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Billionaire Pakistani Family Jumps In UK Asian Rich List >> 4

3 << PANIC GRIPS LARKANA AS 181 CHILDREN TESTED POSITIVE FOR HIV VIRUS



Rouhani Says Iran May Face Conditions Harder Than 1980s War With Iraq

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has called for unity among all political factions in the country to overcome conditions which he said may be harder than those during the 1980s war with Iraq.

As Iran faces tightening US sanctions, Rouhani said on Saturday that his country was under unprecedented pressure comparable to when Saddam Hussein's army invaded Iran in 1980, which prompted eight years of intense fighting and economic problems.

"Today, it cannot be said whether conditions are better or worse than the (1980-88) war period, but during the war we did not have a problem with our banks, oil sales or imports and exports, and there were only sanctions on arms purchases," Iran's state news agency IRNA quoted Rouhani as saying.

"The pressures by enemies is a war unprecedented in the history of our Islamic revolution but I do not despair and have great hope for the future and believe that we can move past these difficult conditions provided that we are united," Rouhani said.

Hardliners have criticised Rouhani after US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which Rouhani supported, and reimposed sanctions last year. The Iranian president has also been abandoned by some of his moderate allies.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR

Rouhani's comments came as the

commander of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said in a parlia-

tary spokesperson. "Commander Salami, with atten-

because the comings and goings of their military is a normal matter," the

was appointed as head of the guards last month.

The US military has sent forces, including an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers, to the Middle East to counter what US officials have said are "clear indications" of threats from Iran to its forces there. The USS Abraham Lincoln is replacing another carrier rotated out of the Gulf last month.

Washington did not provide details on the nature of the threat from Tehran.

Amirali Hajizadeh, head of the Guards' aerospace division, said the US' military presence was an "opportunity", according to the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA).

"An aircraft carrier that has at least 40 to 50 planes on it and 6,000 forces gathered within it was a serious threat for us in the past but now... the threats have switched to opportunities," he said, adding: "If [the Americans] make a move we will hit them in the head."

On Friday, the Guards' rejected an invitation from Trump in which he urged Iran's leaders to talk with him about giving up their nuclear programme.

Trump made the offer while saying he could not rule out a military confrontation. But, Yadollah Javani, the Guards' deputy head for political affairs, said the US was "unreliable".

—LAHORE MIRROR



—THE IRANIAN PRESIDENT SAYS EVEN WITH TIGHTENING US SANCTIONS IRAN CAN OVERCOME UNPRECEDENTED PRESSURE BY ITS ENEMIES IF IT STAYS UNITED

mentary session on Sunday that the US has started a psychological war in the region, according to a parliamen-

tion to the situation in the region, presented an analysis that the Americans have started a psychological

spokesperson for the parliamentary leadership, Behrouz Nemat, said. Major General Hossein Salami

Bilawal Says Govt Seems To Have Surrendered Finance Ministry, SBP And FBR To IMF



Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Thursday made it clear that the PTI-run federal government's deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) won't be accepted if it is not endorsed by the Parliament.

Speaking on the floor of Lower House of the Parliament, he lashed out at the PTI-led government's economic policies and said that the government was the reason behind increase in petrol, gas and electricity prices.

The PPP chairman went on to say that the masses were drowning in the Tsunami of inflation, adding that the labourers, farmers and pensioners were being economically murdered.

"Common man is suffering due to inflation," he said and added positive criticism is their interest. "People are dying and they [government] do not even let masses cry," he added.

Bilawal demanded the government to apprise the Parliament about deal with the IMF, adding that the bailout package won't be accepted if it is not approved by the Parliament.

The PPP chairman said not because of the 18th amendment but the country is near to bankruptcy due to government's inability. Sindh is the only province that has collected its tax, he added.

He said: "When there is no direction, the government gets confused and then suddenly the finance minister and State Bank governor are changed."

"It looks like the government has surrendered the ministry of finance, State Bank and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to the IMF." PPP, PML-N demand Imran Ismail's removal over Sindh division remarks

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Thursday has demanded immediate termination of Sindh Governor Imran Ismail.

