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YERZHAN KISTAFIN

Kazakhstan referendum a revolutionary step



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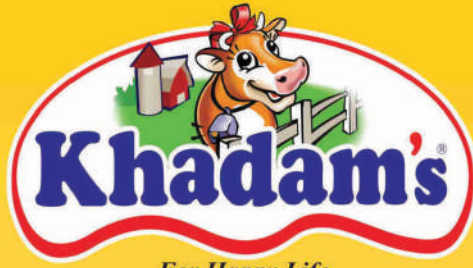


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Why would the government want to complete its term?



WHEN the coalition government took over almost three months ago, it was believed, or maybe the deal was this that the government soon after taking charge would announce early elections. The sole purpose of the then Opposition's exercise was to dislodge the PTI government spearheaded by Imran Khan. They did it successfully. But what transpired afterwards, perhaps nobody had foreseen that. The coalition was confident it would steer clear the country out of the mess, according to it, created by the PTI government. Before taking the charge, particularly their economic wizards including the Finance Minister Miftah Ismael were upbeat about delivering the economy from chaos and uncertainty. Things however did not go according to their

plans and hence the worst economic crisis has hit hard to all and sundry. Announcement of elections soon after the fall of the Imran govt may have avoided the mess we are in these days. A caretaker government composed of technocrats would have done much better than the ones who are calling the shots. Now things have reached to such a pass that it would be suicidal for the coalition parties to leave the government at this stage when their popularity graph has went down significantly. If they call it a day at this stage then they have to suffer heavily in the coming general elections for with this baggage they will not be able to convince the voters that they are the best choice for them. Therefore, they would like to first set things in order and then think about going to the elections. After the long march fiasco, the PTI leadership would think twice before launching another march. As a face saving they have put the ball into the court of the Apex Court and linked its next long march move to the court decision. And one wonders, why the court would like to drag its feet into this matter. The Shehbaz Sharif govt believes that after the long march 'failure' PTI has been rendered toothless so nothing to worry about it. Under this presumption, the government thinks there is no harm in completing the rest of the term. On the other hand, PTI too is not interested in a long march any time soon. The party wants to contest the Punjab by-elections with full force with a view to winning all the seats and return to the Punjab Assembly with majority. If everything goes according to PTI plans, then it can easily overthrow the Hamza government. By and large the ruling government backed candidates sail smoothly in the by-elections therefore it would be indeed a challenge for the PTI as to how it would reverse this trend.

The appointment of the new army chief is yet another plus point for the incumbent government that may help it stay in power. The appointment of the army chief is done by a regular government and not a caretaker one. Announcement about this appointment is likely to be made somewhere in September or October this year because the COAS retires on 29 November 2022. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on June 24, 2022 announced to impose a super tax on the big industries. Additionally, he announced that he would impose tax on the wealthy people. The decision appears to be a smart move however the question is how will it be implemented? And how the government would ensure that those who are going to be taxed, would not increase prices of their products. If they will do this then from the face of it there is no point in taxing them because they would then recover this amount from the ordinary people. Experts rightly believe that the government needs to broaden the tax net besides plugging the loopholes in the taxation system due to which over 300 billion rupees tax is evaded every year. Then widespread corruption is yet another bane the government has to deal with. There is a huge disparity between our earnings and the level of corruption. Imran Khan has rightly raised the issue of corruption in his rallies and intends to continue with it even in the coming days. Sources suggest, some back door contacts have been established between the PTI and the Establishment. However, only time will tell whether these contacts would really help PTI get a date for the early elections. Some say the contacts may just be bait in order to keep the party engaged!!

ANWAR

Chief Editor's Profile: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti is a career journalist. He started off as District Correspondent of Daily The Muslim in 1988 from Gujrat. Later he moved to Islamabad and joined Pakistan Observer as Sub-Editor / Op-ed Writer, in 1993. In 1995 he again moved to The Muslim as Sub-Editor and he left The Muslim in 1997 to join THE Nation as City Editor and Diplomatic Correspondent, where he remained till 2002. His association with the The News spans over three years from 2002 to 2005 as columnist. In 2005 Mr. Bhatti switched over to Khabrain Group as Columnist / Special Correspondent. In 2010 he was made Resident Editor of The Post, a sister publication of daily Khabrain. In 2010, he launched his own publication Centreline. He has authored two books on European Union. He also served in Pakistan Telecommunication Company (PTCL) as Media Advisor/ Director Communication. He launched Diplomatic News Agency (DNA) in 2012. In May 2020 he launched Pakistan's First & only Diplomatic Newspaper Daily Islamabad POST.

YERZHAN KISTAFIN

Referendum to change lives of the people

EXCLUSIVE

I AM THE FIRST KAZAKH AMBASSADOR TO VISIT BALUCHISTAN; THE PROVINCE IS FULL OF RESOURCES AND HAS HUGE POTENTIAL

Ambassador of Kazakhstan talks to Centreline, Daily Islamabad POST and DNA News Agency

Ansar Mehmood Bhatti



LET us begin with recently held referendum in Kazakhstan, please share with our readers some salient features of the Referendum and how do you see this exercise will bring a change for the people of Kazakhstan?

You are right, a referendum on amendments and additions to the Constitution of our country was held in Kazakhstan on June 5 this year. Already on the morning of June 6 this year, the Central Election Commission reported that according to the results of the referendum, the turnout of citizens who voted was 68.6%, of which more than 77% supported the introduction of 56 amendments to 33 articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and almost 19% opposed the changes, 1.5% of Kazakhstanis who voted accepted both answers, and 2.5% - spoiled their bulletins. Thus, the vote for amendments to the Basic Law was recognized as having taken place.

Taking into account the turnout rate at the referendum sites, we express confidence that the adopted amendments will change the life of the people for the better, since the constitutional reforms initiated by K.K.Tokayev proceed from the long-term request of citizens to expand their participation in state governance and the deep democratization of political processes. These processes are fundamental, since from now on the country's political system adopts a new format of interaction between the state and society. This model of interaction consists in the fact that: First, the final transition from a super-presidential form of government to a presidential republic with an influential Parliament and an accountable Government took place.

Secondly, a majority-proportional system of electing deputies to the Majilis and Maslikhats - local representative bodies - has been introduced. This will make it possible to more clearly reflect the interests of voters both at the national and regional levels. Thirdly, the President of the country will appoint akims of regions and cities of republican significance, taking into account the results of consideration of candidates in maslikhats. In other words, the people will have direct involvement in the appointment of the heads of regions. Fourth, the President's equidistant status from all political parties



and movements is being consolidated. The President may not be a member of any political party during the period of his/her term of office. The public will be confident that the Head of State will not lobby for the interests of a particular group of people.

Fifth, the human rights functions of the State are being strengthened. In the "Second Republic", the constitutional rights of citizens of our country will be respected, a new political culture based on mutual respect and trust between the state and society will be formed. And this is only a small part of the reforms that have been initiated, which will become an incentive for big changes in Kazakhstan's society.

Through the referendum, the President sought to share powers to have sort of an inclusive government, which is of course a unique idea. Tell us something more about it please?

As I have already said, an accountable Government is one of the conditions for new reforms. At the same time, a strong and operational executive power represented by a professional Cabinet of Ministers is the key to the qualitative implementation of the requests of the Kazakh society and the instructions of the Head of State. I would like to elaborate on the key political changes, the success of the implementation of which directly depends on the coordinated activities of the Government.

