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Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine

Changing Sands of Middle East Politics



OCTOBER 2023



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Editor-in-Chief

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Executive Editor

Mubashar Ahmad Bhatti

Deputy Editor

Abid Raza

Founding Content Head

Lt. Col Ihsan Piracha (R) (Late)

Advisor

Prof. Dr. Farid A. Khwaja

Legal Advisor

Raja Khurram Shahzad

(Advocate High Court)

M YahyaFarid (Advocate)

Director Marketing

Rana Farrukh Javed

0333-5486892

Sub Editors

Farrukh Shehzad

M. Shaheen Qureshi

Saifullah Ansar

Bureau Chief Karachi

Nazir Siyal

Chief Correspondent

Ather Javed Sufi

Online/ Web Editor

Mahnoor Ansar

Photo Journalists

Muhammad Shahid

Shahbaz Sindhu (Lahore)

Head Office: #11, Block 18-A

(Awan Plaza) G-8 Markaz,

Islamabad-Pakistan 44000

Tel: 051-2261960, Fax:

051-2280074 Cell: 0333-5203232

centrelinemag@gmail.com

Publisher: **Ansar Mahmood Bhatti**

Printers: 051-5441 786.Com

Price USD 04 / Rs. 700

The privatization of state-owned entities



THE Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) convened its special session on October 4, 2023, with a primary focus on enhancing export activities. During this session, comprehensive deliberations took place, aiming to advance strategies that would bolster exports. Furthermore, the SIFC engaged in in-depth discussions regarding the privatization of several state-owned enterprises, most notably the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). It is worth noting that the privatization process for PIA has already been initiated, with plans to solicit expressions of interest in December of this year. While the decision to divest from underperforming state-owned entities that have been draining significant resources

from the public treasury is a prudent one, equal emphasis must be placed on ensuring that these privatized enterprises undergo substantial improvements in terms of performance and efficiency. The privatization of the Pakistan Telecom Company (PTCL) in 2005, when it was acquired by Etisalat, the UAE Telecom giant, marked a significant turning point in its trajectory. While there have been some notable innovations, particularly in the cellular sector, it's undeniable that the performance of PTCL has faced challenges since the privatization. One glaring issue has been the declining relevance of landline systems, which have seen a significant decrease in utility. Despite introducing innovative packages in the cellular sector, PTCL's support services for landline subscribers have exhibited notable shortcomings. This stands in stark contrast to the earlier era when PTCL was under government control, where the service quality was generally more dependable.

The SIFC, unveiled in June this year, seems to be a concerted effort by the military leadership to bolster the struggling economy of our nation. Although the precise mechanisms by which this novel initiative will rejuvenate Pakistan's ailing economy remain unclear, it has ignited a significant debate: Was there a genuine necessity for such an entity when pre-existing institutions like the Board of Investment (BOI) have, thus far, failed to yield tangible results? Is it wise to establish additional institutions, potentially funded by the public treasury, when previous institutions of a similar nature have failed to deliver desired outcomes? What sets apart the SFIC from the BOI, addressing the gaps that were evident in the latter?

Assuming that SFIC aims to distinguish itself from other institutions, the key question for attracting foreign investments is the quality of our business environment. Unfortunately, our current conditions fall short. Conversations with diplomats in Islamabad reveal that foreign investors are primarily concerned about law and order, legal procedures, and a conducive business environment for their operations. There is no doubt that the blue economy plays a pivotal role in shaping a country's overall economic landscape in today's world. Countries such as Indonesia and our neighboring nation, India, have made significant efforts to prioritize and harness the potential of the blue economy. It is quite striking that the concept of the blue economy seems conspicuously absent from our national priorities. Notably, even the newly-formed SFIC lacks representation from the maritime ministry, indicating a lack of recognition for Pakistan's untapped potential in the blue economy. This represents a missed opportunity for the SFIC, which should ideally be an inclusive organization, capable of leveraging resources from all available sectors. Undoubtedly, Pakistan is in dire need of immediate measures to bolster its economic well-being. However, it is imperative that any new initiatives are meticulously planned and executed, preceded by thorough research and analysis. Rushing into initiatives without a comprehensive approach can risk yielding suboptimal outcomes. Economic stability is undeniably intertwined with political stability, and the most viable path to attaining this political stability hinges on conducting free, fair, and punctual elections. This is a fundamental step in ensuring that the nation's governance is representative and accountable to its people.

Ansar

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.

Saudi-Israel détente – at what cost?

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has made it clear that Saudi Arabia considers the establishment of an independent Palestinian state to be a crucial prerequisite for recognizing Israel



IN a historic and groundbreaking development, Saudi Arabia has appointed Ambassador Nayef al-Sudairi as the Kingdom's first-ever envoy to Palestine. Ambassador Nayef al-Sudairi wasted no time upon his arrival in Palestine, boldly affirming Saudi Arabia's commitment to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its rightful capital.

In a series of diplomatic exchanges, Palestinian officials engaged in constructive discussions with their Saudi counterparts. As part of the Kingdom's commitment to recognizing Israel, both sides have to reach a significant understanding. Israel will have to halt the construction of new settlements, empower Palestinians with greater control over security and construction activities in the West Bank, endorse full Palestinian membership in the United Nations, and provide consent for the establishment of a Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington and a US consulate in East Jerusalem.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Sal-

man (MBS) has made it clear that Saudi Arabia considers the establishment of an independent Palestinian state to be a crucial prerequisite for recognizing Israel. Moreover, MBS appears to seek specific support from the United States for Saudi Arabia's efforts to regain ties with Israel. There are five key areas in which the Saudis hope for proactive actions from both the US and Israel.

Saudi Arabia has consistently advocated for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital. While there may be some skepticism about the seriousness of Saudi Arabia's commitment to this cause, the majority view is that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is unlikely to grant Israel's demands without receiving substantial assurances in return. Saudi Arabia has chosen to approach the issue of recognizing Israel with caution, unlike the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, which swiftly established diplomatic relations with Israel. Consequently, both the UAE and Bahrain have seen an influx of Jewish residents, many of whom have acquired UAE residency status. It is believed that some members of the Jewish community in these countries aim to exert influence on their respective political landscapes, reflecting a strategy that has been observed in various places. That is how Jews operate everywhere. For example in Ukraine the Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and other key officials happen to be the Jews and thus wield potential control over government affairs.

