

GOVT NEWS



Sindh to get Covid-19 vaccine by mid-January, says Pechuho

The health department on Friday notified the Provincial Vaccine Administration Coordination Cell (PVACC) after getting a commitment from the National Vaccine Task Force and the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) for supply of the Covid-19 vaccine by Jan 15.

Chairing a meeting on the subject, Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho stated that the NCOC and the National Vaccine Task Force had committed to supply the province with 250,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses by mid-January; each recipient would get two doses with a gap of 21 days.

In the first phase, she informed officials, healthcare providers performing duties in the Covid wards and other front-line workers engaged in handling coronavirus patients would be administered the vaccine.

Staffers working in Covid wards, other front-line personnel to get jab in first phase

The health minister instructed the staff to prepare data on the staff working in the public and private healthcare system that would also be included in the first phase of vaccine administration.

The second phase would include people above 60 years of age and those with comorbid conditions.

The people, who would be marked to receive the vaccine, would get prior information about vaccine administration through a phone call and later receive a vaccination card.

It was also decided in the meeting that 50 cubicles would be set up at the Expo Centre and 5,000 individuals would be vaccinated in a single day.

Facilities for vaccine administration would be provided at tertiary care hospitals in the interior areas of Sindh.

According to a health department notification, the Provincial Vaccine Administration Cell would be headed by secretary health Dr Kazim Hussain Jatui while its members include MPA/parliamentary secretary Muhammad Qasim Soomro, director general health Dr Irshad Ahmed, programme director EPI Dr Akram Sultan, Dr Mazahir Ali, Raza Muhammad Shar, both section officers at the health department, Sindh IT head Faizan Gul Sheikh and provincial technical focal person at the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) on Polio Dr Ahmed Ali Sheikh.

Fayyaz Hussain Abbasi, the coordinator at the EOC and additional secretary PH Dr Manzoor Ali Wassan would act as its focal person and deputy focal person, respectively.

It may be recalled that a special (federal) cabinet committee has recently decided to pre-book 1.1 million doses of vaccine from a Chinese state-owned company, Sinopharm.

The decision, which was made on the day when Sinopharm announced that its Covid-19 vaccine was 79.34 per cent effective, is contingent upon emergency use approval by the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap).

Once approved and procured, the government will provide free-of-cost Covid-19 vaccine to all front-line health workers in the first quarter of 2021.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 02/01/2021)

4,270 officers of Sindh govt facing inquiries, SHC told

The Sindh High Court (SHC) was informed on Thursday that 4,270 officers serving in different provincial government departments were facing inquiries and departmental action had been initiated against 435 of them who had entered into plea bargain and opted for voluntary return (VR) of misappropriated/embezzled money with the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

This was disclosed by the Sindh chief secretary in compliance reports submitted through Advocate General Sindh Salman Talibuddin during hearing of two identical petitions seeking action against government officers holding posts despite entering into plea bargain and voluntary return of the misappropriated money to NAB.

In the first report, Chief Secretary Mumtaz Ali Shah submitted, in compliance with the SHC's Dec 21, 2020 order, four lists to the court disclosing the names, designations and postings of the government/civil servants, who had entered into plea bargain and/or voluntary return under NAB laws, and/or facing disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

The chief secretary submitted that NAB and Enquiries and Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) Sindh were also requested to furnish details of the officers/officials facing references/cases.

Bench orders another report in the matter be filed within 30 days

He submitted that ACE had furnished such information, disclosing that 3,835 employees of the Sindh government were facing anti-corruption FIRs.

The top provincial bureaucrat said that the information from NAB was still awaited.

However, the chief secretary said that all administrative departments had been directed to finalise disciplinary proceedings pending against the officers/officials within 30 days.

The report further stated that the departments had been further directed that in case the disciplinary proceedings had not been initiated, the same should be initiated forthwith and completed within 45 days.

They have been further directed that after completion of such exercise such certificate should be furnished that no case of disciplinary proceedings is pending against such officers/officials, the report added.

The bench, headed by Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui, took the report on record.

AG Talibuddin informed judges that all those officers/officials, who had voluntarily returned the benefits, the proceedings had been initiated against them and would be taken to logical conclusion.

The bench directed the law officer that since a number of employees were subject to inquiry let a second report be filed within 30 days and thereafter appropriate order for its extension will be passed.