The first is the improvement of the administrative and territorial structure of the country. Progress directly depends on the prosperity of the regions: the principle of "strong regions – a strong country" remains an axiom of the ongoing reforms. Three additional regions were formed in Kazakhstan. Administrative and territorial changes optimize the process of public administration, make it easier for citizens to move around the country, contribute to more effective regulation of internal migration, as well as the distribution of finances.

Secondly, the process of decentralization of local self-government. Within the framework of modernization, maslikhats (representative bodies) should become the key link of self-government. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan is entrusted with the ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which is the basic international document in this area. Taking into account the introduction of elective mayors, the Government is considering a mechanism for direct financing of local self-government bodies in accordance with international practice.

Third, the constant changes in the geopolitical and geo-economic

realities associated with the conflict potential on a regional and global scale. Accountability, efficiency, responsibility in decision-making and their execution in the conditions of turbulence of world processes, disruption of production and trade chains and other negative trends are designed to be among the main qualities of the current Government of Kazakhstan.

The Government is obliged to act as a guarantor of the adoption of priority anti-crisis measures. Ensuring the food security of our country is also of great importance for the current Cabinet of Ministers. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the unique idea of the Head of State to create an Operational Headquarters under the Government of Kazakhstan, which simultaneously performs the functions of a Situation Center. The Operational Headquarters analyzes information and the situation in the country and abroad in real time, as well as develops specific emergency measures.

Under the dynamic leadership of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Kazakhstan is making progress in all fields. He has taken a lot of steps for the welfare of people of Kazakhstan. Can you please highlight some features of political reforms introduced by the President?

I have already mentioned a number of political reforms above, so I will not repeat myself. I will try to focus on the basic ones.

Already from the moment of his election to the post of President of the country, K.K. Tokayev began to audit the entire political system of Kazakhstan.

As a result, an understanding has matured of the need for deep socio-political transformations that:

- eliminate the bureaucratic gap between the government and the people,
- they will form a civil society with an active life position,
- strengthen the positions of non-governmental structures and, eventually,
- they will launch the process of democratization on a national scale.

It was for this purpose that the Concept of a "Hearing State" was first declared, designed to promptly and effectively respond to all constructive requests of Kazakhstanis, create conditions for a permanent dialogue between the authorities and society, and also build a harmonious state embedded in the context of modern geopolitics. The support and strengthening of civil society, the demand for its involvement in the discussion of urgent national tasks caused the creation of the National Council of Public Trust in 2019,

which has been working on a rotational principle for a long time. Having existed for three years and fulfilled its tasks, this year the Council was transformed into the “National Kurultai”, which formed a single institutional model of public dialogue.

It is, in fact, a comprehensive representative body: it includes representatives of all regions of Kazakhstan, includes a number of deputies of Parliament, members of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, Civil Alliance, public councils and organizations, authoritative public figures, representatives of business, industry and agriculture, etc.

Thus, the Kurultai will present a wide range of very different opinions and views. Meetings of the authority will be held on a regular basis. The current leadership pays great attention to the right of the public to freedom of speech and expression of will. The first step towards this was the improvement of the legislation on rallies and peaceful assemblies.

The well-being of the development of the entire Kazakh society should also be the strengthening of harmony between various social and ethnic groups. In particular, the authority of non-governmental organizations is increasing, work is being carried out in the field of language policy, a presidential decree in August 2020 adopted a concept for the development of civil society in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025. Modernization of the party system of Kazakhstan plays an important role in political transformations.

The key components of modernization are the development of multiparty system, political competition and pluralism of opinions in the country. The parliamentary elections held in January 2021 were evidence of the demand for the modernization of the party system of our republic.

But it should be noted that the modernization of the political system of Kazakhstan is not possible without optimizing the state apparatus. Starting from 2022, the leadership of Kazakhstan has begun to gradually reduce the number of civil servants, and the released funds were used to financially stimulate the most useful employees and employees of state structures.

It is expected that by 2024 the number of government employees and employees of national companies will be reduced by 25 percent. This, of course, is not the whole list of activities that are carried out within the framework of K.K.Tokayev's political reforms. Separately, there are issues of economic diversification, development of small and medium-sized businesses, the fight against corruption, law enforcement reforms, etc.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the main achievement of the reforms of the current President of Kazakhstan was the response from all Kazakhstanis who did not stay away from supporting his initiatives. And I am sure that the results of the referendum held on June 5 this year are the main guarantee of the effectiveness and success of further political transformations in Kazakhstan.

The President also believes in a strong

regional connectivity. Do you think after the referendum the regional connectivity shall further be strengthened?

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has repeatedly stressed that there is no alternative to regional integration, especially with the fraternal countries of Central Asia, with which we have deep historical ties.

At the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States in Turkmenistan (August 6, 2021), the President of Kazakhstan noted that an intensive trust-based dialogue at the highest level undoubtedly plays a key role in regional cooperation. It was also stressed that our main common goal is to turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed, prosperous region. In this regard, a special role is assigned to the early signing of the Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the XXI century. The strengthening of economic ties was highlighted separately. The number of joint ventures is growing, major projects are being implemented in industry, energy, mechanical engineering, agriculture and other sectors of the economy. Trade barriers are being removed. New checkpoints are being opened at the borders, new flights and railway routes are being launched.

As a result, intraregional trade has grown by 12% since 2018. At the same time, the trade turnover of Kazakhstan with the countries of Central Asia has increased one and a half times over the past five years, amounting to \$ 4.6 billion. According to international institutions (UNCTAD, the World Bank), today the intraregional trade turnover in Central Asia is \$6.5 billion, or only 0.04% of all world trade. In addition, the share of mutual trade between the countries of the region occupies only 9% of the total turnover of our states. It was noted that, given the capabilities of the Central Asian economies, as well as the capacity of the common market (75 million people), this indicator does not correspond to the potential we have.

In this regard, it is necessary to intensify work on increasing trade between the countries of the region, improving its structure, expanding the range of goods supplied. Kazakhstan proposes to combine efforts to create a single commodity distribution network integrated into the transport corridors of Central Asia. This new infrastructure, consisting of wholesale distribution and agrologistic centers, will allow for coordinated deliveries of goods to the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union, the CIS and third countries.

Moreover, our states act as a connecting bridge between Asia and Europe, through which the shortest land routes connecting East with West, North with South pass.

Kazakhstan is consistently developing transit capabilities of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor. The potential of the Kazakhstan section of the China-Europe-China transcontinental route is also being strengthened. At the present time, this route has become particularly relevant. The

existing Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway also provides great opportunities. Annually growing volumes of cargo transportation in the region, as well as the difficult geopolitical situation dictate the need for the development of the Southern Corridor of the Trans-Asian Railway.

For example, the launch of the Darbaza-Maktaaral railway line will reduce the time of cargo transportation by 1.5 times. Kazakhstan is open for mutually beneficial cooperation in the development of transport communications within the region. According to the World Bank, the development of transport communications in Central Asia can ensure GDP growth of all countries by 15%. For reference: new projects with Uzbekistan are under development. First of all, we are talking about the Turkestan-Shymkent-Tashkent high-speed railway (the project cost is about \$ 700 million). The laying of the Beineu-Akzhigit highway has been completed, which opened a short route to the ports of Kuryk and Aktau to Uzbek partners. The Turkmenbashi-Garabogaz-Kazakhstan Border highway has significant potential, which will increase passenger and cargo traffic with Turkmenistan.

