democracy? Are there any other countries which have restricted the services for so long?

Chima: The current disruption of internet services in the areas of Jammu and Kashmir — coupled with the shutdowns ordered in 2018 — currently represent one of the longest periods of intentional disruption of internet access affecting a large population (up to 10 million people) by an established democratic government in the world. The longest continuous internet shutdown in 2019 — and which continues till date — is the shutdown ordered across several townships in Rakhine and Chin states of Myanmar by the government there.

NAB postpones Hamza Shahbaz's investigation in assets case

LAHORE: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has informed Hamza to not reach their Lahore headquarters today (Monday) for probe in assets and alleged money laundering case.

According to details, the summons was delayed owing to the workload of NAB's combined investigation team in the federal capital.

It may be pertinent to mention that Hamza was sent a notice by the anti-graft watchdog to appear at their Lahore bureau today.

An accountability court postponed the indictment of National Assembly Opposition Leader Shehbaz Sharif and his son, Punjab Assembly Opposition Leader Hamza Shehbaz in the Ramzan Sugar Mills reference until the next hearing. When the court resumed hearing of the case, Sharif's lawyer requested the court to postpone the indictment. Shehbaz and Hamza were also present during Wednesday's hearing. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has filed a reference alleging that the former Punjab chief minister caused loss to the national exchequer and misused his authority by sanctioning construction of a bridge to facilitate his sugar mill.

On March 16, Shehbaz Sharif pleaded not guilty by stating that NAB had falsely accused him in the case. To which, the judge responded, "You can come to your own defence at an appropriate time as the case is not being adjudicated by me. Subsequently, the judge, due to the absence of the admin judge, adjourned the hearing of the case."

Besides, former Lahore Development Authority (LDA) director general Ahsan Chishti, ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif's principal secretary Fawad Hassan Fawad and other accused also appeared before the court.

Earlier on March 14, the NAB had filed a petition in the Supreme Court against Shehbaz Sharif's release on bail in Ramzan Sugar Mills and Ahsana Housing Scheme cases.

The plea was submitted by NAB Special Prosecutor Akram Qureshi in which it was stated that Shehbaz Sharif's bail approval by the Lahore High Court was contradictory to facts.

The apex court was requested to nullify the LHC's decision of bail approval.

The LHC had granted bail against two surety bonds worth one million each after Shehbaz Sharif filed a petition in Ramzan Sugar Mills and Ahsana Housing Scheme cases.

The high court also ordered removal of



Shehbaz's name from the Exit Control List on Tuesday. His name was added to the no-fly list on February 22 in the Ahsana Housing case, after he was arrested by NAB in the probe on October 5, 2018.

ASHIANA FIASCO: Shehbaz Sharif was taken into custody by the National Accountability Bureau Lahore in connection with the Ahsana Housing case on October 5, 2018.

He had been charged with misuse of authority by unlawfully assuming powers of the board of directors of the Punjab Land Development Company (PLDC), and evading a contract to an ineligible proxy firm that resulted in the failure of the project. The scam caused a massive loss to the public exchequer and deprived 61,000 applicants of houses.

Ray of hope: Polio patient hires the differently-abled

LAHORE: Shafiqur Rehman, 44, was diagnosed with polio at the age of six months due to the unavailability of vaccination in his region and became paralysed by the infectious disease that affected both his legs.

No efforts of parents or doctors could have helped him after he became differently-abled. However, at a certain point in his life, Shafiq realised that he would not be able to spend his life normally.

He promised himself that he would neither let his disability become a hindrance nor use it as an excuse to refrain from working. Eventually, he started working on a monthly wage of Rs125 and his efforts led him to establishing a factory for the differently-abled.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Shafiq said he does not want other differently-abled people to face hurdles and problems as he had to face throughout his life due to polio.

Polio case reported from Karak. As a result of this, Shafiq decided to provide work opportunities for differently-abled people and proved with his hard work that they should not lose hope and end up

believing that they are incapable of doing something for themselves. "Some differently-abled persons negate themselves because of



negative thinking instead of having a positive approach. This discourages others around them too."

Shafiq further said that he has his private factory where wheelchairs are repaired and manufactured. "All the employees working in the factory are differently-abled individuals and they are also making other people skilled," he said.

"Our business activities are usually designed for persons with disabilities who are striving for an honest

earning," he added. "All these people hired at the factory are no less than professional workers," Shafiqur Rehman, 44,

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United States -Afghanistan Taliban deal raises hope for peace in region, Says experts

ISLAMABAD: The United States and the Afghan Taliban are set to sign a historic deal in Doha today (Saturday), bringing an end to the America's longest war and raising hopes for peace in the war-ravaged country.

The peace deal is likely to be signed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the co-founder of the Taliban movement and a top US official.

The Taliban want US President Donald Trump or Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to sign the deal. However, it is not clear who will attend the ceremony on the US behalf till the filing of this report.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, meanwhile, will attend the ceremony from the Pakistani side. Ahead of the signing ceremony, Qureshi told an audience at the Pakistani Embassy in Doha that the US-Taliban deal is a vindication of Islamabad's stance that there is no solution to end the war in Afghanistan except through reconciliation.

Pakistan has played a key role in brokering the deal between the US and the Taliban since it not only facilitated the talks but also persuaded the insurgents to show flexibility on the issue of reduction of violence as well as intra-Afghan dialogue.

Delegates from other countries will also attend the ceremony while the Taliban said the brother of the Taliban deputy chief, Anas Haqqani, who was recently freed by Afghanistan and Australian professor Timothy Weeks, remained in the captivity of the Taliban from 2016 till his release recently, would also witness the signing ceremony.

Although official details are not available yet, the proposed agreement envisages a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops, release of prisoners by both the sides and guarantees that the Taliban will not allow the Afghan soil to be used again by terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda.

Observers believe the deal cannot be called a peace deal but rather an agreement that would pave the way for an intra-Afghan dialogue.

The talks between the Taliban and other Afghan groups — including the current Kabul administration — will hammer out crucial issues such as the post-US troops withdrawal political set up, a permanent ceasefire and rights of minorities, women and other matters.

One of the major scepticism expressed by critics is that whether the Taliban would show any flexibility in their hardline approach, particularly towards the rights of women.

Afghanistan — dealing with the deal in a recent Op Ed, Sirajuddin Haqqani, the deputy Taliban chief, attempted to portray the Taliban as an outfit willing to reach a compromise on certain issues.

Haqqani spoke about women's rights as well as establishing relationship with western countries — including the US.

The major challenge, nevertheless, remains whether all Afghan groups would evolve a consensus on the future political dispensation in Afghanistan.

The recent controversy over the presidential elections has further compounded the problem.

Ashraf Ghani, who was declared a winner, was set to take oath earlier this week but had to postpone the ceremony on the US request.

His rival Dr Abdullah Abdullah contested the election results and claimed victory. The internal wrangling has threatened to undermine the talks between Taliban and US.

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