During hearing of another petition, the AG Sindh also filed a compliance report on behalf of the chief secretary along with a list of the officers/officials against whom disciplinary proceedings were under process for having entered into plea bargain and voluntary return.

The report mentioned that out of 238 officers/officials, 217 belonged to the School Education and Literacy Department and majority of them were primary and high school teachers. Therefore, placement of services of such a large number of school teachers may create problems for the school education department as the same may cause adverse effect on the process of teaching in schools concerned. (By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 15/01/2021)

PTI, MQM-P agree to hold 'early' census

In what appears to be an attempt to ignore the persistent protests by almost every major political party against the approval of the controversial National Census 2017, the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and its coalition partner Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan tried to move on and claimed to have agreed on Saturday on the need of conducting an early nationwide population count. The PTI and MQM-P have come under strong criticism for accepting the census results in a cabinet meeting held on Dec 22, 2020. MQM-P had written a dissenting note but still it is widely seen as being complicit in the approval.

On Saturday, a PTI delegation headed by Federal Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Minister Asad Umar and Sindh Governor Imran Ismail visited the MQM-P's temporary headquarters in Bahadurabad where they held a meeting with party convener Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and others.

It was the second visit of the PTI during a short span of two weeks as on Dec 31, 2020 the local leadership of the PTI met their coalition partners only a day after the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh visited the MQM-P asking it to adopt a united front against the centre's move to accept the National Census-2017.

The main agenda of Saturday's meeting between the PTI and MQM-P remained focused around the census as both parties were concerned about the political fallout of accepting the 2017 results.

The population census is due to be held every 10 years in the country, but the last headcount was conducted after over 17 years.

Cabinet body formed

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Mr Umar said that a cabinet committee headed by MQM-P's IT and Telecom Minister Aminul Haque had been constituted which would present its recommendation to the cabinet for holding an early census.

He said that a technical committee had also been constituted in this regard which would review the process of census across the world to create an effective system.

He said the parties protesting against the census results should also visit Peshawar to stage their protests there since census was not only the issue of Karachi but the entire country.

"We need to bring improvements in the whole system and we are heading towards a best system to conduct census," he said.

Governor Ismail said that the federal government would not delay holding the census as soon as the cabinet committee completes its recommendations.

Earlier, MQM-P convener Dr Siddiqui told reporters that the two parties had agreed to conduct the new census before time because not only Karachi and the rest of Sindh, but people of KP and Balochistan also had serious reservations on the results of the sixth population census.

(By Azfar-ul-Ashfaq Dawn, 13, 17/01/2021)

Murad, Asad Umar strike conciliatory tone, vow to work together for city

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Saturday said that with coordinated efforts, the provincial and federal governments had started different projects in the city, including remodelling of major storm-water drains, water, drainage, road and transport sectors.

"In the larger interest of Karachi, setting aside all our political differences, we, all the stakeholders [the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan] sit together and chalk out plans to develop the city to make it one of the beautiful and liveable cities of the world," he said.

This he said while addressing a joint press conference with federal ministers Asad Umar and Aminul Haq. Provincial ministers Saeed Ghani and Nasir Shah and Law Adviser Murtaza Wahab were also present.

The CM said that the federal and provincial governments had committed to undertake projects including K-IV, sewerage treatment, road network, Malir Expressway, Green Line, Yellow Line, Orange Line and the Karachi Circular Railway.

"Since there were three executing agencies — the Sindh government, the federal and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation; therefore, we all have joined hands so that these projects can be completed on a priority basis and in time," he said.

The CM thanked the federal government, the KMC, army authorities, National Disaster Management Authority and FWO and also thanked the Supreme Court for pushing and guiding all the stakeholders to expedite the development works.

Planning minister hints at availability of Covid-19 vaccine in Pakistan by March

No politics on city uplift

Federal Planning Minister Asad Umar said that the people of Karachi looked towards their elected representatives. "Therefore, brushing aside our political differences, we have joined hands for the development of this city," he said.

He added that the NDMA had engaged FWO and they had mobilised their machinery and work had started.

Mr Umar said that the success story of our coordinated efforts was the start of work on the ground. "It is a good start and time is very short because in July and August Karachi receives rains, therefore we have to complete the remodelling work of nullahs by the start of July," he said

"I want to reiterate that we have various other things for doing politics but as far as uplift of the city is concerned we have to work together which is important for all the concerned political parties," he added.

Federal IT Minister Aminul Haq told the media that the development works being started in the city were worth Rs1.1 trillion.

