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Increasing bonhomie between Pakistan and CARs

THE Central Asian states undoubtedly have acquired huge significance in the comity of nations because of their strategic importance and business potential. Most of the states after their independence have made huge progress in human as well economic development. The infrastructural development in these states has also been phenomenal. Having visited Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan I can say with confidence that these three states, especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, have never looked back after declaring independence. Tajikistan, among these states, happens to be less developed mainly because the country did not possess enough natural resources as compared with the other states, yet its leadership is making strenuous efforts to bring the country at par with the other neighboring states. Another factor that has perhaps impeded its growth appears to be tensions at the borders with Afghanistan and sometimes with Kyrgyzstan as well. Afghanistan particularly has always been a source of tension for this country like Pakistan, however Tajikistan appears to have overcome its border problems mainly because the Tajik President Rahmon Emomali has shown zero tolerance for any subversive activities. Pakistan and Tajikistan enjoy excellent relations. At one point the Tajik flag carrier started direct flights from Dushanbe to Islamabad however the activity could not last long due to lack of passengers. The outbreak of Covid afterwards made it impossible for both sides to continue this air link. CASA 1000 project is yet another important engagement which would cater to at least 25 per cent of the energy needs of Pakistan once completed. Work on this project is under way however its completion largely depends on the situation in Afghanistan. With Uzbekistan Pakistan's engagement is multi-faceted. The trade and economic activity between the two countries continues to grow with each passing day. Uzbekistan is well known for its religious tourism potential. People-to-people contacts between the two countries increased manifold after the start of direct flights between Tashkent and Lahore. Somehow this air link got discontinued because of Covid but as reports suggest both sides are working tirelessly to re-activate this route. Infrastructural development in Uzbekistan has also been tremendous in recent years. The holding of the SCO summit in Samarkand in September 2022 proved yet another feather in Uzbek cap. The city is well known for its historical importance but after this summit it has become a must-visit place as the Uzbek leadership has completely turnaround the city on modern lines. The bullet train 'Afrosiab' that runs between Tashkent and Bukhara, making a stopover in Samarkand, is yet another attraction the tourists would like to explore and enjoy. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar was in Tashkent recently to strike a billion dollar economic deal that unequivocally shows proximity of relations between the two countries. Similarly Uzbekistan produces state-of-the-art machinery used for cotton crops. The Uzbek embassy in Islamabad, from time to time, holds road-shows in Pakistan exhibiting its products, which can certainly enhance the capacity of the Pakistani agriculture sector. It is up to the Pakistani side to cash in on this opportunity in order to increase its agri produce. Kazakhstan, during the past few years, has intensified its engagement with Pakistan for which credit must go to Ambassador Barlybay Sadykov, Ambassador Akan Rakhmetullin and now Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin. The incumbent Ambassador Kistafin is zealously pursuing the goal of diversification of relations between the two countries. It is because of his tireless efforts that the direct air link between Almaty and Lahore is going to be established from April 26, 2023, while in May Almaty and Karachi shall be linked with a direct flight. Apart from trade and economic relations, cultural and academia links between the two countries have also been strengthened. With the establishment of direct air links one can hope both countries would be able to cement relations besides working earnestly to make the direct air link a sustained activity. With Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan too Pakistan is desirous to have close links and vice versa. Kyrgyzstan is also part of the CASA 1000 energy project. Besides, both countries have explored a number of other avenues as well in order to further solidify bilateral relations. There is a direct flight from Islamabad to Bishkek now and plans are afoot to have similar air links from other Pakistani cities as well. As regards ties with Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) is indeed an important project but progress on this project has not been made because of the Indian presence. It has been my consistent view that as long as India is part of TAPI it may not see the light of the day.

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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 Muslim 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.

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The apex court verdict and emerging political scenario



THE Supreme Court of Pakistan finally announced an anticipated verdict making it binding upon the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure Punjab and KP elections within 90 days. The apex court directed all government machinery to extend all required support to the ECP in order to make sure that the constitutional requirement is fulfilled in the stipulated time frame. The court also directed the respective caretaker governments to do the needful in this regard. Two, out of five judges however gave their dissenting note. Justice Jamal Mandokhel and Justice Mansoor Ali Shah were of the view that the pleas were not maintainable. When it comes to holding of elections within 90 days after dissolution of the assemblies, these two judges maintained similar views during their observations that elections cannot be delayed beyond 90 days. However the court gave a sort of leeway to the authorities to delay the elections only for a few weeks if necessary. The elections in Punjab as announced by the President of Pakistan shall take place on April 30, 2023. The court verdict seeks to put an end to various legal controversies that had gripped the country ever since the dissolution of both the provincial assemblies. The court has determined once and for all that even if the governors do not sign the dissolution summaries, the election will have to be held within 90 days. In that case the President of Pakistan shall announce the date. Though doubts continue to rule supreme at least within those circles that still do not want elections to take place on time for a variety of reasons, yet, majority of the legal as well constitutional experts earnestly believe that after the verdict there is no escape from elections now. In my piece on this subject titled 'General elections or a technocratic setup' published in this newspaper on February 20, 2023 I had opined, 'These are the legal glitches that are likely to land in courts and it is presumed the apex court of Pakistan

may ultimately make any decision about this. As regards the role of the President, even if it is not written in the Constitution, being the head of the state the President may intervene and he should intervene if he is convinced that the constitutional order is at stake. It is a point of concern that the constitutional bodies are reluctant to fulfill their constitutional role with regard to holding of two provincial elections within 90 days. Everybody is unanimous on this point that there is no such provision that allows elections to be delayed beyond 90 days.' Now in its verdict the apex court has clearly mentioned that the Election Commission would consult the President before announcing the date for the elections. The good news is that the Election Commission has already started the process and seems willing to hold elections as the directions of the Supreme Court. However to some the ECP is still confident that something extra-ordinary may take place in the country after which the whole election drill may have to be put on hold. Interestingly, the government legal team came up with a rather strange justification. The Attorney General and the Law Minister while talking to media observed that since two judges (Justice Athar Minalha and Justice Yahya Afridi) had already given their opinion against the maintainability of the applications and two judges (Justice Mansoor Shah and Justice Mandokhel) who were part of the five-member bench have given a dissenting note therefore according to the government view this verdict is not 3-2 as announced by the chief justice of Pakistan but 3-4 (four judges dissenting). This plea on the part of the government seems quite immature and irrational because the legal fraternity is unanimous that the final judgment is the one which is announced by the Chief Justice of Pakistan which declared holding of the elections in 90 days by majority of 3-2. Even in the coming days the government