Saudi Arabia is committed to enhancing its defense capabilities and reducing dependency on allied nations like Pakistan for its defense requirements. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) envisions a robust command and control system operated by the Saudi armed forces. To realize this objective, Saudi Arabia aims to establish a comprehensive defense pact with the United States while also seeking the autonomy to develop its weapons without external pressures, including from the United States and Israel.

Saudi Arabia is actively pursuing a strategic defense partnership with the United States because it earnestly believes that such a partnership will bolster Saudi Arabia's defense capabilities through access to advanced military technology, intelligence sharing, and training programs. This collaboration will ensure a more secure and self-reliant Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia recognizes the im-



“ Saudi Arabia is committed to enhancing its defense capabilities and reducing dependency on allied nations like Pakistan for its defense requirements. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) envisions a robust command and control system operated by the Saudi armed forces. To realize this objective, Saudi Arabia aims to establish a comprehensive defense pact with the United States while also seeking the autonomy to develop its weapons without external pressures, including from the United States and Israel ”

portance of having its own weapons development facilities. This approach will enable the nation to have greater control over its defense technology and reduce reliance on external suppliers. It is committed to ensuring that its weapons development program operates independently and free from external influences. Historically, Saudi Arabia has cultivated strong diplomatic ties with Republican administrations in the United States. However, its relations with Democratic governments have often encountered challenges. It is reasonable to assume that the Saudi leadership closely monitors the US presidential elections, as the outcome can significantly impact their foreign policy.

Should the Republicans secure the presidency, Saudi Arabia may continue its cordial relationship, maintaining the status quo. However, if the Demo-

crats maintain control of the White House, the Saudi leadership may find it necessary to reassess and adapt their diplomatic priorities. In essence, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is responsive to the changing dynamics of US politics, and they are prepared to adjust their strategies to ensure productive relations with whichever party holds power in Washington. Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS) is committed to fostering peace and reducing animosities in the Middle East by 2030. One of the most significant steps towards achieving this goal is establishing peaceful relations with long-time arch-rival Iran. Similarly, pursuing a truce in Yemen is a top priority for MBS. Peace with Iraq, Syria, Libya has already been achieved. Furthermore, the potential easing of tensions with Israel could reshape the entire political landscape of the Middle East.



“Under MBS’s leadership, Saudi Arabia aspires to become a prominent figure in the Muslim Ummah. The country has recently joined the BRICS alliance, adding to its already substantial involvement in international forums such as the G7, OIC, G20, and the imminent G8”

Under MBS’s leadership, Saudi Arabia aspires to become a prominent figure in the Muslim Ummah. The country has recently joined the BRICS alliance, adding to its already substantial involvement in international forums such as the G7, OIC, G20, and the imminent G8. If Saudi Arabia can successfully secure peace with Israel, Mohammad Bin Salman is poised to emerge as the undisputed leader within the Muslim bloc, solidifying the nation’s position on the global stage. As widely recognized, Saudi Arabia holds the esteemed title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. While there is

speculation among certain commentators that the Saudi government may seek a similar custodianship role for the Al Aqsa Mosque, it’s crucial to note that the Al Aqsa Mosque is presently under the custodianship of Jordan.

Iran, another important players in the Middle East has voiced concern over growing bonhomie between the Arab states and Israel. The Iranian President in his recent statement categorically warned all those states wishing to forge deeper partnership with Israel to weigh all pros and cons first for Israel, according to the Iranian administration, can never be a trusted partner for the Muslim world.

Regarding the issue of Israeli recognition by the two major Muslim powers, Indonesia and Pakistan, there have been reports indicating that both countries have faced significant pressure to improve their relations with Israel. Recently, high-level Indonesian officials engaged in several crucial meetings with Palestinian representatives to discuss the nature of the pressure exerted on them and the incentives offered if Indonesia were to recognize Israel. However, it’s worth noting that the current Indonesian government under President Joko Widodo

do has firmly rejected any such move.

Looking ahead, despite the upcoming Presidential elections scheduled for February 2024, many analysts believe that Indonesia’s stance on the Israel-Palestine issue is unlikely to undergo a substantial change.

Pakistan too may not change its stand on this issue no matter which political party forms government as a result of the upcoming general elections. Pakistan is likely to recognize Israel only when an Independent Palestine state is established with Al Qadus as its capital. Pakistan has traditionally been a supporter of the Palestinian cause and a vocal advocate for their rights. This support is not tied to any particular political party but reflects a broader national consensus. The Palestinian issue holds significant importance in the hearts and minds of the Pakistani people.

In conclusion, while political parties may change in Pakistan, the country’s stance on recognizing Israel is deeply rooted in historical, geopolitical, and national considerations. It is likely to remain unchanged until progress is made towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Afghan-India Honeymoon is over



Qamar Bashir

INDIA invested heavily in Afghanistan, allocating more than \$3 billion for aid and reconstruction initiatives. These efforts encompassed the development of critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, dams, power stations, schools, hospitals, and the Afghan Parliament building. India also extended humanitarian aid, providing food, clothing, medicine, and shelter, along with scholarships for Afghan students and training for Afghan security forces. This support included weapons, equipment, and military vehicles for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

The primary, albeit undeclared, objective of India's engagement with Afghanistan was to counter Pakistan's influence in the region. While publicly stating aims like leveraging Afghanistan's strategic location as a gateway to Central Asia and fostering goodwill with the Afghan government and people, both India and Afghanistan acknowledged the complexities of their alliance. They recognized that India's involvement was primarily driven by self-interest, and questions lingered about the long-term sustainability of these efforts given the ever-evolving political and security dynamics in Afghanistan.