The developing situation in Afghanistan is of particular concern for the Republic of Kazakhstan. At the moment, collective efforts are needed to develop the country's trade and economic potential in order to prevent an economic “catastrophe” in the country. For these purposes, it is necessary to involve Afghanistan in regional integration, especially in transport and logistics projects. In this context, the project of construction of the Mazar-I-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway, where Afghanistan is of priority importance, is of particular relevance. The successful implementation of the project will open mutual access to the markets of South and Central Asia.

At the same time, the President of Kazakhstan calls for considering new opportunities to strengthen transport and logistics ties in areas of common interest between Kazakhstan and Pakistan. The Head of our state emphasizes the need to expand trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation between the countries. These issues were discussed in detail at the meeting of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev with Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Dushanbe on September 16, 2021. The Head of our state noted the high level of bilateral relations based on trust and mutual respect. The Pakistani side also stated the importance of developing logistics capabilities that will contribute to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. To address these issues, as well as to expand the level of bilateral relations between our countries, the visit of the President of Kazakhstan to Pakistan is planned in the near future.

We believe there are efforts to have direct flights between Pakistan and Kazakhstan. Can you please share details in this regards?



Yes, now we are actively working on the resumption of direct flights between Kazakhstan and Pakistan. As you know, in the 90s there were direct flights between our countries, however, for some reasons they were canceled and now we have a good opportunity to launch them again. I would like to emphasize that the opening of direct flights will strengthen our brotherly relations and will allow us to develop trade and economic ties and achieve high performance. While this program aims to link South and Central Asia, and it is also a promising potential for further regional development.

As far as we know, the government of Pakistan is positive and promotes the Central Asia vision program and the opening of direct flights is the first and main step for further diversify infrastructure and logistics projects. Moreover, the CPEC represents a strategic opportunity for Kazakhstan to further transport export goods, to regional and global markets, while strengthening trade and economic ties. Increasing the export products from Kazakhstan also provides an opportunity to enter the markets of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East through the Pakistan seaports in Karachi and Gwadar.

What are the prospects for Transit Trade Agreement and Preferential Agreement between Pakistan and Kazakhstan?

As you know, Kazakhstan is the biggest landlocked country. Afghanistan is the main transit route between Pakistan and Kazakhstan. Currently, trade of Pakistan with our country is very limited yet. Entering into Kazakh market will open door for Pakistan to capture Central Asian Repub-

lics and Eurasian Economic Union markets and both Kazakhstani and Pakistani products can have edge in market competitiveness. In other hand, Pakistan can be like golden gate for our products to enter seaports of Karachi, Kassim and Gwadar.

Currently both country's authorities are working on the Draft TTA. We expected to signing of that by the end of this year. For a country like Kazakhstan, trade agreements especially with less distant countries can prove to be beneficial. Nevertheless, without establishing banking channels and currency exchange issues, exporters and importers will remain hesitant for entering into this market. Nowadays Embassy working to solve all issues. These measures aims to help business environment work easily.

Cultural cooperation is yet another field where both Pakistan and Kazakhstan have been cooperating closely. Please share your vision with particular reference to recently held Cultural conference in Kazakhstan?

As we know Almaty hosted the International "Al-Farabi - Iqbal" forum organized jointly by the International Turkic Academy, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the COMSTECH during May 26-27. The forum conducted plenary sessions on "Iqbal's Philosophy: Past, Present, and Future", "The Global Impact of Iqbal's Philosophy and Poetry", and "The Challenges of the 21st Century and Technology".

At present time I can constant that both countries have lack pieces of information about each other. And such events are essential in the current time for understanding and establishing strong coop-

eration. I would like to especially thank Iqbal Chaudhry Coordinator General of COMSTECH and Senator Walid Iqbal, the grandson of great Pakistani poet Al-lama Iqbal, for making that conference a great success.

Also, we are working on showing Kazakh movies on your channels; trying to organize a good collaboration to record a musical duet between musicians from our countries. Taking this opportunity I would like to mention that we are looking for a Sitar player for that event and be glad to invite a Pakistani musician.

Cultural cooperation in our framework contributes to the creation of a positive outlook and stimulates the expansion of various interactions. All these efforts lead to a strengthening of mutual understanding. Our task is to create a strong core for various cooperation between Kazakhstan and Pakistan and the cultural field is one of the main basis for that.

Dear Excellency you happen to be the first Kazakh Ambassador to visit Baluchistan. How do you see the potential, which is available in that province?

Yes, it is true that I happen to be the first Kazakh ambassador to visit Baluchistan province. During my visit I met with the Acting Governor of the province besides visiting some of leading universities there. I am sure in the coming days Baluchistan will be the most developed areas in the region. The deep Sea Gwadar port, CPEC and presence of abundance of natural resources have enhanced the importance of the province. We are looking forward to exploring avenues of cooperation in the Baluchistan province.

A new Kazakhstan in the making

The election commission officials termed the entire election drill as satisfactory and according to them no issues whatsoever were reported from anywhere



At a polling station in the suburbs of the Capital

Ansar M Bhatti

THE people of Kazakhstan ostensibly set the basis for a new Kazakhstan when they voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Referendum that took place on Sunday, June 05, 2022 to determine whether the people wanted to have a new look-country with more powers to the parliament and the people. As announced by the Central Election Commissioner 77.18 per cent of the population voted in favour of the referendum. The officials of the Central Election Commission further told the media that out of over 11 million eligible voters over 07 million voters took part in the exercise. The turnout thus remained at 68.6 per cent. Those who voted against stood at 18.6 percent while 2.58 votes were declared invalid.

The election commission officials termed the entire election drill as satisfactory and according to them no issues whatsoever were reported from anywhere. The commission also praised the

government for extending its full support to all those conducting the election. The Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Zhang Ming in his briefing lauded the role of the Kazakh authorities for making befitting arrangements for the successful holding of the referendum. He said his mission visited a number of polling stations and found no violations anywhere. The SCO Secretary General further said the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs spared no efforts in facilitating the foreign delegates for efficient performances of their duties such as monitoring and physical visits to the polling stations. The Russian representative was also all praise for the Kazakh authorities for making excellent arrangements. He said he visited a number of polling stations located outside of Nur Sultan randomly. He was happy to see the enthusiasm and interest with which people thronged to the stations to cast their votes.

The referendum exercise drew huge interest from all and sundry. This scribe

visited a number of polling stations in the Capital Nur Sultan and the suburban areas. A brief chat with the people at each polling station showed how keen were the people to have the new system in place. After the referendum the Kazakh constitution will see a lot of changes with a view to turning the current super-presidential system into an inclusive presidential system. The changes seek to grant more powers to the parliament and the people of Kazakhstan. 33 out of 99 Articles shall be amended plus two new articles shall be introduced.