During the Senate session, PPP's Raza Rabbani expressed anger over the governor and said that how he can even think of dividing Sindh. Imran Ismail should first resign from the governorship and then think whatever he wants, he added.

Rabbani said that Imran Ismail is behaving like he has been made chief minister of the province. No one will bear division of the Sindh, he asserted.

Meanwhile, PPP leader Sherry Rehman demanded the House to summon Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan for explanation on Ismail's statement. On the other hand, PML-N leader Mushahidullah said that the governor is federation's representative and if he starts talking about division of the province, he should better leave the office.

Minister of State for Revenue Hammad Azhar has said that the Parliament will be apprised of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions. The minister expressed his views in the Senate and stated that the government is ready for charter of economy if the opposition wants it. Hammad Azhar told the House that the IMF delegation wanted to meet the parliamentary leaders but no one from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) came in the session. —LAHORE MIRROR

Federal Government Bans 11 Proscribed Organizations Under National Action Plan

The federal government has decided to further speed up the implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) and banned 11 more proscribed organizations in this regard, media reports claimed on Saturday.

The interior ministry has banned Al-Anfal Trust Lahore, Khidmat-e-Khalaq foundation and Dawat-ul-Arshad under NAP, Dunya News reported.

Al Hamd Trust Lahore and Al Fazal Trust, Mosaic and Welfare Trust Lahore and Al Madina Trust were also banned by the interior ministry.

Maaz bin Jabal Education Trust Lahore, Al Isaar Trust Lahore, Rehmat organization Bahawalpure and Al Furqan Trust Karachi were also among the banned outfits.

The entities were designated as proscribed organisations for their alleged affiliation with banned Jamatud Dawa (JuD), Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FiF) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

In March this year, law-enforcement agencies intensified its ongoing crackdown on JeM, JuD, FiF and other banned outfits, and arrested more than 100 activists.

Nearly 200 seminaries besides hundreds of other facilities and assets associated with them across the country were taken over by the government.

Most of the facilities were later handed over to the Auqaf department, health and education authorities. At many mosques, prayer leaders were replaced.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi expressed that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government would ensure the implementation of NAP. —LAHORE MIRROR

United States Seizes North Korea's Coal Ship For Violating Sanctions

The United States have seized a North Korean cargo ship, claiming the latter violated international sanctions.

"The ship was used to transport coal, North Korea's largest export but subject to a UN export ban, announced the Justice Department today.

The vessel was initially impounded in Indonesia in April 2018.

It is the first time the US has seized a North Korean ship for breaching sanctions and comes amid worsening relations between the two.

A meeting between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump ended without agreement in February with the US insisting North Korea give up its nuclear programme and Pyongyang demanding sanctions relief.

North Korea has carried out two weapons tests in the space of the past week in what is widely seen as an attempt to increase pressure on the US over its failure to make concessions.

WHAT IS NK SHIP?

The vessel, the Wise Honest, was first seized last year and the US filed a seizure warrant in July 2018.

Indonesia has handed over the ship, and it is now on its way to the US.

US officials stressed that the announcement had nothing to do with

the North Korean tests.

"Our office uncovered North Korea's scheme to export tons of high-grade coal to foreign buyers by concealing the origin of their ship, the Wise Honest," said US prosecutor Geoffrey S Berman.

"This scheme not only allowed

in US dollars through unsuspecting US banks - giving the US authorities the opportunity to mount an unusual civil forfeiture legal action.

North Korea has been the subject of a series of US and international sanctions over Pyongyang's development of nuclear weapons and missile



North Korea to evade sanctions, but the Wise Honest was also used to import heavy machinery to North Korea, helping expand North Korea's capabilities and continuing the cycle of sanctions evasion."

Payments for the maintenance of the Wise Honest were allegedly made

tests. Can the US and North Korea get back on track?

Most of the developments concerning the two countries point to a return to animosity but the US Special Representative on North Korea Stephen Biegun is currently in South

Korea to discuss ways of restarting denuclearisation talks.