Ehsanullah Ehsan, a central leader and former spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, revealed in a 2021 foreign media interview an alleged collaboration between Afghan security forces, specifically the NDS (National Directorate of Security), and India's intelligence agency, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), in supporting cross-border terrorist activities targeting Pakistan. According to Ehsan, he was involved in such activities from sanctuaries on the Afghan side of the border.

Ehsan disclosed that the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan), which had sought refuge in Afghanistan since June 2014, established connections with the Afghan intelligence agency, NDS. Through this link, they established contact with operatives of India's RAW.

Ehsan claimed that NDS and RAW facilitated the harboring of anti-Pakistan militants and assisted in establishing "special committees" in Afghanistan to maintain contact with the NDS.

The statements made by Ehsanullah Ehsan in his interview had brought to the forefront allegations of clandestine collaboration and assistance provided to elements opposed to Pakistan by Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies and raised concerns about the nature of regional dynamics and the potential implications for security and stability in the region.

The abrupt withdrawal of the previous Afghan government and U.S. forces in 2021, leaving behind military and civilian hardware worth billions of dollars, not only dashed the United States' aspirations for Afghanistan but also eroded India's influence within the Afghan government. The rapid rise of the new Taliban regime, which has established itself as the de facto governing authority, albeit awaiting international recognition, may have signaled a reluctance to serve as a tool of Indian policy against Pakistan in the region.

Furthermore, it underscores the age-old axiom that India primarily acts in its own self-interest and may change its loyalty when its interests demand it. India, after a careful assessment of the costs and benefits associated with maintaining friendly relations with the Taliban, as well as the desire to appease the United States have chosen the latter path. The benefits it stands to gain from its association with the United States appear to outweigh any potential loss in its status as the largest regional donor to Afghanistan over the past two decades.

The withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan had sharply diminished its role and influence within Afghanistan. Currently, India has not publicly disclosed any immediate plans to reopen its embassy in Kabul which it shut down immediately after withdrawal of US forces in 2021. Whereas recently, Afghanistan, citing a lack of cooperation from the host government, has opted to close its embassy in New Delhi. These diplomatic moves underscores a notable shift in India's stance and priorities, signaling a reduced interest in maintaining its previous level of engagement with the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan.

This recalibration in India's approach is influenced by several key factors. Foremost among them is the explicit declaration by the predominantly Pashtun Taliban that Islam will be the guiding framework for Afghanistan's political structures. India has closely aligned itself with the United States and is wary

of the Taliban due to perceived close ties between the group and Pakistan. India views the Taliban as an extension of Pakistan's influence in the region, reinforcing its decision to reassess its engagement with the new Afghan government.

India's decision not to extend patronage to the Taliban-led government, coupled with the Taliban interim government's move to close down its embassy, has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the future of thousands of Afghan students, professionals, patients, and businessmen residing in India.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of October 2023, there are approximately 18,500 Afghans living in India. Among this population, more than 10,000 Afghan students find themselves grappling with the challenge of renewing their visas. Around 5,000 professionals are facing obstacles in renewing their work permits, while over 2,000 patients are encountering difficulties in accessing essential medical care. Additionally, Afghan military personnel are struggling to receive their salaries and cover their expenses, and asylum seekers are confronting hurdles in obtaining refugee status. This complex situation highlights the multifaceted humanitarian and administrative challenges faced by Afghan residents in India amid the evolving political landscape in Afghanistan.

Maintaining all weather friendly relations with Pakistan with Interim Afghan Government have also not been the bed of roses though Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating the signing of the Doha agreement, which ultimately led to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the collapse of Mr. Ashraf Ghani's government, the alteration of India's relationship with Afghanistan, and the installation of the Taliban interim government in Kabul.

Subsequently, Pakistan took a series of steps to support the Taliban Interim government in consolidating its authority in Afghanistan following the U.S. evacuation in 2021. Pakistan extended substantial economic assistance to the Taliban government, including essential supplies like food, fuel, and medicine. This support played a crucial role in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and helped the Taliban maintain basic services for the Afghan population. Pakistan also actively advocated for the Taliban on the international stage, encouraging other countries to recognize the Taliban government and offer assistance. These diplomatic efforts improved the Taliban's standing within the international community.



Asim Majeed
A man of substance
 The success story of
 Second Cup in Pakistan

Asim Majeed had an extensive experience in the Real estate and Construction sector, and in his family's Retail Business in the Middle-East, Asim had the opportunity to bring Second Cup Coffee Co. Inc. to Pakistan through Mater Franchising rights for the country. Second Cup is the fastest growing café chain in the country, with around 50 stores. The brand has augmented its position in the Pakistan market through a combination of excellent management, team building and robust growth in the ultra-competitive coffee industry. An MBA from NUST, he's had an ambitious career graph of Entrepreneurship, with an aim to explore the dynamic Retail sector of Pakistan through upcoming opportunities and build a competitive edge for all stake holders

Here are excerpts from his interview, which he gave to Centreline magazine and Daily Islamabad POST

Ansar M Bhatti

WHILE recounting his journey of launching Second Cup outlets in Pakistan, Asim Majeed shared that they initiated the venture by signing the agreement in 2012, officially commencing the project in 2013. Like any business venture, they encountered initial challenges, which are par for the course. However, as time passed and with unwavering support from our valued customers, Second Cup in Pakistan embarked on a remarkable journey towards success. Today, we proudly operate over 50 branches spanning across 13 major

cities in Pakistan. While the majority of our outlets are indeed situated in Lahore, we are proud to extend our reach to some exquisite locations beyond the city limits. Among these, we have a notable presence in the enchanting hill-resort of Murree, and we are also situated in the highly coveted tourist destination of Nathia Galli. He told that the Second Cup Coffee Company is a premium Canadian café brand operating since 1975. The brand first came into Pakistan in 2013 and has been expanding immensely since then. Second Cup is the fastest growing and one of the largest café brand in Pakistan and aims to become