Ansar M Bhatti

may come up with similar interpretations with a view to creating confusion nevertheless no gimmick is going to work as the Supreme Court verdict is candid clear and it cannot be defied or shelved, at least, through democratic means. The government circles believe some ways can still be found to get the elections delayed. It shall however be a futile exercise. The court verdict ostensibly should not augur well for the PDM parties as none of them is ready to go for elections. These parties were quite sure they would be able to get the elections delayed as according to their assessment the powers-that-be were on their side. As per the PDM plan, after seeking a delay in the provincial elections, their next target was to get the national elections delayed. There is a provision in the Constitution that in case of any emergency situation the national elections may be delayed for one year. The existing economic condition of the country would have provided the PDM with an ample excuse of achieving this end. But to their disappointment, the Supreme Court verdict appears to have dashed all their hopes to the ground. By the way the likelihood of impositions of economic emergency may still be an option to get the elections delayed. After the court verdict the government is left with the only option to file a review against this verdict. There are nevertheless divergent views on this within the government ranks. The majority is of the view that even in case of a review the verdict is not going to change as the same five-member bench shall hear the review petition. The review petitions normally have a very limited scope and any chances of success therefore the exercise if undertaken would only add to the woes of the government.



The PDM government, even after the court verdict, is not obliged to call the national elections. It may continue till its tenure comes to end somewhere in August this year. There is hardly any doubt that the PTI shall sweep provincial elections if held in a free and fair manner. If so happens then the party shall be in a better position to perform well even in the national elections. Choices for the PDM parties are not too many. The incumbency factor would take a heavy toll on them. It would be much better for them to announce national elections allowing the provincial and the national electoral drill to take place more or less at the same time. But as some analysts would put it the politicians are engaged in a battle of egos. Nobody is ready to give in. The ultimate losers happen to be Pakistan and people of Pakistan. The economic situation has reached a point of no return. The rupee plunged

by nearly Rs19 against the US dollar on March 2. The central bank's monetary policy review was also done on the same day after which the interest rate sky-rocketed to 20 per cent. The very next day the Chinese interviewed and extended immediate deposits that provided a temporary relief to Pakistani currency. Even the staff level agreement may not address all our problems. We need to look for some longer term solutions. The governments need to expand their tax net. The rich continue to go scot free when it comes to paying of taxes due to which the entire burden is shifted to the poor people. The problem is that all those who need to be taxed are sitting in the Parliament. Without a true representation of people of Pakistan in the Parliament the real problems shall remain unattended. Let us hope and pray that a better sense prevails and politicians and powers-that-be join hands for the ultimate good of the country.

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Italian Ambassador meets Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani

ISLAMABAD: Andreas Ferrarese, Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, called on the Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, at the Parliament House in Islamabad. During the meeting, the two discussed a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including bilateral relations, economic cooperation, and regional security. They also emphasized the need to enhance people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and Italy to further strengthen their ties. The Chairman Senate appreciated the positive role of Italy in promoting

peace and stability in the region and expressed the hope for greater collaboration between the two countries. The Italian Ambassador expressed his country's keen interest in further enhancing its economic and trade ties with Pakistan and reiterated Italy's support for Pakistan's efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth and development. The meeting was held in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, reflecting the strong and longstanding relationship between Pakistan and Italy. - DNA

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The Kalash, the Fading Community of Pakistan



Justice ® Ali Nawaz Chohan

I VISITED the Kalash valley to study the culture and difficulties being faced by the Kalash people. When I asked a convert as why he had changed his religion. His reply was that he had no other choice as this was a matter of his survival. The Kalash need immediate attention of the KPK Government as well as the Federal government for protection of their unique culture/civilization. The British account of the Kalash reflects a certain degree of discrimination and stigmatization of Kalash people. According to "Military Report and Gazetteer on Chitral, 1928" Kalash was once the rulers of the "whole Chitral but were gradually driven into their present narrow limits. The Kalashis are a very degraded branch of the Kafir race. It may be noted as showing the former subordinate position of the Kalash Kafirs, that a Kam Kafir on his way to Chitral walks into a Kalash village and claims his food, etc, as a matter of right...

The Kalash at present do a great deal of dirty work for the mehtar". This British version of Kalash provides important insight into the historical marginalization of this community and indicates that they may be vulnerable to further exploitation in recent times. The advance of Islam into the mountains, starting from the sixteenth century, gradually brought about the conversion of the whole area by the end of the nineteenth, with the sole exception of the Kalasha of Chitral who still practice their ancient religion to this day. Although paraded and exhibited for decades, by Pakistan's Government and media, as a well preserved, happy and hospitable indigenous stock of people, the Kalash have rarely come under the microscope in terms of their socioeconomic problems. For decades, the Kalash made the headlines only for the celebration of their seasonal festivals, as if they had no life, needs and requirements except merry making and dancing. But recently, focus of the mainstream human rights discourse in Pakistan has shifted to the genuine problems of the Kalash after the realization that there may not be any indigenous culture left to celebrate due to the rapid conversions of the Kalash people to Islam and the increasing number of Muslim settlers in the valleys of Bumburate, Rambur and Birir.

The aforesaid demographic changes in Kafirstan can be attributed to the encirclement of Kafirs by Islam for the past three centuries and the ensuing cultural diffusion i.e. the spread of cultural beliefs and social activities from one group to another. All the material and ideological transgressions and encroachments from the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan have gradually withered away the traditional ways of Kalash community. The traditional festivals of Kalashas, holding great religious and spiritual significance are Zhoshi, Ratnat, Po'n'(Phool), Chawmos and Madaik.