The amendments are aimed at a significant transformation of Kazakhstan's political system. Their objective is to expand citizen participation in state governance and ensure substantial democratization of political processes. After these reforms Kazakhstan will now become a Presidential system from a super-presidential form of government. They will enhance the multi-party system and create new opportunities for the participation of all citizens in the



The writer with his hosts from MOFA



Group members visiting a museum in Nur Sultan

electoral processes. The emergence of new political parties is expected to cover almost the entire electoral landscape. The creation of the new Kazakhstan goes side by side with the concept of building a Second Republic, which envisions the modernization of the model of state governance. These measures make it clear that Kazakhstan's leadership is well aware of the problems in society and is making every effort to address thorny issues through reforms in the political and economic spheres of the country. During our briefing with the Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Roman Vassilenko when I asked him as to how the Referendum may impact upon the foreign policy of the country, he said, the reforms will lead to a new level of democratization in the country, never seen before adding reforms matter outside of Kazakhstan because through these reforms the country has demonstrated that it is embracing political principles that are most respected and valued in the international community; particularly by countries with developed democracies. It means that Kazakhstan can be counted upon to stand on the side of political progress, to show respect for international law, and to contribute to

global security and development. The amendments would also cut the powers of the president and ban the membership of the President in political parties for the period of his presidency. Similarly a ban at the constitutional level for the close relatives of the President on holding managerial positions in state and quasi state structures has also been introduced. As per the new changes a constitutional court shall also be established. Anyone who finds that legal acts violate their constitutional rights would be able to apply to the court and get protection. Death penalty has also been prohibited through there were hardly any death penalties in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has experienced significant challenges in the first half of 2022, predominantly the tragic events in January, when Kazakhstan suffered the worst violence in its thirty years as an independence state following an armed coup attempt by terrorist and criminal groups. Yet rather than look inward, the government of Kazakhstan has used these challenges as an opportunity to transform the country into a new Kazakhstan. It is also true that establishment of a new Kazakhstan will not happen overnight. It is indeed a deep and long process of so-

State Secretary briefs the international media



cial transformation, but as it goes, where there is will, there is way. The Kazakh government under the leadership of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has taken upon itself the onus of building a new Kazakhstan and that too in a very short span of time. As the SCO Secretary General said in his briefing, the Kazakh government is doing an excellent job by empowering its people and giving them their rights with the ultimate goal of true democratization of the country. From a tourist point of view, Kazakhstan has a lot to offer to the visitors. During the week-long visit I could only visit a few places in the Capital Nur Sultan and Burabay, a tourist resort located 250 KMs away from the Capital. Nur Sultan can rightly be called the City of the Future. The city abounds in a number of high rises. The infrastructural development is phenomenal. Inflation, like other countries, has also hit Kazakhstan but even then prices of especially the daily use items have not been allowed to sky-rocket. People are friendly and hospitable. Kazakhstan, among the Central Asian states, happens to be the largest country with a population of around 19 million. After the reforms, the coun-

try is likely to expand its outreach to the outer world with a view to not only fetch more and more Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) but to sell its products in various world markets. Both Pakistan and Kazakhstan have a lot in common. Desire and interest is there to expand bilateral cooperation. As announced by the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, direct flights between the two countries may start in September this year, which means bilateral relations will get a considerable boost. Then, direct flight from Lahore to Almaty will be yet another good excuse for people of both countries to diversify their trade and business relations particularly. Regional connectivity is yet another area where the Kazakh leadership would like to see the progress sooner rather than later. Kazakhstan, being located in the very heart of Eurasia, is strategically interested in turning to be a regional transportation hub. This is in the best interests of not only Kazakhstan, but also of other countries. This is also true for countries of South Asia, like Pakistan, through the territory of Afghanistan. There is no denying the fact that the leadership of Kazakhstan genuinely



Chairman of the Election Commission briefs the media



The writer with the State Secretary of Kazakhstan



Visiting a polling station with fellow journalists from Egypt and South Korea



People cast votes in referendum

wants to promote peace and stability in the region especially. At the same time the Kazakh leadership wishes to have a safer world free from elements of mass destruction. Since Soviet times, all major nuclear facilities have been located in Kazakhstan. After the independence, the Kazakh leaders decided to do away with all sorts of nuclear facilities with a view to send a message to the outer world that Kazakhstan desires peace at home and peace abroad. The anti-nuclear policy of the Kazakh government has been widely hailed by the world. It was after the decision of the Kazakhstan leadership to wind up the nuclear facilities, that the other countries having similar facilities came under huge pressure to also abandon these facilities for the ultimate good and well being of humanity.

Summing up, one should hope that after the constitutional amendments Kazakhstan will appear on the world map as a democratic country whose leadership earnestly wants to share power with the people of Kazakhstan. More power to the parliament will definitely place the MPs in a much better position to play an active and cardinal role in law making and other related parliamentary businesses. Power sharing ostensibly is a difficult call. The Kazakh President Mr. Tokayev has accepted this challenge especially keeping in view the fate of the Soviet Union when the then President Mikhail Gorbachev decided to democratize the country and that move had led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. President Tokayev and his aides are confident that nothing of that sort will happen in Kazakhstan as the new reforms and constitutional changes seek to not only empower the Kazakh people but they also ensure a better and prosperous future for them. The way Kazakhstan is positioning itself in the comity of nations and the way an economic turn-around is being put in place, one can easily predict that Kazakhstan is going to be a leading developed country in the years to come.



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs briefing the media



Grigore Lese: Iconic Romanian musician in Pakistan

Talks to daily Islamabad POST; says Pakistani artists possess immense talent; talks about popular and traditional music

ISLAMABAD: Renowned and iconic Romania musician, artist singer and performer Grigore Lese has said Pakistan has a rich musical and cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and projected in its true spirit. He added, Pakistani music should not be mixed with the Western or any other music in order to retain its originality. Grigore Lese expressed these views while giving an exclusive interview to Daily Islamabad and Centreline magazine. The full text of the interview shall be published in the July edition of Centreline. Ambassador of Romania Nicoale Goia facilitated the interview. Grigore Lese talked in length about the kind of music he was composing. During his recent visit to Pakistan he participated in number concerts in Islamabad and Lahore. During the visit, he found many similarities between the Romanian and Pakistani music. Lese was born in 1954 in Stoiceni village, Maramure County in northern Romania. He graduated from the Music College in Baia Mare, followed by the Music Academy in Cluj.

In 2003 he received a Ph.D. in music, with the thesis *Horea în grumaz. Consideratii teoretice si practice ale interpretării genului dintr-o perspectivă*

stilistică. From 2005 he was an associated teacher of ethnomusicology at the University of Bucharest. One year later, in 2006, he started doing shows for the public national radio and the public national television, for which he was awarded with national and international prizes in journalism. When asked whether the modern day popular music posed any threat to the traditional music, he said, the relevance and importance of the traditional music shall always be there. He said, the artists need to be genuine and original in their performances. Music, he said was a powerful tool to convey feelings and message across. In 2007 Grigore Lese received the great prize of the Romanian Association of Television Professionals (APTR), in 2009 the prize for cultural journalism awarded by Radio Romania, and in 2009 he was nominated at the International Shanghai Film and Television Festival.

Lese is the first Romanian musician that brought with him on the stage traditional artists from other cultures and countries such as Iran, Syria, and Pakistan, with the purpose of demonstrating the relationship between old music in Romania and the East.





His music was selected for several feature films and documentaries from Romania and other countries, such as *The Pharaoh*, *Gunpowder*, *Treason and Plot* (a BBC production), and *Wild Carpathia* (a Travel Channel production). He was invited to perform worldwide at festivals in Washington, D.C., Bloomington, Paris, Berlin, Athens, Montreal, Basel, Moravia, Frankfurt, and London.

When asked to share his experience of giving music to well-known international movies, he said ostensibly it was a great experience. He said today people try to become stars overnight, which is not a professional approach. A good artist always banks upon his or her works and takes pride in his professionalism.

He said when he woke up in the morning he heard

sound of the Azaan (prayers) and he suddenly felt as if he were in an old traditional town of Romania with his elders.

He stressed exchange of artists between Romania and Pakistan adding he was ready to host Pakistani artists in Romania. "If they come to Romania, I will certainly arrange for them performances and interaction with the Romanians counterparts", he added.

He said a good artist speaks through his works. He said host would greet you from your looks but will give you something to eat once you speak out your mind. Grigore Lese offered his services to the Pakistani people and especially those who want to learn music. He was he was ready to even to give lectures to music students.