the market leader in Pakistan. When discussing the prevailing business challenges in Pakistan, Asim emphasized that some of the most significant hurdles revolve around import logistics and the supply chain. In our business, the integrity of our supply chain is absolutely paramount, and we take rigorous measures to ensure its seamless operation. Additionally, we must navigate certain challenges stemming from the country's economic conditions. It's evident that when the economic landscape is less than optimal, businesses invariably face adverse repercussions. Pakistan is a diverse country with multiple languages and cultures. Understanding



and respecting these cultural differences can be vital for businesses looking to operate across various regions of the country. Notwithstanding these formidable obstacles, it's worth highlighting that Second Cup has not only managed to successfully expand its network but has also significantly bolstered its customer base. This achievement undeniably stands as a testament to our chain's resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Successful companies in Pakistan often employ strategies that involve building strong local partnerships, conducting thorough market research, and demonstrating adaptability in the face of changing circumstances. With the right approach and a keen understanding of the local landscape, businesses can navigate the challenges and tap into Pakistan's vast potential as an emerging market. Certainly, enhancing Immediate Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and ensuring policy continuity are crucial for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). In addition to that continuity in policies happens to be another factor that play key role in luring especially the foreign investors. Authorities need to ensure that regulations and procedures related to FDI are clear, transparent, and easily accessible to potential investors. Then to simplify bureaucratic processes and reduce red tape to facilitate smoother investments may be yet another step that can encourage foreign investors. When discussing the prospect of granting Second Cup franchises in Pakistan, it's crucial to emphasize our commitment to adhering to the established guidelines set forth by the head office and the board of directors overseeing operations in Pakistan. As you astutely mentioned, launching a business is just the initial step; the true challenge lies in its long-term viability. Prior to awarding a franchise, our primary focus is to guarantee its enduring success and secure a strategic location that offers a competitive advantage. In response to a query regarding our forthcoming initiatives, Asim Majeed provided the following updates:

Multan: Asim Majeed confirmed that the Second Cup outlet in Multan is gearing up to commence its operations soon.

Peshawar: He mentioned that Second Cup had previously opened an outlet in Peshawar. However, due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the outlet had to temporarily close its doors. Nonetheless, there is an optimistic outlook, as we are exploring the possibility of reopening a branch in Peshawar.

Diplomatic Enclave: Unfortunately, the Second Cup outlet in the diplomatic enclave also faced temporary closure due to the impact of COVID-19. However, we are actively monitoring the situation and considering options for its reopening in the future.

Kohsar Market: As a positive note, Asim Majeed pointed out that our outlet in Kohsar Market continues to serve both diplomatic and other esteemed customers uninterrupted. These updates exemplify our unwavering dedication to delivering exceptional coffee and top-notch service to our cherished customers. The Second Cup management is wholeheartedly committed to consistently crafting exquisite coffee flavors and serving delectable food experiences, not just today, but also in the days that lie ahead.



National Day of Malaysia

Pakistan greatly values its ties with Malaysia: Gohar

Malaysia takes pride in its relations with Pakistan, says High Commissioner Azhar Mazlan

Ansar M Bhatti

ISLAMABAD: Gohar Ejaz the Federal Minister for Commerce and Industry has said Pakistan greatly valued its relations with Pakistan adding this relationship has witnessed an upward trajectory over the years.

The Minister expressed these views while speaking as chief guest on the occasion of the 66th National Day and 90th Armed Forces Day of Malaysia. A large number of guests hailing from various walks including the civil and military officials attended the reception.

Gohar Ejaz further said there were strong trade and economic links between the two brotherly country adding these links shall further be cemented. He further said there were a number of areas where both

countries can cooperate with each other. High Commissioner of Malaysia Azhar Mazlan in his speech said this year the theme of the National Day celebration is Malaysia Madani: Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan'. In English it means Determination in Unity, Fulfilling Hope'. He said Malaysia takes pride in its unity in diversity blessed with a rich tapestry of cultures, languages and traditions. We progress ahead, we have forged a strong sense of nationhood based on our aspiration, shared values and mutual respect among our diverse ethnicities. He added, his country takes pride in its relationship with Pakistan. Malaysia and Pakistan have been enjoying years of strong bilateral cooperation that has greatly contributed to

our expanding partnership. In March 2019 Malaysia and Pakistan elevated bilateral relationship to strategic partnership.

Mr. Azhar Mazlan further said both countries share similar positions at the Non-Aligned Movement, OIC and G 77. Pakistan, he said is a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN and member of ASEAN Regional Forum.

He added, over the years Malaysia and Pakistan have collaborated in key areas of national building, from culture and tourism, defense and security, education, economic and trade, health, human resource and capacity building, parliamentary and people to people contact.

The guests also enjoyed traditional Malaysian cuisines and cultural performance.





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Embassy of Ethiopia in Pakistan Celebrates Ethiopian New Year with Zeal & Fervor

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Pakistan has celebrated Ethiopian New Year 2016 with traditional zeal and fervor. In this regard, a colourful reception was hosted here for Government of Pakistan's officials, media, civil society, diplomatic corps and Ethiopian Diaspora. H.E. Dr. Gohar Ejaz, Minister for Commerce, graced the occasion as a chief guest, while other important guests including H.E. Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan and Dean of Diplomatic Corps to Pakistan, H.E. Mohammed Karmoune Ambassador of Kingdom of Morocco to Pakistan, Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry H.E. Zafar Bakhtawari and others also attended the ceremony. H.E. Jemal Beker Abdula, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the FDR Ethiopia to Pakistan accorded warm welcome to all the guests upon their arrival at the celebration ceremony. Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Jemal Beker said every year on September 11, Ethiopia celebrated its new year in accordance with its own ancient calendar which was an identity of the FDR Ethiopia. "Our calendar consists of 13 months, with 12 months comprising 30 days each and a 13th month consisting of 5 days. Every four years, this 13th month counts 6 days to account for a leap year. Hence, we find ourselves celebrating this public holiday on September 11, unless it is a leap year in the Ethiopian calendar, when we celebrate it on September 12," he explained. He said the seven to eight-year gap between the Ethiopian and Gregorian calendars stemmed from an alternative calculation used to determine the date of the Annunciation. At one moment, the gathering broke into a loud applause when H.E. Jemal Beker said "Whoever presents in this gathering today becomes seven years younger of his age." He said on this day, all Ethiopians reaffirmed their unwavering faith in the core values that defined Ethiopia including love, forgiveness, unity, and harmony. The ambassador said Ethiopia had a unique place in human history as the land of origin, with the discovery of Lucy—the human fossil believed to be one of our earliest ancestors. It was also the birthplace of coffee, with the village of Keffa giving coffee its name. "Visiting Ethiopia is akin to reconnecting with your ancestral roots," he noted. "Moreover, Ethiopia is renowned as the source of the Nile, the longest river in the world. Our nation also takes pride in producing some of the world's most exceptional athletes, and I am excited to announce plans to foster knowledge exchange between our athletes and our dear brotherly country in the realm of sports," the ambassador stressed.