However, Kalashas are facing difficulties in celebrating these festivals in some form or the other because of security situation, pressure from nonKalasha neighbours and inappropriate behaviour of the tourists. For instance, the festival of Ratnat has not been celebrated for the past 10 years. Similarly, the festival of Rhuzhias, celebrated to punish the King Satan, is only celebrated in Birir after three years. In Bumburate, this festival is known as "Bhutrmishek" but has been abandoned since many years. Moreover, my interaction with the Kalash revealed that there are multiple socioeconomic factors and pressures, which may be nudging Kalashas towards abandonment of their culture and religion such as land grabbing, intolerance towards religious minorities in Pakistan, the looming threat of border incursions by Taliban into Chitral from Afghanistan, limited opportunities of socioeconomic progress and poor infrastructure of roads, health and education. The Kalash, today, face a lot of pressure on this culture and with the non-Kalash population overwhelming them, they face threats of extinction. Some of the immediate threats are unwilling conversions and cajoled marriages with non-Kalash. They have become vulnerable in this context because it is an open society and women partake with men, the husbandry, and all the rest of day-to-day life. They join in music and dance as a part of their festivity and because of their accessibility they are exploited. Another is the settlement of land, which took place about five years back and in which they did not participate - with a protest - that has taken away their rights in land and forest.

Their customary law is a spoken word, which will ultimately be forgotten if it is not recorded. Since they do not have a script, a methodology has to be evolved for codification of their customary law before some of the well-versed elders in the matter die. I have offered to codify the customary law, based on my experience of the GAMBIA where I was the Chief Justice. I'm still awaiting the response from the KPK government. In the meanwhile, the Kalash contrary to their beliefs are being made to read Islamic history.

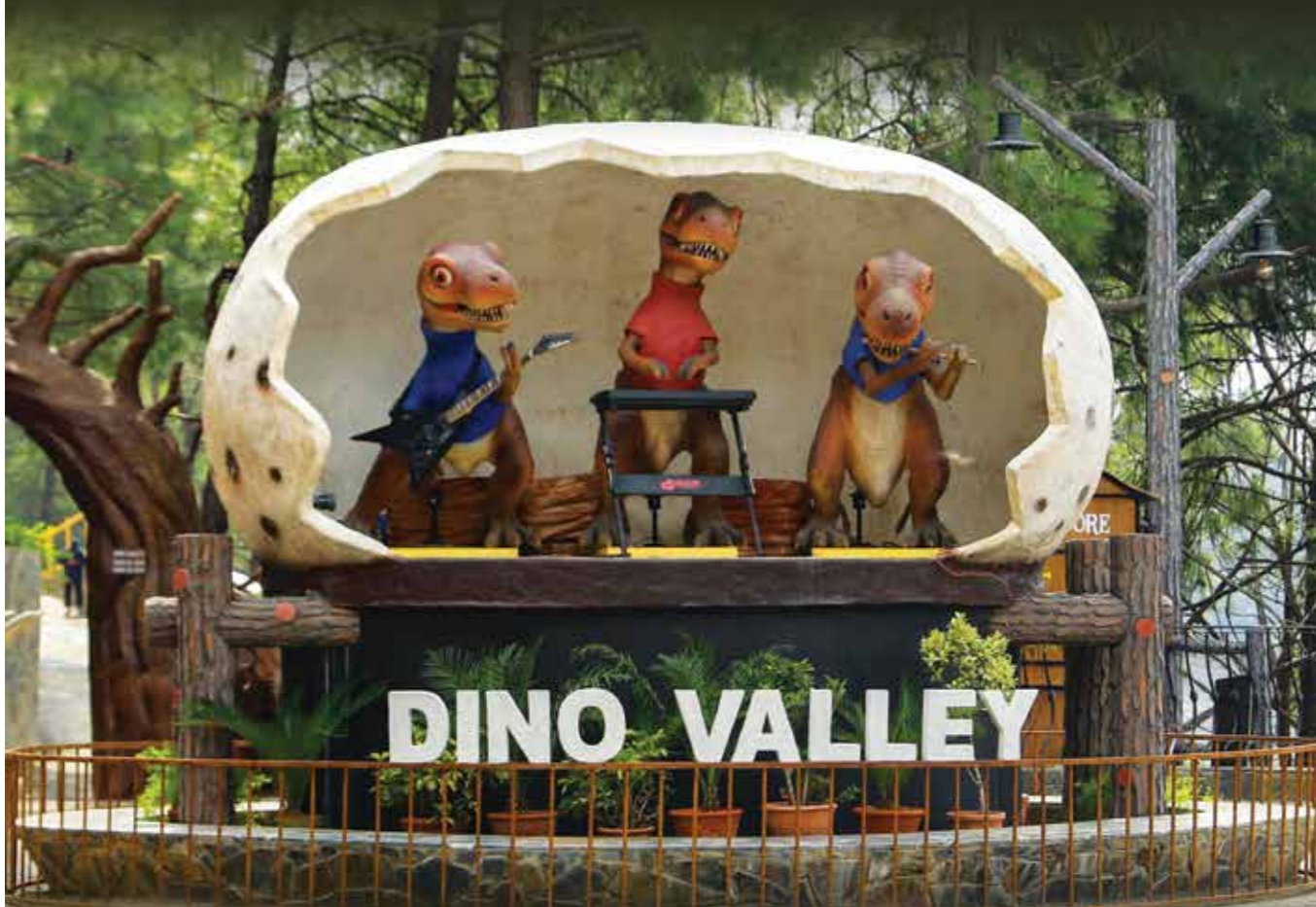
The education system is the same as for the Muslims of the KPK. As there is no specific operational quota for their employment in government services this is causing hardship. No standard college exists in the valleys of the Kalash. The school education is also poor. Unfortunately, the Kalash are not taught anything of their culture. Is it conversion through subtle indoctrination? Or is it lack interest on the part of the provincial government or the Ministry of Heritage in the federation? This conundrum shall have to be answered. Now we have about 4,000 of the Kalash reflecting diversity and uniqueness of a culture bedecked in the beautiful valleys of the Kalash; handsome people with pretty dress and wonderful health needs the caress of the state for their preservation.