Exhibition of handcrafts at the Islamabad Serena Hotel



Serena Shigar Fort; A Historic Heritage Hotel of Pakistan

Munaza Kazmi



THE classical History lovers are pinned everywhere in the world, looking for exploring another piece of art. Pakistan! Famous for its wildest and most dangerous peaks, is a home to Indus Valley civilization, Gandhara, Mughal Rule, Tribal Kingdoms and a lot many. However, one can only look at them in Museums, Palaces or Forts, but had never got the opportunity to live the History. What if I take you somewhere. IMAGINE! in the middle of gigantic mountains, a day into the actual homes of Kings and Queens, the splendor of Royalty on the rhythms of History. About 170km, almost a two hours unforgettably beautiful drive from Sakardu Airport, Gilgit Baltistan lies the Shigar, an absolutely beautiful gift of nature. There are stunning natural treasures like the Katpana Desert, also known as the Cold Desert and is the highest desert in the world. Among the valley's mountainous landscapes is K2, the second-highest mountain in the world, Trango Towers, Concordia Glacier amongst many



other glaciers. Surrounded by greenery and captivating beauty of lakes, Shigar is no doubt a glamorous tourist spot. The perfect tone of the clouds, the huge mountains and the tranquility makes the place a heavenly and magical, where your IMAGINATION will be turning into reality.

Serena Shigar Fort, known as Fong-Khar which in the local language means the "Palace on the Rock", it is one of Northern Pakistan's most beautiful hotels. There you almost feel as if you have stepped in to a movie set because it is so picturesque.

Decorated by the magnificent beauty of Baltistan's Karakoram Mountain Range and four centuries of folklore and legends, Serena Shigar Fort is a one-of-a-kind heritage boutique hotel situated within a peaceful



natural setting. Experience history in a 450-year-old fort and the 17th century Palace of the Raja of Shigar, along with the more recently added "Old House" and "Garden House". Ancient mountain landscapes, stunning views and the ambience of a 400-year-old Fort-Palace set our 15 rooms and 5 suites among Pakistan's most serene and timeless sanctuaries. Ornamented in warm earth tones, all accommodations feature locally inspired design touches like wooden floors, exquisite woodwork, native stone and period furnishings.

The 13 traditional guest rooms located in the original 17th century Palace offer you an exclusive glimpse into the life of the Raja and Rani of Shigar, where you can actually enjoy the ways of royalty. Moreover, a more recent addition to the grounds,

the Garden House offers 7 conventional rooms with modern comforts like flat-screen televisions and room service. These accommodations were crafted using building materials and techniques faithful to the historical architecture of Shigar Fort. Adorned with handmade fabrics and antiques, Garden House rooms feature private terraces with views of the Amacha Garden. The most important! all rooms at Serena Shigar Fort are non-smoking.

Standard Room: These non-smoking heritage rooms offers either double, single or twin beds covered by cloudy white sheets and a well-appointed bathroom with shower.

Garden House Standard Room: Spacious Garden House Rooms feature double or twin beds,



and a sitting area. Special features include beautiful paneled ceilings and carvings on Shah Nasheen.

Royal Suite: Originally the Raja's royal summer quarters, this non-smoking suite features one comfortable king bed, an adjoining sitting area, originally Raja's Baithak, a "Shah-e-Nasheen" and an airy, hanging wooden latticework balcony. Decorated in period antiques with a splendid view of the Shigar stream, the room is appointed with a working desk, one exquisite bathroom and a powder room.

Fong Khar Restaurant: The culinary philosophy at Serena Shigar Fort is based on providing the finest seasonal and, where possible, local ingredients from Shigar Valley farms and providers. All meals feature fresh produce from hotel's very own cherry orchards and vegetable garden, including a handmade cherry ice cream sure to be the delight of your stay.



a lobby area, cable television and a romantic private wood balcony facing the picturesque Baradari monument and Amacha Garden.

Garden Suite: Providing a little more space than Garden Rooms, Garden Suite feature a king bed, sitting area with Diwan, in-room cable television, a modern bathroom equipped with all the modern-day facilities, and a glamorous private balcony facing the beautiful Baradari monument and Amacha Garden, from where the scented smell would keep coming.

Heritage Suite: The hotel's 3 Heritage Suites originally served as the chambers of the royal women and the Raja's mid-season quarters. Spacious and opulently decorated with period antiques, these Suites offer a king bed in the main bedroom, a single bed in a separate anteroom or Shah-e-Nasheen



Amidst a historic stone and wood design, Fong Khar Restaurant invites conversation among guests while savoring an innovative menu of Pakistani, Balti, Chinese and Continental specialties. During the warmer months, the al fresco garden is the perfect setting for a meal beneath the grapevine with beautiful views of the Shigar stream and surrounding village. However, for private dining events, the first floor offers a Turkish-style seating area with an open veranda seating presenting gorgeous village and stream views.

From the traditional stone and wood architecture to the tranquil sight and sound of the Shigar stream flowing in front of the hotel, the experience here is that of a peaceful home away from home in an ancient, historic undisturbed wilderness.



French envoy hosts B-Int'l consortium delegation

Ambassador Galey in his remarks welcomed the initiative and termed the project a step in the right direction in terms of promotion of educational links between Pakistan and its partners



Special Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: French Ambassador to Pakistan, Nicolas Galey hosted a reception at his residence for the representatives of 8 universities, along with the ambassadors of Italy, Spain and a representative of the EU delegation. The representatives from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan also attended the event. Ambassador Galey in his remarks welcomed the initiative and termed the project a step in the right direction in terms of promotion of educational links between Pakistan and its partners.

He further said, B-International was a collaborative capacity building project in higher education between Pakistan, the UK, France, Italy, and Spain, and is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The project brings together 4 prestigious universities in Pakistan; COMSATS University Islamabad; LUMS; NUST and PIFS, and 4 top-notch European Universities: Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), Ecole Centrale de Nantes (France),

University of Bologna (Italy), University of Salamanca (Spain) – all working together in the spirit of internationalisation.

The Ambassador further said, the French Embassy in Pakistan strongly supports academic cooperation between Pakistani uni-

versities and their counterparts in France and Europe. Such a project deserves to be celebrated: the B-International project will reinforce the Pakistan's HEC Vision 2025 on internationalization through building capacity within the Higher Education sec-





tor, enhancing international collaboration, and supporting the development of global mind-sets of the youth. 'The first two years of the B-International project has coincided with a global pandemic, meaning all of the B-International Partners are yet to meet face-to-face. Nevertheless, colleagues from the 8 universities across Europe and Pakistan have worked passionately and tirelessly for the last two and a half years adapting work plans and delivering to achieve endless success in the name of internationalisation and B-International. He added, this international visit to Islamabad marks the very first time that the B-International consortium members from both Europe and Pakistan have met in person. It is a key milestone in the projects. Colleagues from Europe will

have the first opportunity to deepen their understanding of Pakistan. This trip is also the start of many visits to all partner nations in EU across the remainder of the project, he added. In conclusion the ambassador said, connecting in person, peer to peer, faculty to faculty, Institution to institution will bolster the collaborative and capacity building efforts and ensure sustainable impact of the B-International project and the connections regarding Higher Education between Pakistan, UK, France, Italy and Spain. The representative of the French university in her speech thanked the French embassy for hosting the reception and the participants for attending the event. She said this collaboration will go a long way in strengthening of educational links among these institutions.