Ambassador of Portugal opens Arts and Crafts bazaar at ISH

Serena Hotels and Nomad Art Gallery hosted Crats Bazaar and screening of Androon Lahore and Posheeda Qadam

Mahnoor Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels, in collaboration with Nomad Art Gallery, hosted a captivating cultural event that left audiences both inspired and enlightened. This event combined the vibrancy of a crafts bazaar with the profundity of two enlightening film screenings. The Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan Frederico Silva inaugurated the event and emphasized on the importance of promoting art as means of attaining peace and tolerance. The bazaar featured a curated selection of exquisite handmade crafts from talented artisans, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the region. This unique exhibition provided attendees with an

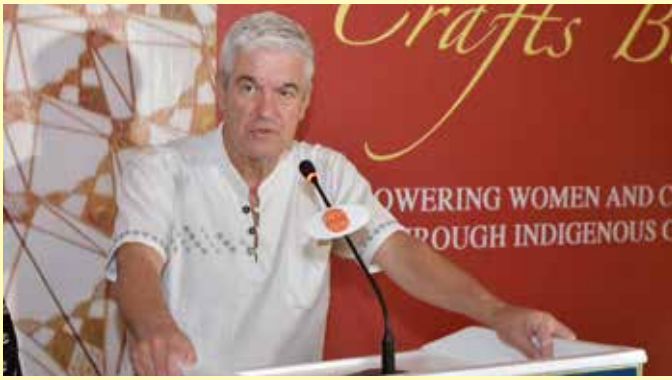
opportunity to appreciate and purchase exceptional artworks, textiles, jewelry, and more, directly from the artisans.

The exhibition reflects Nomad Art Gallery partners from all over Pakistan; community based artisans, young graduates and entrepreneurs. Rich hues of textiles from Sindh including silk and cotton Ajrak, block printed textiles, totes, home accessories, Kashmiri embroidery and shawls, trendy ensemble, handmade toys by Granmani, exquisite silver jewellery by Amna Shariff and SS collection. Pottery by Shazia Zuberi, handpainted wooden cabinets, bowls and engraved slate items. Rakaposhi Naturals health foods, bright woven bags, cushions, accessories by Kimmy. Tribal Truck art products and furniture for gifts and self indulgence. The first film screening of the evening, "Androon Lahore," is a powerful documentary that delves into the history of Lahore as seen through the lens of artist Nageen Hyat. The film captures the essence of Lahore's walled city, revealing its historical richness and the

lives of its inhabitants both before and after its restoration. "Androon Lahore"

offers a compelling look at the city's vibrant past and its continued relevance in contemporary times. The second film, "Posheeda Qadam," is a bold exploration of the pervasive issue of violence against women and youth, as well as discriminatory laws in South Asia. This thought-provoking film, directed by shines a spotlight on the patriarchal narrative that has long dominated the region. "Posheeda Qadam" fearlessly examines draconian laws such as the Law of Evidence and the Hudood Ordinance, which violate fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. The film also addresses the effects of cyberbullying and harassment, as well as the distressing statistics of violence against women. This event aims to not only showcase the beauty of indigenous crafts but also to stimulate meaningful discussions on crucial societal issues. Serena Hotels is committed to provide a platform for art, culture, and dialogue that can lead to positive change.





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Malaysian cultural show at the Malaysian High Commission



Thai embassy keen to cement ties with Pakistan thru sport diplomacy

Thai ambassador disclosed that next month Thai Women Cricket team will travel to Lahore to participate in the cricket events



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan Chakkrid Kra-chaiwong has said Royal Thai Embassy earnestly believes in sports diplomacy to strengthen the friendship between Thailand and Pakistan as well as international community in Islamabad. A friendship that goes beyond state to state relations and focuses on people to people interaction. He expressed these views while speaking as chief guest on the occasion of a football match played between the Thai Thunder and All Stars Islamabad. The ambassador said 'we are very fortunate to have coach Adul, a former National football player, who is here with the support of Hitkub Thailand. His visit is a starting point for cooperation and exchange of knowledge and skills in football between Thailand and Pakistan. Coach Adul also comes to train Thai student from IIUI to provide career in sports business as part of Thai Embassy duty in taking care and empower Thai community abroad. The Thai ambassador further said, he was happy to have with them Pakistani friends, as well 4 Trends from the Embassy of Spain, Japan, Romania, Kazakhstan, United States and Algeria. This reflects not only the relationship between Thailand and Pakistan through sport, but also the friendship among international community residing here in beautiful and friendly country of Pakistan. He thanked Pakistani friends especially Mr. Mubasher who helped organize this event as well as friends from the diplomatic community and our staff from Thai Embassy. He said they will have more events like this in future so that we can come together and strengthen our relations. Ambassador Chakkrid further said Thai and Pakistan have ties through sport. Rubber and latex imported from Thailand are used to produce world famous Pakistan football export to countries around the world. Thai quality product and Pakistan's craftsmanship is a symbol of our friendship and synergy. The ambassador disclosed that next month Thai Women Cricket team will travel to Lahore to participate in the cricket events. He hoped more Thai and Pakistani sports team will have more chances to visit each other country more as we have many direct flights between our two countries by the Thai Air. - DNA



PAKISTAN THROUGH THE LENS OF ITALIAN PHOTOGRAPHER

A talented Italian photographer Marzia Reggiani's works was displayed, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. Ms. Reggiani captured beautiful places of Pakistan with her camera. She, through her works, also portrayed lifestyle and various aspects of the Pakistani society. The visitors admired the great work done by Marzia Reggiani and hoped she will continue this effort with a view to building strong cultural linkages between Pakistan and Italy.