I think their preservation is like a S.O.S. call and it cannot be overlooked. The Kalash are a people and a culture from which there is much yet to learn, but if these problems are not resolved it will be very hard for Kalash culture to thrive. The time for Kalash is now and there is not a moment to waste, for we fear that there is much to lose. As an example of the diversity of our great nation, it is on individuals and institutions to raise their voices in unison to protect the rights of a minority that has prospered in these valleys for centuries and now are face-to-face with an existential threat.

- Justice (R) Ali Nawaz chohan
Formerly Chief Justice of The Gambia, Intl judge of the UN at the Hague, Chairman NCHR Pakistan, Justice Lahore High Court, visiting scholar to intl. Universities, co.chair UNESCO legal board etc.



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Gandhara Research Center opens to support heritage of Paksitan

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, Advisor to Prime Minister for Political, Public Affairs, National Heritage and Culture Eng. Amir Muqam here Thursday inaugurated the newly established Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center at the Department of Archeology and Museums (DOAM).

PM's aide termed the Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center as a great gift from the Korean Government for the cultural heritage of Pakistan while Secretary of National Heritage and Culture Division, Fareena Mazhar, Administrator (Minister) of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Rep. of Korea (CHA) Dr. Choi Eungchon, President of the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation (KCHF) Choi Youngchang, Ambassador of the Korea embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan Suh Sangpyo, Director of the International Cooperation Division, CHA, Jo Dongjoo, Director General of the International Cooperation Department, KCHF, Jeon Bumhwan and Director General, DOAM, Dr. Abdul Azeem were also present on the occasion.

Engr Amir Muqam on the occasion said that Gandhara Cultural Heritage Center at Islamabad was established with the generous technical and financial support of the Government of the Republic of Korea. "It



will help to establish a systematic approach for preservation and conservation of the Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Gandhara in particular and the overall cultural heritage of Pakistan in general. Pakistan is a unique country, strategically located giving it a highly important place not only in the past but also in the present era, and will continue to enjoy the same status for all the times to come," he said.

"Pakistan generally and Gandhara Region of Pakistan particularly is famous for the rich cultural heritage of diversified nature", he said adding that the richness of Pakistan is

not confined to tangible cultural heritage. Its rich traditions, arts and crafts, music, poetry, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies, and varying landscapes are indeed treasures that very few countries of the world have ever inherited, all these treasures handed down to us by nature and by successive civilizations. Adviser to the PM said that he was thankful to the Government of the Republic of Korea for taking keen interest and continuous support for the cultural heritage of Pakistan, adding that especially for the preservation and promotion of Buddhist Heritage of Gandhara.

Indonesian cyclist en route to Makkah reaches Pakistan



ISLAMABAD: Two Indonesian cyclists, Asid Kusuma Atmaja and Yunus started their long-awaited spiritual journey to Makkah on bicycles from Indonesia in August 2022 to spread the message of peace, tolerance, and kindness. After traveling with bicycles across five countries; Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Singapore, and Bangladesh, they took a flight to Pakistan. In Pakistan, they are staying in the premises of the Indonesian Embassy to obtain a visa for their next destination, which is Oman. They intend to travel to Makkah via Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Indonesian Ambassador Adam Tugio welcomed the two Indonesian cyclists and wished them a safe journey as they embarked on their unique adventurous trip to Makkah. The visiting cyclists are exploring Islamabad on their bicycles while displaying the flags of Indonesia and Pakistan and other visited countries to express the love and brotherhood between all brotherly nations and other visited countries. They were very warmly greeted by the people of Pakistan and received a lot of appreciation for their courage. Asid Kusuma Atmaina said, "This is my first International tour on a cycle, the motivation behind starting this journey was pure love and devotion for the supreme power of this world, which is Allah, and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)". Asid and Yunus encountered many challenges during their arduous journey such as visa issues, grueling weather conditions, language barriers, and security concerns. Sometimes they camped on the side of the road, slept inside mosques, and on many occasions, it was too cold to sleep. - DNA

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BAKU-ISLAMABAD ROUTE TO RESUME SOON

Lahore, Almaty flight to start from April 26

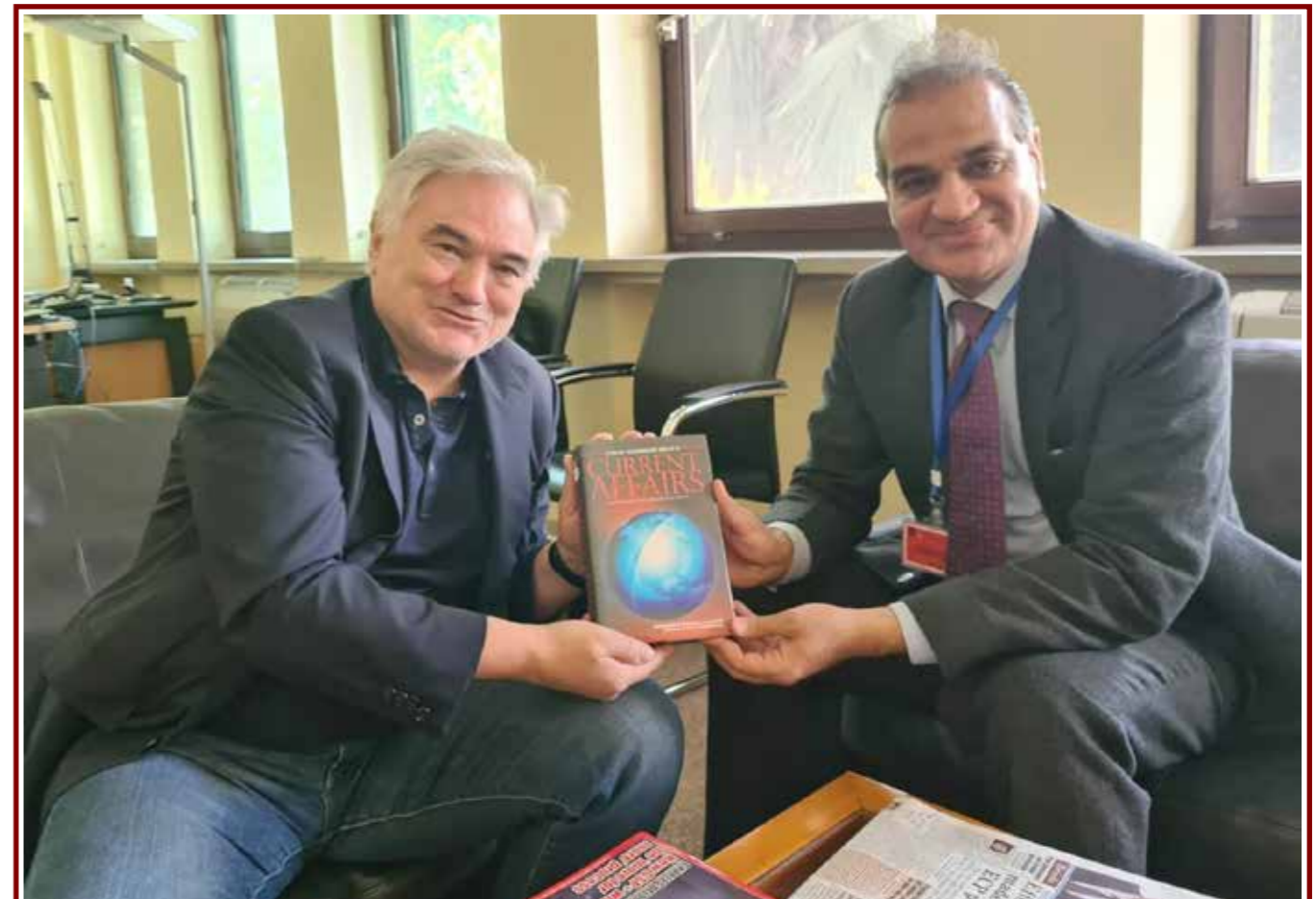
In May flights between Karachi and Almaty shall Commence: Ambassador Kistafin