Up gradation of special education centre for visually handicapped children started



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ISLAMABAD: The project “Up-gradation of National Special Education Centre for Visually Handicapped Children” is started under the administrative control of Directorate General of Special Education, Ministry of Human Rights. This project is created for the diagnosis and screening of visually impaired persons through the use of advance technological services. In this project, a diagnostic/ screening unit headed by Ophthalmologist and an Optometrist carries out assessment/ screening of visually handicapped persons/ students is providing services. After visual screening and diagnosis, the beneficiaries are trained to use the proposed technology in National Library & Resource Centre. Two

emoney of the project was held on June 22, 2022 at the National Library and Resource Center, Islamabad. Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada was the Chief Guest of the occasion. Addressing the audience, he said that in the present age everyone is well aware of the usefulness of technology and it is impossible to deny it. Without technology, we will not be able to make real progress, nor will we be able to compete with other nations. So everyone should use modern technology as much as possible but when we talk about visually impaired people, the assistive devices based on modern technology become a source of education and rehabili-

I.T Experts provide technical support in imparting these training orientations to visually impaired persons on these latest digital assistive devices which are available under this project.

An inaugural ceremony of the project was held on June 22, 2022 at the National Library and Resource Center, Islamabad. Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada was the Chief Guest of the occasion. Addressing the audience, he said that in the present age everyone is well aware of the usefulness of technology and it is impossible to deny it. Without technology, we will not be able to make real progress, nor will we be able to compete with other nations. So everyone should use modern technology as much as possible but when we talk about visually impaired people, the assistive devices based on modern technology become a source of education and rehabili-

tation for them and these people pass their advanced exams and others can prepare for competitive exams and use their abilities to become important members of society. He further said that he was very happy to see the provision of sophisticated and assistive devices for the visually impaired under this project and to provide technical assistance to the visually impaired using these facilities. Training is also being provided which will be a stepping stone for the rehabilitation and practical life of these visually impaired people in the society. Mr. Afzal Latif, Secretary, Ministry of Human Rights, Mr. Tariq Mahmood (Joint Secretary), Dr. Abdul Rahim (Director General Legal Aid & Justice Authority), and Mr. Abdul Sattar, Director General (Social Welfare) also attended the function. On this occasion Director General (Special Education) Mr. Sheikh Azhar Sajjad also gave an introductory speech highlighting the objectives of the project and introduced the latest digital assistive devices available for the visually impaired. The event was attended by a large number of dignitaries and visually impaired persons / students.



Pakistan and Azerbaijan Commemorate 30 years of Diplomatic ties

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Islamabad, organized a special event and a photo exhibition at the Foreign Office to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood and Ambassador Khazar Farhadov of Azerbaijan formally inaugurated the exhibition. The photographs on display had been carefully curated to showcase the rich history of leadership-level engagement between the two countries as well as important milestones in the bilateral relationship. Speaking on the occasion, the Foreign Secretary said that Pakistan-Azerbaijan relations had evolved into a robust and multi-dimensional partnership since the formal establishment of bilateral ties in 1992. He highlighted that the two countries had a long-standing tradition of supporting each other on their issues of core interest. The Foreign Secretary



recalled Pakistan's support for Azerbaijan's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. He appreciated Azerbaijan's principled stance on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, noting that Azerbaijan had been a consistent advocate for the rights of the Kashmiri people as a member of the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir. While expressing satisfaction with the state of bilateral relations, the Foreign Secretary reiterated Pakistan's resolve to further strengthen and diversify its cooperation with Azerbaijan, particularly in the economic, trade and cultural domains. Ambassadors and senior diplomats from the Central Asian States as well as Turkey participated in the event. Members of the media and representatives from the Multicultural Center of Azerbaijan, which has recently been established at the NUML, were also in attendance. – DNA

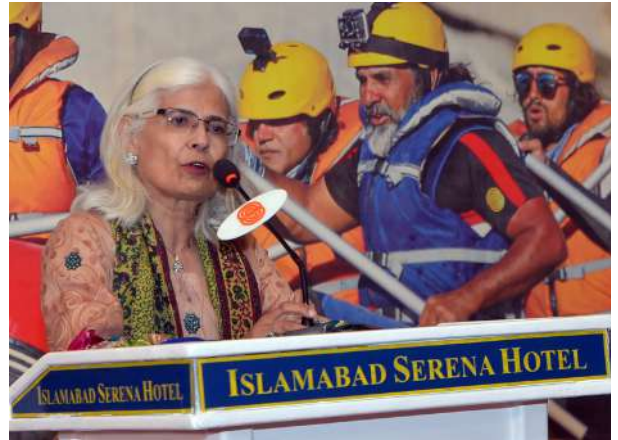
CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani hosts reception to welcome new General Manager of ISH





Serena hotels sponsored rafting expedition

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Wajahat Malik and his team have successfully completed Expedition Indus, the first-ever exploratory river rafting expedition covering the entire length of the Indus River, starting from North to South, leading to the Arabian Sea. To recognize the valiant effort by Wajahat and his team CEO Serena Hotels East and South Asia hosted a grand reception. A large number of guests hailing from various walks of life plus diplomatic corps attended the meeting. Wajahat Malik, an adventure, travel filmmaker initiated this expedition which was Pakistan's first ever full-length rafting expedition of the Indus River. At the send-off

reception hosted by Serena Hotels, he had announced his departure for the North of Pakistan in the third week of March 2022. The Indus is fed by mighty glaciers on the slopes of the Karakoram range, the Nanga Parbat massif, and the Kohistan highlands. Passing through rough terrain around the Northern and Western sides of the Nanga Parbat in gorges that reach depths of 17000 ft; the river contours around the KPK province then enters the plains of Punjab and finally culminates in the Arabian Sea. Wajahat Malik's mission was sponsored by Serena Hotels, under its Adventure Diplomacy Initiative that aims at fostering adventure sports in the country and providing a

supportive environment for the nation's talented sportspeople to flourish. Wajahat said: "Expedition Indus will be a landmark expedition not only in terms of natural conservation, but also in identifying sustainable tourism sites along the path of the river. I am truly grateful to Serena Hotels for supporting this unique initiative." Mr. Aziz Boolani, CEO Serena Hotels said: "We at Serena have always been a passionate advocate for adventure sport, testing human endurance and commitment. Supporting brave adventurers like Samina Baig, Sirbaz Khan and now Wajahat Malik, we are encouraged to further strengthen our Adventure Diplomacy Initiative."







Islamabad Floral Art Society holds workshop



National day of Italy: Pak, Italy ties on a positive trajectory: Kaira

Ambassador of Italy Andreas Ferrarese says his country attached huge importance to ties with Pakistan









DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira has felicitated the government and people of Italy on their 76th Republic Day. He was addressing the participants of a reception regarding Republic Day of Italy hosted by the Italian embassy here in Islamabad today. The Adviser said that Pakistan regarded Italy as a reliable friend

and partner. He said, Pakistan and Italy have commonality of views on broad range of regional and international issues. He said, the trajectory of Pakistan Italy ties is positive and we are determined to make every effort to maintain it. Qamar Zaman Kaira said, Pakistan looks forward to further strengthening its partnership with Italy for the achievement of its objectives of peace prosperity and develop-

ment. He said Italy is one of Pakistan's largest trading partners in the EU. Pakistan is firmly committed to further expanding and deepening our mutually beneficial relationship in economic and commercial spheres. Qamar Zaman Kaira said that considerable number of Pakistanis were living in Italy who also serve as a strong bridge between our two friendly nations.