Mushahid all praise for President Ilham Aliyev's leadership

Remembermce Day in the Republic of Azerbaijan and book presentation ceremony "The History of the Patriotic War – Personality Factor' observed





D. N. A

ISLAMABAD: Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed Chairman Senate Defence Committee has said Pakistan and Azerbaijan enjoy excellent relations adding Azerbaijan has made progress by leaps and bounds in all spheres under the dynamic leadership of President Ilham Aliyev. Senator Mushahid made these remarks while speaking on the occasion of September 27-Remembrance Day in the Republic of Azerbaijan and book presentation ceremony “The History of the Patriotic War--- Personality Factor”, at the Azerbaijan embassy. Mushahid further said he first visited Azerbaijan in 2007 and met with the then Prime Minister, a close aide of the National Leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev. He said even the Russian were all praise for legendary Heydar Aliyev and they used to say that if he were the leader of the Soviet Union, the USSR would never collapse. Senator Talah Mahmood also spoke on the occasion and lauded efforts of the Azerbaijani president. He said the Azerbaijani people deserve accolades for winning the 44-day Patriotic War. He assured Pakistan would always stand by Azerbaijan through thick and thin. Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov also spoke on the occasion. He emphasized the profound impact of the 44-day Patriotic War, which culminated on September 27, 2020, when Azerbaijan liberated its territories from Armenian occupation. Ambassador Farhadov highlighted that the day serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by Azerbaijani soldiers and officers who fought heroically for their nation’s territorial

integrity. He recounted the pivotal moment when Armenia was forced to sign an act of surrender, bringing an end to decades of illegal occupation. However, the Ambassador also expressed concern over Armenia’s failure to fully implement the trilateral statement signed on November 10, 2020. He pointed to continued provocations and acts of terrorism, such as the recent landmine explosions that claimed civilian lives. Local anti-terror measures were initiated to uphold the provisions of the trilateral statement, secure the withdrawal of Armenia’s armed forces, and restore constitutional order in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ambassador Farhadov noted. He acknowledged Pakistan’s unwavering support during these challenging times, highlighting the nation’s moral and political backing of Azerbaijan’s just position. “I would like to extend my deep gratitude to our brotherly Pakistani media representatives for their support in highlighting the Azerbaijan realities among the Pakistani public as well as in the international arena,” the Ambassador said. Ambassador Farhadov shared updates on the massive reconstruction and restoration efforts in the liberated areas, with international airports built and cultural hubs like Shusha and Aghdam now hosting international events. The Ambassador also introduced a book titled “The History of Patriotic War – Personality Factor,” dedicated to the 44-day Patriotic War. The book delves into the historical context, the role of national leadership, and the geo-political consequences of Azerbaijan’s victory.

China-Pakistan ironclad friendship



Jiang Zaidong

THIS year marks the 10 anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China's neighborhood policy of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. It also marks the 10 anniversary of the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In this context, being appointed as the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, I'm fully aware of the glorious mission with heavy responsibility.

Not long ago, I flew over the majestic Karakoram and arrived in Pakistan, a country we call "iron brother" in China. Even within this short stay, I have already felt the China-Pakistan friendship that is said to be "higher than mountains, deeper than ocean, and sweeter than honey".

China and Pakistan are linked by mountains and rivers, and have enjoyed an ever-lasting friendship. During the past 72 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, no matter how the international situation may change, China-Pakistan have always stood side by side in weal and woe. The two countries have rendered each other mutual understanding and mutual support, and forged an ironclad friendship.

In April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a historic state visit to Pakistan, during which the two sides elevated China-Pakistan bilateral relations to all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, opening up a new chapter in the development of bilateral ties. Since then, President Xi Jinping has met with Pakistani leaders many times and both sides have reached important consensus, which provides the fundamental principles and action guidelines for the development of bilateral relations. China-Pakistan relations have maintained a high level of operation and are full of vigor and vitality.

Both sides have maintained close high-level exchanges. Not long ago, President Xi Jinping sent a message of congratulations to the 10 anniversary of the CPEC, and dispatched his Special Representative, Vice Premier of the State Council of China Mr. He Lifeng to visit Pakistan for the celebration. It fully demonstrates the great importance attached to China-Pakistan relations by our leaders. The Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilisation Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping have received positive response in Pakistan. The strong guidance of the leaders has set the direction for the development of China-Pakistan relations and steer the way forging ahead.

China-Pakistan practical cooperation has achieved fruitful results. The economic and trade cooperation maintains high level. China has been Pakistan's largest trading partner for eight consecutive years. Pakistan's exports of agricultural products to China have grown rapidly. CPEC has evolved from vision into reality, becoming a vivid testament of the all-weather friendship, and providing important support for building an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era. Two sides are committed to jointly building CPEC into a growth corridor, a livelihood-enhancing corridor, an innovation corridor, a green corridor and an open corridor, and carry forward the CPEC with high-quality development.

China-Pakistan military exchanges and cooperation have continued to deepen. The leaders of the two militaries have maintained good momentum of frequent exchanges and visits. This year, senior leaders of the Pakistani military including Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of Army Staff visited China successively. The two militaries have witnessed fruitful cooperation in fields such as joint training and exercises, anti-pandemic cooperation, equipment and technology collaboration, constantly making important contributions to safeguarding regional peace and stability.