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin has disclosed that direct air links between Kazakhstan and Pakistan shall be established from April 26, 2023 when a flight from Almaty will land in Lahore. The ambassador told this to daily Islamabad POST during a recent interaction. He further said that there will be two flights per week between Lahore and Almaty. He further told that in May direct air links between Almaty and Karachi shall be established. The ambas-

sador said ever since his arrival in Pakistan he was working zealously for the establishment of the air link between the two countries and by the grace of God his efforts had yielded positive results. The ambassador also thanked the Pakistani authorities for extending their full cooperation and thus making this project a success. To a question the Ambassador said the sustainability of these flights is ostensibly linked to passenger load. He hoped that he shall be able to make this project sustain-

able one with support of all stakeholders. He said Almaty can serve as a regional hub for passengers in case they would like to visit other Central Asian states. He said Kyrgyz capital Bishkek was just two hours drive from Almaty. It may also be mentioned here that flights from Islamabad to Baku, which were discontinued for a while are also set to resume in near future. The officials of both Pakistan and Azerbaijan are trying to re-establish link between Islamabad and Baku.

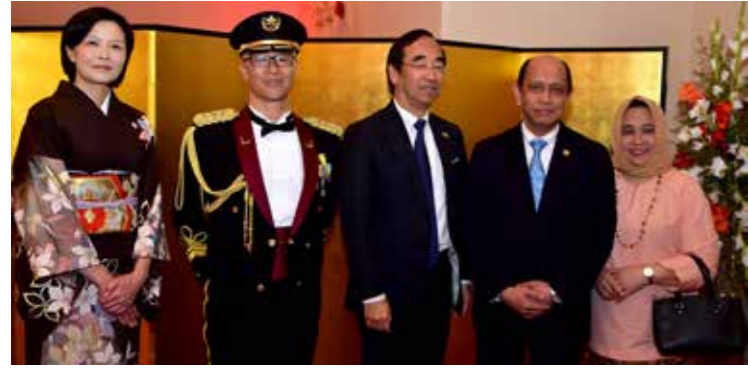


Editor Centreline and Daily Islamabad POST and DNA news agency Ansar M Bhatti presenting his book to Ambassador of Germany Alfred Grannas. – DNA



Air Link Communications sponsor CEO conference in Islamabad





Japan Emperor's Birthday celebrated

ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Riaz Hussain Pirzada Federal Minister for Human Rights, Ambassador of Japan Wada Mitsuhiro and others cutting cake to celebrate 63rd Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. – DNA



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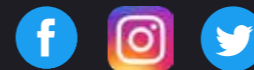


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ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Khurram Dastgir Federal Minister for Energy, Ambassador of Kuwait Nassar Abdulrahman J Almutairi, and others cutting cake on the occasion of the 62nd Anniversary of the Independence Day and 32nd Anniversary of Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait – DNA

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Creative Minds Organisation organises cricket match for a cause. Sadaf Bashir the CEO of Creative Minds assures to continue this practice



Star-studded Sarangi event by Serena Hotels

Aziz Boolani, CEO Serena Hotels lauds the talented performers and encouraged others to participate in the Season 7 competition



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels under its Cultural Diplomacy hosted Sarangi season 6 finale at the Sheesh Mahal of Islamabad Serena Hotel, an evening dedicated to promoting the hidden talents of Pakistan by providing them the hotel's platform to showcase their musical talent with a wider audience; an opportunity to become the nation's rising stars. Sarangi, a music initiative has been encouraging young and talented individuals or group of people to celebrate our cultural heritage through their music. For season 6, over a total of 400 participants submitted their entries in the competition, of which 5 were selected by professional jury members. The five shortlisted contestants from varying background provided an intriguing mix

of musical talent on display, included Asma Aslam from Karachi, Muqaddas Younas from Lahore, Minhas Khan from Islamabad, Sajjad Ali Hussain from Faisalabad, and Rahat Francis from Quetta. Their experience and training were reflected in their styles as they performed in front of more than 300 guests, including a large number of Diplomats, Government functionaries, Corporate heads, Businessmen and music lovers, proving their mettle to the highly acclaimed musical genius Sarmad Ghafoor whose well known works include Atif Aslam's two platinum albums including Jal Pari and he is the man behind the music of last year's cinematic hit 'The legend of Maula Jatt.' The other members of the jury panel consist of illustrious Qawwal Asif Ali Santoo, who was in the tutelage of the Great Legend Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, along with the

melodious Aima Baig, who rose to fame with the 2017 songs from the movie 'Lahore se Aagey' and has since been mesmerizing the audience with her electrifying performances. The jury unanimously decided on Sajjid Ali Hussain from Faisalabad as the Winner of Sarangi Season 6, whose album will be made through the professional music house by Serena Hotel. The other artists were also presented with the awards by the Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan (Retd) along with the judges. Mr. Aziz Boolani, CEO Serena Hotels lauded the talented performers and encouraged others to participate in the Season 7 competition. He also appreciated the three jury members for their voluntary services for this wonderful community initiative and presented them with mementos on the occasion.