CEO AND FOUNDER OF MONAL GROUP LUQMAN ALI AFZAL HOSTS LUNCH FOR THE OUTGOING SPANISH ATTACHE RICARDO MELER



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CEO Monal Lugman Ali Afzal and his wife host DHM Jordan Dr. Maen





CEO Moani Group hosts dinner for the outgoing Ambassador of Switzerland



Malaysian Acting High Commissioner Deddy Faisal hosts farewell dinner for DJFM Jordan Dr. Maen



Indonesia's Collective Wisdom



Dr M Ali Hamza

IT is an established history of last few decades that Pakistan remained west dependent for her financial and political survival. The dependence of west is not limited to Pakistan but the major parts of eastern hemisphere were and somehow still look forward to the west. The reason is simple, and the reason is financial, scientific, and system design supremacy of the west. Specially, in post USSR era, the supremacy became unchallenged and resultantly exploitative. The challenge for eastern nations was multifaceted. First, they had to neutralize the impacts of colonialism imprinted on social, cultural, political, and cognitive fabric. Some had to break the shackles of monarch. Indeed, reaching to breakeven was itself an unmatched challenge. The progress begins afterwards. So naturally it was not an easy journey, but going through thick and thin few eastern nations proved to be resilient and progressive. In this context one of the least recognized nations in Pakistan is Indonesia.

It was a good surprise that on the instruction of PM Shahbaz Sharif, Minister for Industries and Production Makhdoom Syed Murtaza Mahmud led a delegation to Jakarta this month. The main purpose of the visit was to negotiate on the recent decision of the Government of Indonesia to ban export of Palm oil to Pakistan; due to the shortage of

inhouse stock to meet domestic needs. The dialogue went well and 10 of palm oil shipments are expected to reach Karachi before the end of this month. To understand the importance of Indonesian palm oil we must know that Pakistan is the third largest importer of Indonesian palm oil. We import 80% of palm oil from Indonesia and rest 20% from Malaysia. More than 55% of Pakistan's population: 220 million, depends on Indonesia for its edible oil. Already the loss of sunflower oil supplies from Russia and Ukraine have also affected Pakistan's edible oil inventory. During these circumstances the Indonesian government's ban on the export in April this year was a big blow. You can imagine that prices of branded edible oil in Pakistan rose by 6% per liter within few hours of Indonesia's announcement. The ban affected Pakistan's ghee and cooking oil supply and resulted in price hike as industry faced cancellations by suppliers under force majeure. Pakistan has Preferential Trade Agreement with Indonesia and could get exemption from Indonesian government export ban on palm oil. Surely as India has already approached Indonesia under the same agreement, might be Pakistan used the same approach. Anyhow, a friend in need is friend indeed. Besides this progressive meet-up there are plenty of other areas where both Muslim countries can extend support for mutual

benefits. Pakistan and Indonesia share many commonalities, even in the history of last 70 years. Let us have a quick scan of post-colonial Indonesian history and where does it stand today.

Present Indonesia resisted the invasion of Japanese, and took independence from the clutches of Dutch colonialists in 1945. The Republic of Indonesia was established and President Sukarno ruled under the new constitution. Then US fear of Indonesia's leftward drift happened. United States tried to weaken Sukarno presidency by providing military aid to some rebellions, positioning anti-Communist camps within the Indonesian army through continued military education and equipment sales, and supporting anti-communism and pro-religious groups. This forced President Sukarno to dissolve the elected Assembly and replace it with an appointed one: a presidential system which he believed would make it easier to implement the principles of 'Guided Democracy'. This was a short authoritarian regime, where government control of the media, and sending opponents into exile was assured. This initiated a political and economic instability. Food shortages, poverty and separatist sentiment sparked rebellions. Then the regime changed and Mr. Suharto, one of the General in Indonesian army took over the capital and finally took charge as a president of Indonesia. Violence sweeps throughout the country. More than 1 million communists

were arrested or killed. Communism was eradicated, and US intention for global political monopoly started growing roots. President Suharto enacted "New Order" to focus economic development. It was indirectly a military control regime, running on the advice from American-educated Indonesian economic experts, known as 'Berkeley Mafia'. Relief aid, military training and arms sales flow exponentially increased from the United States, Britain and Australia. The poverty level came down, and Indonesia kept growing. But in 1980s an issue erupted in East Timor, Aceh; part of the province of Sumatra. The issue was based on Indonesia's agreement to let US oil, gas and mining companies exploit Aceh's rich natural resources. Free Aceh Movement started demanding independence. Prolonged fighting ensues, and in 1990 President Suharto declares martial law. Later on, a political settlement to an armed separatist conflict in Aceh was achieved in 2005 following the 2004 tsunami

that killed 130,000 Indonesians, including a huge majority of the people of East Timor. In 1992, under President Bill Clinton, the US cited human rights abuses in East Timor and cuts off military training and restricts sales of military equipment to Indonesia. The reason was obvious; Cold War ended, communism declined globally, US hegemony got established and the importance of Indonesia for the US was over. Civil unrest increased as the Asian financial crisis of 1997 coincides with falling oil and gas prices and the worst drought in 50 years. Then 9/11 happens. Indonesia faced severe ripple of terrorism. Terrorist attacks in Bali in 2002 & 2005 and Jakarta in 2003, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of tourists and foreign students, demonstrated the existence of jihadi groups in Indonesia. Besides all unusual situations, Indonesia's economy performed very well in last two decades. You can imagine the growth by knowing that Indonesia is the only G20 member state in

Southeast Asia, and the country has the largest economy in the region so to be classified as a newly industrialised country. Indonesia is the world's 17th largest economy by nominal GDP and 7th in terms of GDP at (Purchasing Power parity), estimated to be 1.289 trillion and 3.995 trillion US\$, respectively. Pakistan needs to realize this phenomenal growth. The 70 years of Indonesian history resembles a lot to the history of Pakistan. Same foreign interferences particularly US, military intrusions in civil matters, political upheavals etc. But one thing is quite opposite. Indonesian economy grew significantly in last 20 years, and we as Pakistan deteriorated severely in almost all fronts; economy, society, politics, professionalism and the list goes on. Why? How and what to be done? No country other than Indonesia can actually help us know to figure it out and work it out. We need to take few more steps to get closer to Indonesia and benefit from their collective wisdom.

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Exploring the beauty of Azad Kashmir

We are giving priority to local species of trees: Secretary Forests



Mumtaz Ahmed Bhatti

PEOPLE of Pakistan enjoy visiting Azad Jammu and Kashmir that is why a large number of tourists from Pakistan go to AJK. People from most parts of the world, including Pakistan, want to visit Kashmir. The beauty of Azad Jammu and Kashmir is due to its beautiful forests. The Ten Billion Trees project was launched in all four provinces as well as in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Tree planting was in full swing everywhere. All the officers and officials of the AJK Forest Department are constantly working day and night to make the TBTP a success. I have loved writing in the forest since the

beginning of journalism. So far I have written many articles on forest. To make my writing based on facts, I have visited forests all over Pakistan, including AJK, several times.

About TBTP, whenever AJK visits, the forest department officials are engaged in plantations and are constantly struggling to make TBTP a success. A few months ago, I visited Muzaffarabad and surrounding Areas with Imtiaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Secretary Forest AJK. Secretary Forest was inspecting the plantation on foot for several miles. DFO Shahbaz Khan was giving him details regarding TBTP and Secretary Forest was giving instructions to Shahbaz Khan. After visiting the plantation, we also visited a beautiful nursery.