China-Pakistan cultural and people exchanges have continued to expand. Flights between the two countries have resumed in an orderly manner. Exchanges of visits by scholars, media professionals, religious representatives and other groups have taken place one after another. Students from the two countries are enthusias-

tic about studying abroad in each other's country. The people-to-people bond has been further strengthened. This year is the China-Pakistan Year of Tourism Exchanges. The Gandhara Art Exhibition was successfully held at the Palace Museum in Beijing, injecting new impetus into the people-to-people contacts, tourism cooperation and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Now under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the entire CPC and people of all ethnic groups in China are earnestly implementing the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the CPC, and to embrace the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernisation. Despite the complex and challenging external environment, Chinese economy still has strong resilience with tremendous potential. The fundamentals sustaining China's long-term growth remain unchanged. China has the confidence, the conditions and the ability to promote the continuous optimisation of its economic structure, continuous enhancement of its growth momentum, and continuous improvement of development trends. China will accelerate efforts to foster a new development paradigm, pursue high-quality development in a comprehensive way, and contribute more positive energy to global economic recovery.

China views its relations with Pakistan from a strategic and long-term perspective, and Pakistan has always been a high priority in China's neighborhood diplomacy. I am ready to work with friends from all walks of life in China and Pakistan, by implementing the important consensus reached by President Xi Jinping and Pakistani leaders as the guiding principle, building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era as the main line, and promoting high-quality development of the CPEC as the major platform, to continuously consolidate, deepen and expand China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperation, safeguard our common interests against changes unseen in a century, and better benefit the two countries and the two peoples.

- The writer is the Ambassador of People's Republic of China to Pakistan



National Day of Nepal celebrated



Serena Hotels and True Sight

Special persons feature in fashion show 'Beyond Labels'

Serena Hotels is committed to fostering inclusivity and representation, we have recently signed an MOU with Connect Hear to provide quality communication to guests with hearing impairment

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels and True Sight Unite for Groundbreaking Fashion Show: 'Beyond Labels' celebrating Children with Disabilities Serena Hotels in collaboration with True Sight organized a groundbreaking fashion event called Beyond Labels.

This inspiring fashion show aimed to celebrate and empower children with disabilities, redefining beauty transcending the boundaries of traditional fashion.

True Sight founded by Atif Kayani is dedicated to ensure access and opportunity for children with disabilities. In a world where

diversity and inclusion are becoming increasingly vital, Beyond Labels stands as a testament to the belief that beauty knows no bounds. This spectacular event took place on 18th September at Islamabad Serena Hotel, bringing together children with various abilities to showcase their unique talents and personalities that transcends any perceived limitations.

Ambassador of Denmark Jakob Linulf and Ambassador of Portugal graced the occasion with dignitaries in attendance from government, sports, corporate and diplomatic circle. Attendees had the opportunity to hear inspiring stories from children who

have overcome challenges and embraced their uniqueness, serving as a source of inspiration and empowerment for all. Talking to media, the team from Serena expressed that Serena Hotels is committed to fostering inclusivity and representation, we have recently signed an MOU with Connect Hear to provide quality communication to guests with hearing impairment. We will continue to provide platform to people from all groups to further their talent and potential. The event engaged the local community to raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity and promoting acceptance and support for children with disabilities.





Embracing self-care through breast self-examination

Dr. Shazia Asim

BREAST cancer is a significant health concern worldwide, and early detection is crucial for effective treatment and improved outcomes. Behind the statistics and risk factors lie countless personal stories of courage and resilience. By understanding the impact of this disease on both individuals and society, we can and should make continued efforts towards improved outcome of this disease by prevention and early detection.

Firstly, it is essential to acknowledge the glaring statistics surrounding breast cancer. According to global estimates, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, accounting for approximately one in four cancer diagnoses. In 2020, an estimated 684,996 women across the world died from breast cancer, out of which 56,366 were in Pakistan. These numbers are overwhelming and they emphasize the need for vigilance and awareness. These statistics are not just numbers; they represent mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends who have been touched by this disease.

Disease like breast cancer brings a sense of uncertainty and fear for those affected. The journey of diagnosis and treatment can be physically and emotionally challenging. The toll it takes on patients and their families cannot be taken lightly. It takes a lot of strength and resilience of individuals facing breast cancer, as they endure surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation, and a myriad of side effects with unwavering determination. In the fight against breast cancer, one of the most powerful weapons we have is knowledge and early detection. Breast self-examination (BSE) is a simple yet crucial practice that empowers individuals to take control of their own health and can help identify potential breast cancer symptoms at an early stage. According to several studies conducted in different cities of Pakistan only 24% of female had heard of breast self-examination. This article is an effort to emphasize the importance of BSE and provide basic information about the signs and symptoms of breast cancer.

Understanding Breast Cancer:

Breast cancer is a malignant growth that occurs in the breast tissue, primarily in the ducts or lobules. It can affect both women and less frequently, men. While various risk factors (being female, old age, dense breast tissue, genetic predisposition, etc) contribute to the development of breast cancer, early detection remains one of the most effective ways to combat this disease.

The Role of Self Breast Examination (BSE):

BSE is a proactive, hands-on approach for individuals to monitor their breast health. It involves regularly checking one's breasts for any changes or abnormalities. The goal of doing a breast self-exam is recognizing what's normal for you. Knowing how your breasts typically look and feel can help you notice a change (if one were to occur). Here's why BSE is crucial:

Early Detection Saves Lives: Breast cancer, when detected at an early stage, is often more treatable, with a higher chance of complete recovery.

Empowerment and Awareness: BSE empowers individuals by allowing them to actively participate in their own health. It fosters awareness of one's body and helps identify potential issues promptly.

Cost-Effective: BSE doesn't require any special equipment or medical visits, making it a cost-effective method of monitoring breast health.

Performing Self Breast Examination:

Here are the steps to perform a basic BSE:

Choose a regular time: Pick a specific time each month to perform BSE, ideally a few days after your menstrual cycle ends if you menstruate.

In front of a mirror:

Stand in front of a mirror with your hands on your hips. Look for any changes in breast size, shape, or contour. Check for any skin changes, such as dimpling or redness. Examine the nipples for any discharge or inversion.

Lying down:

Lie down with a pillow under your right shoulder. Use your left hand to examine your right breast. Use the pads of your fingers (not tips), moving in small circles, to feel for any lumps or irregularities. Cover the entire breast, including the underarm area. Repeat the process for your left breast using your right hand.