Ambassador Mehmet Pacacı says

Türkiye indebted to Pakistan for whole-hearted support

Says at least 41 thousand people lost their lives and 105 thousand people injured because of these massive earthquakes. More than 250 thousand search and rescue personnel are currently on the field

Special Correspondent / DNA

ISLAMABAD: - Ambassador of Türkiye Mehmet Pacacı has said, Pakistan was among the first countries to respond to Türkiye call after the devastating earthquake that hit the Kahramanmaraş province. In the very beginning of the earthquake-disaster, Türkiye had called for international help. 102 countries offered assistance, 59 countries were/are on the ground for search and rescue nearly with five thousand staff. - The Government of Pakistan along with our Pakistani brothers and sisters, was among the very first responders to earthquake disaster. Ambassador Pacacı expressed these views while address-

ing a press conference on Tuesday. He said, Prime Minister Sharif got in touch with us and with our authorities in the very beginning of the disaster. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, along with other Federal Ministers visited the Embassy to express their condolences. -The very recent visit of PM to Türkiye, to Ad yaman, one of the most affected provinces from the earthquake, also means a lot for the Turkish people. He said- Up to this date, at least 41 thousand people lost their lives and 105 thousand people injured because of these massive earthquakes. - More than 250 thousand search and rescue personnel are currently on the field, whose work is

coordinated by Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency-AFAD. In addition to those staff of AFAD on the ground, more three thousand foreign personnel from different parts of the world are exerting their efforts to save lives. - Prime Minister Sharif announced that every possible support and aid will be provided to Türkiye and exert every effort to heal the wounds of the earthquake-affected areas. The Government opened an account - Relief Fund- for financial aids. - the PM also instructed National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan to coordinate all in-kind aids provided by Pakistan with our authorities. The NDMA, the ambassador added, has sent nearly four thousand winterized tents, more than eight thousand blankets to Türkiye since the first day of the disaster, in accordance with the needs of the earthquake-affected areas, all coordinated with our Embassy. - Nearly three thousand winterized tents and 25 thousand blankets are on the way to Türkiye by road. 'They are all planned to be arrived in Türkiye Hatay, one of the most affected province, on February 23. - This week and next week more than four thousand winterized tents will be sent to Türkiye with chartered cargo flights'. Upon the instruction of Prime Minister, in addition the airway and road way, a maritime bridge will also be established. A ship of Pakistani navy will start trip from Karachi port in the first week of March and will arrive to Türkiye-Mersin Port in thirteen days. This ship will be carrying three thousand five hundred tents. - Pakistan, being the leading tent producing country in the world, with all its manufacturers will be providing

most of the needed winterised tents of Türkiye, inshallah, Ambassador Pacacı added. 'We should also put a special emphasis on the search and rescue teams of Pakistan. The USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) teams of 84 staff, including army personnel and 1122 rescue teams, were dispatched to Türkiye in the first day of the disaster. Those were amongst the very first USAR teams to reach the earthquake-affected areas'. They have saved many lives, 28 people alive from rubbles, including 10 years-old boy after 137 hours. -Moreover, for relief operations of the international organizations and NGOs, like United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization of Migration (IOM) and International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), Pakistan have been one of the important global centers, as well. In these relief operations carried out in coordination with our Consulate Generals in Karachi and Lahore, NDMA has also been the main supporting institution. -We are receiving hundreds of support messages and calls from also all provinces and walks of Pakistani society. Pakistani NGO's, including Pakistan Red Crescent and universities are also in contact with our Embassy and with our consulate-generals, he further told. To a question he said, they have been and still are providing in-kind assistance like medicines, food, medical equipment etc. to Türkiye. We should thank them once again in here. 'We also would like to extend our gratitude to our beautiful Pakistani brothers & sisters for their prayers and good wishes for the recovery of our country. We feel their prayers deep in our heart. We believe that we will overcome this disaster with their invaluable support, he concluded.





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Secretary Information assures to resolve newspapers, periodicals problems

Says summary to increase rates already sent to PM; determines to ensure ads to genuine publications only

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Information Secretary Ms. Shahera Shahid has assured that the genuine problems of the newspapers and periodicals shall be addressed on priority basis adding the government was fully alive to the hardship faced by the newspaper industry. She expressed these views while talking to the delegation of the Federal Committee of the APNS that called on her at her office. Revision of current rates was the main agenda item. All members requested the Secretary to take up the rates matter with the concerned authorities, upon which the Secretary told that a threadbare discussion had already been held on the subject and the summary for increase in rates @ 35 per cent had already been sent to the Prime Minister for approval.

It was informed by the Committee that the recovery process of the payment is in good position under the present PIO however the outstanding payments also need to materialize. The PIO informed that the PID is in process to clear all the outstanding payments. In the opening remarks, the members of APNS expressed satisfaction over distribution of advertisement to the newspapers and appreciated the expeditious processing of advertisement claims/bills and subsequent payments to media houses and advertisement agencies by PID during

the ongoing financial year. The members raised the issue of dummy newspapers and allocation of advertisement to non-APNS newspapers. The Secretary supported the stance of the APNS members regarding revision of rates in view of staggering inflation and apprised about the efforts being made by the Ministry and the limitations faced due to the precarious economic situation in the country. She affirmed to review the policy regarding distribution of advertisements to weekly and monthly magazines/periodicals by giving appropriate share in the overall distribution.