President Trump has said "nobody's happy" about the latest North Korean tests.

"I know they want to negotiate, they're talking about negotiating. But I don't think they are ready to negotiate," he said.

He became the first sitting US

NORTH KOREA HAS CARRIED OUT TWO WEAPONS TESTS IN THE SPACE OF THE PAST WEEK IN WHAT IS WIDELY SEEN AS AN ATTEMPT TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE US OVER ITS FAILURE TO MAKE CONCESSIONS

president to meet his North Korea counterpart when they met last year but despite this, and a follow-up meeting, there has been little tangible progress towards the stated goal of riding the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons. —LAHORE MIRROR

Honorary Chairman FBR Is Not A Solution To Taxation Woes



Faisal Ali Ghumman

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the premier tax collection agency in Pakistan, has been in the limelight for the last two decades at least apparently owing to lowest tax-to-GDP ratio.

Political appointments, mismanagement, lack of capacity, training and corruption have remained the salient features of the board that deals in sales tax, income tax, customs duty and federal excise duty.

The recent appointment of Chartered Accountant Syed Shabbar Rizvi as FBR chairman has initiated debate among the tax officers, economists and academia

that if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government has failed to find even a single suitable officer from the Inland Revenue Service and the Pakistan Customs Department to lead the board?

Is it lack of confidence or a deliberate move to achieve some results that suit to the IMF?

Mr Rizvi being a senior partner of an accountancy firm A F Ferguson & Co was pleading the cases of corporate companies involved in billions of rupees as tax revenues.

His appointment raises serious doubts about his impartiality and sincerity with premier revenue agency.

Gen Pervez Musharraf too appointed chartered accountant Abdullah Yousuf as FBR chairman who according to tax officers destroyed the department in the name of reforms as there was destruction of tax records on a massive scale when the tax houses were converted into open plan sitting arrangements. Under his regime, focus was more on presentations rather than real work.

No audits were allowed for almost 10 years and tax officers couldn't conduct any fields operations or raids.

After 2008, President Asif Ali Zardari had appointed Arshad Ali Hakeem as FBR chairman who was considered better than Mr Yousuf because of his past career in the Customs department. Mr Hakeem, who got retirement during his mid career, was removed from the post in the light of judgement of the Islamabad High Court.

He couldn't enough time at the helm.

The latest case was of Dr Muhammad Jehanzeb Khan, a BS-22 officer of the Pakistan Administrative Service, who was appointed Chairman FBR/Secretary Revenue Division on August 28, 2018 by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The officer who had no prior experience in taxation visibly failed to deliver in the backdrop of shortfall in country's revenues and was eventually removed on May 4 to be replaced by Rizvi.

According to Daily Dawn, the figures during the first nine months of the current fiscal year show that aggregate revenue under the income tax, sales tax and federal excise duty (FED) reached Rs2.186 trillion posting a shortfall of Rs303 billion against the Rs2.488tr target set for the period.

However, during the same period, custom collections surpassed the set target of Rs509.3bn clocking in at Rs510.11bn

Despite buoyancy in the customs collection, it is estimated that the annual shortfall in revenue collection from all taxes will be around Rs450 billion by the end of the ongoing fiscal year.

Just imagine how horrific this government is doing with the central tax collection agency that is already struggling hard to overcome revenue collection shortfalls.

If FBR gets short of Rs450 billion in current fiscal

year ending June 2019, how the government will overcome gap is crystal clear to every one-by increasing taxes ratios in next fiscal budget.

Certain powerful sectors in the country are still evading taxes and the federal and provincial governments have failed to come up with new taxpayers.

To increase tax-to-GDP ratio that is staggering around 11 to 12 percent currently the government needs to introduce structural changes in the entire formation and for that reason only the officer from the FBR cadre with absolute authority and tenure-protection could be the best choice.

Tax officers and economists raise suspicion over a successful and prolonged inning by Mr Zaidi who has been appointed the FBR chairman on an honorary basis for two years.

It's time for the government to appoint a suitable officer as regular FBR chairman who should be free from political and undue interference in his administrative and operational matters.

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