Upward motion:

Sit or stand up. Repeat the examination for both breasts using an upward motion. Pay attention to any changes or abnormalities.

Signs and Symptoms of Breast Cancer:

It's important to be aware of the common signs and symptoms of breast cancer, as early detection relies on recognizing these changes:

Lump or thickening: The most common symptom is a lump or thickening in the breast or underarm area.

Changes in breast Shape or Size: Any unexplained changes in breast shape or size should be examined.

Skin changes: Look for redness, dimpling, or puckering of the breast skin, which may resemble an orange peel.

Nipple abnormalities: This includes nipple discharge (other than breast milk), inversion, or a change in nipple appearance.

Breast pain: While not always a sign of breast cancer, unexplained breast pain or discomfort should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

Swelling: Swelling or inflammation in the breast, especially if it's only on one side, should be evaluated.

Rash or itchiness: Persistent rash or itchiness around the nipple or breast area requires attention.

Nipple retraction: If your nipple becomes inverted or changes position, it should be examined.

Enlarged lymph nodes: Swollen lymph nodes under the arm or around the collarbone could indicate breast cancer.

Consult a Professional: If you notice any changes, lumps, or persistent symptoms during BSE, consult a healthcare professional for further evaluation.

Breast self-examination is a vital tool for early detection of breast cancer. By performing regular BSE and being aware of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, individuals can take control of their health and increase the likelihood of detecting breast cancer at an early, treatable stage. Remember, if you notice any changes or abnormalities during BSE, don't hesitate to seek professional medical advice promptly. Early detection can save lives and improve the chances of successful treatment.

Breast self-examination isn't just a routine task; it's an act of self-care. It's about acknowledging the incredible value of your own life and well-being. By regularly examining your breasts, you are not just checking for lumps or changes – you are affirming your right to a healthy future. In closing, I urge you to make breast self-examination a part of your regular routine. Encourage your friends, family members, and colleagues to do the same. Let's foster a culture of self-care and awareness, not just during Breast Cancer Awareness Month but throughout the entire year. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those we love and in our own lives as well.

– *The writer is the Professor of pharmacology in a private medical college in Lahore.*

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Mr and Mrs Skakil Ahmad hosted dinner for their son in law Safdar Parvez the ADB Country Director for China. A large number of guests hailing from various walks of life attended the reception



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“Melodies De Piano” performance jointly organized by the French Embassy and the Serena Hotels

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotel in collaboration with the Embassy of France hosted the enchanting Melodies De Piano Fundraising Gala, featuring the world-renowned piano virtuoso Maxime Zecchini, on 4th October at Islamabad Serena Hotel. This exceptional evening of classical music not only captivated the audience with mesmerizing performances but also served a noble cause. All the proceeds from this event were dedicated to environment protection and climate resilience initiatives, supporting efforts to combat climate change and conserve our natural resources. Maxime Zecchini, celebrated for his extraordinary talent and musical prowess, graced the stage with a performance that promised to leave the audience in awe. His exceptional piano skills and emotive interpretations have garnered acclaim from audiences and critics alike, making him a standout figure in the world of classical music. The Melodies De Piano Fundraising Gala is a testament to the Islamabad Serena Hotel's commitment to social and environmental responsibility. By channeling the power of music towards a cause, the event aims to raise funds for vital projects dedicated to environmental conservation and climate resilience. Guests had an evening filled with soul-stirring melodies, fostering a deep appreciation for the arts while championing the protection of our planet. Attendees included the French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Gale, members of corporate community, diplomatic missions, government institutions and general public. Addressing the guests CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani shared that Serena Hotels has been a patron of art and culture in Pakistan and always supports such cultural exchanges and this particular event makes it all the more special since it's a fundraiser and the proceeds will directly benefit the cause of Environment protection.





To promote Environment consciousness **Serena hotels launches green impact cleanup drive**

The inaugural ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Pakistan, H.E. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi, Ambassador of Kuwait to Pakistan, H.E. Nassar AbdulRahman Almutairi and President of Ismaili Council for Central region, Dr. Nadir Anjum along with other dignitaries





D. N. A

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels launched its sustainable initiative “Green Impact Cleanup Drive,” which is aimed at promoting environmental protection, sustainable practices along with raising awareness against littering and use of single use plastic. This inspiring event took place at F-9 Park Islamabad and Saidpur Village simultaneously and was made possible through a collaborative effort between Serena Hotels, the UAE Embassy, Ismaili Civic Pakistan, and the Capital Development Authority (CDA).

The activity was organized simultaneously across all Serena Hotels’ units in Pakistan. Quetta Serena Hotel and Rotary International carried the cleanup drive activity. Faisalabad Serena Hotel joined hands with WWF, whilst Gilgit Serena Hotel, Serena Shigar Fort, Serena Khaplu Palace and Serena Altit Fort Residence collaborated with schools, NGOs and local governments to conduct the activity.

Serena Hotels is taking a proactive stance by organizing this Green Impact Cleanup Drive due to the recent climate and environmental disasters. The event

not only served as a practical demonstration of their commitment to sustainability but also provided an opportunity for the community to get involved in a meaningful environmental initiative. A diverse group of volunteers united to restore the natural beauty of F-9 Park by removing litter and waste. CEO, Serena Hotels, Aziz Boolani highlighted the need for environmental protection, recycling, sustainable practices and waste reduction by educating the participants at the opening ceremony.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Pakistan, H.E. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi, Ambassador of Kuwait to Pakistan, H.E. Nassar AbdulRahman Almutairi and President of Ismaili Council for Central region, Dr. Nadir Anjum along with other dignitaries.

This initiative by Serena Hotels’ is expected to catalyze change, motivating communities to take proactive steps towards preserving the environment and reducing litter. Members of the diplomatic corps, corporate sector including GIZ and UNDP, civil society, and the general public attended the event and joined the effort to create a cleaner, more sustainable Pakistan.



Armed Forces Day of Egypt celebrated







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