Upon request by the members of APNS not to change the media suggested in the client order and subsequent additions by PID, the Secretary highlighted the mandate of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to ensure fair distribution of advertisement among mainstream, regional and local newspapers. The Chair further reiterated that PID is responsible for maintaining a balance in distribution of advertisements by accommodating all newspapers/stakeholders as per Federal Advertisement Policy in vogue. The participants evolved consensus on detailed scrutiny of newspapers to eliminate dummy newspapers. PIO suggested introducing a system of digital attendance (based on barcode) to streamline absentee/dummy newspapers. All the

participants appreciated the idea and requested to implement the aforesaid system at the earliest possible in order to have a genuine list of newspapers for accurate distribution of advertisements.

She informed the participants that Ministry is fully aware of all the outstanding advertisement dues accumulated in the past and is working out a plan to clear the dues by federal ministries/departments through a transparent process in a due course of time. She highlighted that Federal Government Advertisement Policy provides 25% quota for the regional newspapers in order to encourage the regional language newspapers and local newspapers industry. PID will evolve a mechanism & ensure that the quota is distributed fairly among those newspapers. The Secretary Information pointed out some Regional newspapers have complaints that they are not given membership. The Secretary was informed that there is no restriction on membership of Regional newspapers, if they fulfill the criteria. It was agreed by the Secretary Information and PIO to meet the Committee at least once in month to update the progress.

The meeting was attended by the following members: Mrs. Shahera Shahid, Secretary, MOIB In-Chair, Manzoor Ali Memon, Director General, IP Wing Mobashir Hassan, PIO, PID, Ms. Zoobia Masood, Deputy Secretary, MOIB, Muhammad Saleh, Director (Advt), PID, Gauhar Zahid Malik Executive Editor, Pakistan Observer Chairman, Ms. Rukhsana Sulat, Monthly Nikhar Member, . Khushnood Ali Khan, Daily Sahafat Member, . Waseem Ahmed, Daily Awam Member, . Mohsin Bilal, Daily Ausaf Member, Agha Bilal, Daily Dawn Member, Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, Islamabad Post/Centreline Member, . Danish Iftikhar, Daily Asas Member, Inayat Ullah Niazi, Daily Pakistan/Patriot Member, Hadique Tahir, Daily Nawa-e-Pak Member. – DNA

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Lt. General Mohammad Shehbaz Khan, Chief of Strategic Command Pakistan Army, Ambassador of Nepal Tapas Adhikari, Military Attache Col Amrit Kaji Gurung and others cutting cake to celebrate Nepali Army Day, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. Ambassador of Nepal shed light of the bilateral relations and termed them excellent. – DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan H E Frederico da Silva made a courtesy visit today to Sri Lanka High Commission in Islamabad and met with the High Commissioner Vice Admiral Mohan Wijewickram. – DNA

UAE Embassy organizes 10km Eco-Friendly Marathon

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The UAE Embassy in Islamabad, in coordination with the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, organized an eco friendly 10km Marathon to highlight the importance of Mainstreaming Sustainable Development and Climate Resilience for Collective Action. A large number of athletes from different nationalities, officials, ambassadors and representatives of the diplomatic community participated in this healthy and eco-friendly 10 km run on Saturday 25th February 2023 at Constitution Avenue, Islamabad. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Al Zaabi, the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the occasion said that the Marathon and remarkable participations from all walks of life reflects the longstanding brotherhood, partnerships, and shared values between the two brotherly countries. Ambassador Al Zaabi added, that as the UAE's is hosting the largest UN Conference COP28 this year, the UAE will focus on building bridges to advance international efforts that will support the Global South and countries that are most vulnerable to climate change such as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and finding practical solutions that ensure energy security while reducing emissions. The Ambassador stressed on economic development and conservation of environment as the UAE will focus at COP28 on ensuring inclusive sustainable progress that protects communities



most impacted by climate change, and appealed the civil society to play its role in driving "Climate Action" across key sectors to reduce emissions and build resilience. He extended his thanks to the Government of Pakistan, Prime Minister Youth Program, Islamabad Administration and Gerry's Visa for the coordination and facilitations extended for the successful organization of the Marathon, and to Islamabad Running Club, Pakistan Red Crescent and SOS Children's village for their active participation in this Marathon.



Inauguration of Regional Connectivity Desk at RCCI

The promotion of trade opportunities in various sectors including tourism, visiting religious places, energy and pharma sectors also came under discussion



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RAWALPINDI: A Regional Connectivity Desk has been established in the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) in collaboration with Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research & Development (AIERD). The aim of the trade desk was to provide information for trade promotion, networking, B2B and networking at the Chamber of Commerce level in Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The opening ceremony of the desk was attended by the ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan and Dean of Diplomatic

Corps H.E. Atadjan Movlamov, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan, Khizr Farhadov, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Yerzhan Kistafan, the Ambassador of Tajikistan, Asmatullah Nasreddin, the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan, Olenbek Tuytoyev, and the Ambassador of Uzbekistan, Aybak Arif Osmanov. Chamber President Saqib Rafiq, Group Leader Sohail Altaf, Chairman AIERD Zahid Latif Khan, Haripur Chamber President Tayyab Swati, RCCI Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad, Former presidents, executive committee members and chamber mem-

bers were also present on the occasion. On this occasion, the speakers and ambassadors in their addresses spoke about trade and investment opportunities in Azerbaijan and the five countries of Central Asia. The promotion of trade opportunities in various sectors including tourism, visiting religious places, energy and pharma sectors also came under discussion. They also stressed on simplifying payment channels and procedures for issuing visas, and also urged on direct flights. Later, the ambassadors visited the Trade Desk where they were briefed.



Pakistan, Uzbekistan sign \$1 bln trade agreement

D.N.A

ISLAMABAD: Among other developments, Pakistan and Uzbekistan Friday signed \$1 billion trade agreement at Inter-governmental Commission (IGC), which will encourage the exchange of goods and services and will also ease the process of trade. The 8th Session of Pakistan-Uzbekistan Inter-governmental Commission (IGC) on Trade-Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation was co-chaired by Minister of Investments, Industry and Trade, Uzbekistan, Laziz Kudratov and by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Uzbekistan, according to a press statement received here. The commission mainly focused on bilateral economic cooperation in various sectors including commerce and trade, banking, industries and production, investment, textile industry, energy, oil and natural resources, transportation and communication, agriculture and tourism

and culture development.