“First of all, we are giving priority to local species of trees. And secondly, I have zero tolerance for those who are corrupt and careless in TBTP,” said the Forest Secretary. I also visited successful and beautiful plantations in Bagh, Rawlakot, Pallandri, Kotli, Mirpur and Bhimber.

Rainfall in Kotli, Bhimber and Mirpur was less than normal but due to hard work and better strategy of DFOs, the survival rate of the plantation is very good and that is why it is commendable. The AJK Forest Department is working according to PC 1. From the launch of TBTP to today, funding has always been delayed by the Ministry of Climate Change. Despite the delayed availability of funds, the Forest Department AJK did not stop working



and continued to achieve all its targets. The entire Forest Department deserves credit for achieving all the targets in the event of a shortage of funds. DFO Shahbaz Khan Muzaffarabad Forest Division, DFO Sardar Mohammad Farooq Reforestation Forest Division Kotli who have recently been transferred to Watershed Forest Division, DF O malik Mohammad Ashraf Parwana Watershed Forest Division Kotli who is now reforestation Forest Division Kotli Transferred, DFO Muhammad Latif Khan reforestation Forest Division Rawalkot has now been transferred to Watershed.

DFO Chohadri Irshad Watershed Bagh Forest Division. DFO Raja Imran Shafi Watershed Forest Division Mirpur, DFO Raja Noman Akbar Watershed Forest Division Bhimber.

All these DFOs have shown high performance with regard to TBTP and their excellent performance have been appreciated at all levels. The Ministry of Climate Change should provide cash prizes, job promotions and certificates of appreciation to the best performing DFOs as promised. Encouragement of forest officers by the government to encourage other forest officers to join the race for better performance. It would have been very difficult for the DFOs to achieve all the targets if the best performing forest officers had not been given full support and encouragement by Secretary Forest Imtiaz Chaudhry, Chief Conservator Principal Sardar Naseer and Chief Conservator Development Gul Hassan Shah.

Best Performing DFOs



CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani fetes Swiss ambassador and Jordan DFM





Habib Metro CEO fetes Turkish ambassador

PRESIDENT and CEO Habib Metro Bank Mr. Mohsin Ali Nathani pose for a photograph with outgoing Ambassador of Embassy of Turkiye Mr. Ihsan Mustafa Yurdakul in a ceremony to bid farewell to the Ambassador and to celebrate one-year anniversary of Habib METRO Bank of their Diplomatic Mission Department at Embassy of Turkiye. – DNA

"75th Pay Kuch Khaas"



Mango Festival at Islamabad Serena Hotel draws huge interest

CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani thanks FM Bilawal for gracing the occasion

MAHNOOR ANSAR

THE Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with Serena Hotels and Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Association organized a Mango Festival at Serena Hotel today. This was part of the series of activities and events being organized throughout the year to commemorate 75 years of the Pakistan's Independence - Pakistan's Diamond jubilee.

Under the theme of Pakistan At 75 and "75th Pay Kuch Khaas", the event focused on projecting Pakistan's culinary and agrarian richness linked to production of more than 200 varieties of mangoes - "king of fruits" that are exported all over the world.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari graced the event as Guest of Honour. Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood, CEO Serena Ho-

tels Mr. Aziz Boolani, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Ambassador Atadjan Movlamov of Turkmenistan, Patron-in-Chief PFVA Mr. Waheed Ahmed and Senior Vice Chairman PFVA Mr. Ch. Shoaib Ahmed were present on the occasion. A large number of Heads of Diplomatic Missions in Islamabad participated in the event

In his remarks, the Foreign Minister highlighted the significance of the festival as part of the events celebrating the 75th anniversary of Pakistan's Independence. The Foreign Minister underscored the fact that Pakistani mangoes were popular the world over due to superior quality as well as the huge number of varieties being grown in Pakistan. It was highlighted that Pakistan's missions abroad were organizing mango tasting festivals in their host countries and showcasing the variety and richness of

the Pakistani mangoes.

The event was attended by over 300 persons that included members of the Diplomatic Corps, Business Executives, Bureau Chiefs of Local and Foreign Publications, Representatives of Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Association, and Officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassies of China and UAE also set up stalls offering mango based dishes from their own cuisine. The guests were served with different varieties of freshly cut mangoes, salads, milkshake, lassi, chuttnis, pickles, desserts and ice cream. The participants appreciated the different mango varieties on display as well as the mango-based cuisine offered to the guests. This event showcased the potential of Pakistani mangoes as a popular fruit not only in Pakistan but in the international market as well.



Envoys of USA, Turkiye, Australia, EU, present credentials

Special Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The newly appointed envoys of the United States of America (USA), Turkiye, Australia, European Union (EU), Bhutan, and Sudan presented their credentials to President Dr Arif Alvi during the Presentation of Credentials Ceremony, held at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today.

Later, the Ambassador of the USA, Mr Donald Armin Blome, Ambassador of Turkiye, Dr Mehmet Pacaci, High Commissioner of Australia, Mr Neil Hawkins, Ambassador of European Union, Ms Riina Kionka, the Ambassador of Sudan, Mr Salih Mohamed Ahmed Mohamed Siddig, and non-resident Ambassador of Bhutan, Mr Rinchen Kuentzyl, made separate calls on the President.

While talking to the Ambassador of the USA, the President emphasised that a constructive and sustained engagement between the two countries on the principles of mutual respect and mutual interest was vital to promote peace, development and security in our region. He added that this year would mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Pak-USA diplomatic ties which would be celebrated befittingly. The President noted that there had been a healthy momentum of engagement between Pakistan and the USA through dialogues on the Climate Change, Health, Energy, Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). "We encourage US companies to invest in Pakistan and reap dividends from the lucrative benefits offered by Pakistan's Special Economic Zones", he said. He further highlighted that Pakistan was actively involved in engagement with its diaspora in the USA in the Tech sector and was desirous of more tech sector investments from the US companies.

Talking to the Ambassador of Turkiye, the President noted with satisfaction the convergence between the two countries on critical issues, including Kashmir, Northern Cyprus, Islamophobia, and Afghanistan. He said that both countries would celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two brotherly countries, on November 30th this year, in a befitting manner. He further underlined that Pakistan remained committed to furthering bilateral trade and investment ties with Turkiye.



Ambassador of Turkiye



Ambassador of EU



Ambassador of the USA



Australian High Commissioner



Ambassador of Bhutan



Ambassador of Sudan

While talking to the High Commissioner of Australia to Pakistan, the President said that Pakistan offered attractive investment opportunities in different sectors. "Australian companies can invest in infrastructure development, agriculture, renewable energy, mining, manufacturing, water and waste management", said the President. He further stated that Pakistan offered a large pool of highly skilled human resources in many areas with professionals qualified from top Pakistani and Western Universities. He also expressed satisfaction over the ample educational opportunities being offered in Australia for Pakistani students.

Talking to the Ambassador of the EU delegation to Pakistan, the President stated

that Pakistan valued its relations with the EU and was satisfied that Pak-EU relations were moving in a positive direction in all spheres of coordination. "Economic and trade ties are the key feature of Pakistan and EU multidimensional relationship", said the President. He highlighted that GSP+ has been a mutually beneficial scheme and has played an important role in the expansion of Pak-EU bilateral trade. He further said that Pakistan saw the GSP+ scheme as a constructive engagement for the betterment of its economy and promoting its economic agenda. While talking to the Ambassador of Sudan, the President appreciated the historically fraternal ties, bilateral cooperation, and coordination at OIC and UN between the two countries.

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