The continuous efforts by both countries to encourage closer ties, especially in the fields of trade, transport, banking, and agriculture was appreciated by the Uzbek side.

On the occasion, Ishaq Dar appreciated the deeper interests of the Uzbek side and the strengthening of the relationship and lauded progress already made in the field of transport, and trade and welcomed Uzbek side to explore the areas in automobiles, information technology and natural minerals.

Both sides emphasized that there was huge untapped potential in investment cooperation and bilateral trade. Furthermore, the IGC recognized the importance of closer collaboration in order to bring sustainable development through technology, innovation, and economic partnership.

The IGC aims to increasing economic diversification, sustainable growth,

building supply chain resilience, and robust regulatory environment. The Commission expressed satisfaction on the bilateral trade volume between the two countries and desired to enhance it further in the future. Moreover, Uzbekistan showed commitment for enhancing bilateral connectivity through diverse modes.

Among others, the meeting was attended Special Adviser to Prime Minister (SAPM), Tariq Bajwa, SAPM to Finance Minister, Zulfiqar Younus, Federal Secretary Economic Affairs Division, Dr. Kazim Niaz, along with other ministry representatives from Pakistan and from Uzbek side, the session was attended by Minister of Sport and Youth Policy, Hamraev Oybek Nematovich and Chairman Chamber of Commerce of Uzbekistan, Ikramov Adham Ilhamovich.

Both the parties agreed to hold the ninth meeting of the Pakistan-Uzbekistan Inter-governmental Commission next year in Pakistan.

Russia's concerns related to Afghanistan



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RUSSIA views Afghanistan primarily through the lens of security risks to itself and its Central Asian neighbors, over which Moscow seeks soft supremacy. After Ukraine, Afghanistan is another significant factor in Russia's complex and tense ties with the United States and NATO. Beginning in the early 2010s, Russia explored diplomatic avenues to influence Afghanistan's political climate. Moscow increased its outreach efforts as the United States and NATO withdrew their presence and the Taliban slowly gained momentum across the nation. As a result, Russia established a number of diplomatic initiatives, which were frequently organized as rival conversation platforms to efforts conducted by the West. Russia developed the Moscow format of regional peace negotiations on Afghanistan with Taliban involvement in 2017 and an informal inter-Afghan forum under the auspices of Afghan diaspora organisations in Russia in 2019. The meeting brought together the leaders of numerous key movements and factions of the old Afghan Northern Alliance, mujahideen groups, and the Taliban to examine the chances for peace. Even though the Taliban remained on the official Russian list of terrorist organisations, these measures were implemented. The Chinese-Russian-US discussion, a cooperative project that developed out of the US-Russian dialogue on Afghanistan, was a comparable attempt. Midway through 2019, this format was expanded to include Pakistan.

In 2019, US and Russian special envoys for Afghanistan began meeting regularly. Moscow supported US-Taliban talks late in 2018 but opposing any peace plan without Russia. In February 2019, the Taliban-US Doha talks restarted, changing Russia-Taliban ties. Russia abandoned limited collaboration for full engagement. As Afghan MPs and Taliban members met in Moscow to celebrate 100 years of Russia-Afghanistan diplomatic relations in May 2019. In ad-

dition Russia was the first to negotiate with the Taliban after the US left Afghanistan to protect its regional interests.

There are important factors that prevent Russia from downplaying Afghanistan's importance in terms of its foreign policy goals. One is the risk of turmoil in Central Asia due to the Taliban's ascent and U.S. and NATO military withdrawal. Russia worries about the Taliban administration in Afghanistan inspiring terrorism and insurgent activity in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It distrusts Central Asian states and its capacity to protect the region from a Taliban inspiration. It believes the present surge in terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan might spread and affect the CARs.

Afghan drug trafficking is another threat. Russia has recently changed from being a large drug transit country to becoming an important consumer of opiates and heroin from Afghanistan. Russia uses somewhat less heroin than Europe combined, according to the UN (70 tonnes versus 88 tons). 30,000-40,000 of the 100,000 drug users that die each year are Russian. As the Taliban fell and coalition soldiers entered Afghanistan, drug manufacturing expanded significantly.

Due to Islamic State-rising Khorasan's attacks in Afghanistan, Russia is concerned about its nationals' safety. Last September, the terrorist group exploded a suicide bomb outside the Russian Embassy in Kabul, killing two employees and several Afghan visa applicants.

At the beginning of this month, Russia invited regional powers to Moscow for multilateral discussions on Afghanistan. These powers included China, India, Iran, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. According to his office, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke at the beginning of the fifth international dialogue on how to build

peace and stability in Afghanistan. He stated that there are conflicts "not far from Russia, including on the Ukrainian track," but that these do "not reduce the significance" of the situation in Afghanistan, and that Russia does not want "more points of tension" on its southern borders. Mr. Putin also noted that "international terrorist organizations" like al-Qaida are "stepping up their activity" in Afghanistan. Pakistan skipped Russia's international Afghanistan conference this year whereas on the other hand, India made sure that its anti-Pakistan stance on Afghanistan was heard well. Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch explained Islamabad's absence from the Moscow meeting during the weekly press briefing. She said Pakistan didn't go because it thinks it can contribute more to Afghanistan peace efforts elsewhere. Pakistan is working on a quadrilateral (US, China, Russia, Pakistan) platform to address Afghanistan's peace and stability and the danger of terrorism, according to a senior Pakistani official. It was an obvious choice by Pakistan not to participate as it is in dire need of Washington for a successful IMF deal. Nevertheless, it is not wise to be absent from a diplomatic forum and miss the opportunity to express the state's stance. Pakistan is one of Afghanistan's most unstable neighbors. So, its voice matters if it speaks out at all important regional and global venues. Mr. Putin discussed Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and terrorism at the Moscow conference. These are Pakistan-related concerns. In the future, Pakistan must actively engage in any such conversations that might assist in stabilize Afghanistan and ensure that its voice is heard and its interests safeguarded at such regional gatherings so that others do not take advantage of our absence to further isolate us.

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