Mr Haq said that the amount for the development package of Karachi was not enough but "something is better than nothing".

He called for strengthening the local governments and said actually it was their job to clean the nullahs, provide water supply schemes and construct connecting roads.

Covid vaccine to be available in March

Replying to a question, Mr Umar said that Covid-19 vaccine would be made available in the country by March.

To another question, he said that as far as the complaint of the Sindh government about the shortfall in the share of the National Finance Commission Award was concerned, it had its own arguments and the federal government spoke something else.

To a question, the chief minister said that the model of Mehmoodabad nullah in terms of its structure, removal of encroachments and development of drainage system would be replicated in the development of Gujjar nullah.

The chief minister, replying to another question, said that his government had reservations on the census which he had taken up at the concerned forum, which is the Council of Common Interests.

"We want the federal government to redress the grievances of the people of the province," he said.

To the same question, Mr Umar said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh had reservations on the census but it [census] was not carried out by the PTI government.

"I remember very well that whenever a census is conducted the provincial governments, one or the other, has raised objections," he said.

Talking about twin islands of Karachi, Mr Umar said that the federal and provincial governments had different opinions on the issue and it was debatable.

"The [island] ordinance has expired and we want the provincial government and the federal government to sit together to find a mutual way out to start development," he added.

Mr Umar vowed that the KCR project would be started very soon and it would be completed much before the ML-1 project.

He said that the Green Line project would be completed soon and procurement of buses had already been ordered.

He said that the Mauripur-Manghopir road would be also completed shortly. "We have purchased fire tenders for the city," he said.

Issue of JPMC, NICH, NICVD

Replying to a question about the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and National Institute of Child Health, the federal minister said that their administrative control had been taken over by the federal government through a notification as per Supreme Court's orders.

He said that there was a way out under which these hospitals could be returned to the provincial government by filing a reference in the apex court.

Earlier, talking about Mehmoodabad nullah, the chief minister said that it had been undertaken as a pilot project.

"We have worked hard to save maximum houses constructed along the embankments of the nullah," he said.

He appreciated the public support and even the cooperation of the affected people in removing the encroachments.
(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 17/01/2020)

CM urged to ask Sepa to hold public consultation on review process

Three senior lawyers have recently written a letter to the chief minister, urging him to direct the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) to engage the public in the review process of the Sindh Environmental Protection Act 2014 and its rules and regulations, it emerged on Sunday.

The letter also calls for a strategic environmental assessment of the amendments to the law as proposed by the department.

Sources said the letter, a copy of which is available with Dawn, has been written against the backdrop of the government's initiative to amend the Act and rules, without engaging the public in the review process — a mandatory obligation under the law.

In this respect, they said, a draft had already been sent to the law department for vetting. The department, sources said, recently held a high-level meeting to discuss the amendments and framing of new rules but there was no mention of engaging the public in the review process.

Proposed changes to law will make Sepa, tribunal legally ineffective

The letter on the subject, 'Infringement of the fundamental rights to environment and information by Sindh, environmental protection, coastal, development and climate department', is written by advocates Shahab Usto, Ghulam Rasool Soho (a member of the Sindh Bar Council) and Zubair Ahmed Abro.

The letter says that the proposed amendments are reportedly, inter alia, in respect to disposal of industrial effluent; amendment to the provision 'regulating initial environmental examination (IEE)' and environmental impact assessment (EIA); powers of the environmental protection tribunal.

"These changes would ultimately have an effect on environmental protection in the province of Sindh. It would be apposite to point out here that due to increase in climate induced events including heavy rains, heat waves, prolonged gap in rain resulting in droughts the provincial environmental law requires stringent provisions for its compliance, and an effective environmental protection agency," it says.

It refers to the Section 18 of the 2014 Act which provides for carrying out a strategic environmental assessment of policies, legislation, plans and programmes prepared by any department and agency.

"All provincial government agencies, departments, authorities, local councils and local authorities responsible for formulating policies, legislation, plans and programmes to be implemented in Sindh province which may cause any environmental impact in the jurisdiction of the province shall, before submitting the same to the competent authority for approval, be forwarded to Sindh Environmental Protection Agency for a strategic environmental assessment....."

It may be mentioned here that Section 18 and Rule 7 of the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency Rules, 2015 make it mandatory to hold public consultation for a review of strategic environmental assessment.

Section 18 is mandatory provision as non-compliance is punishable under Section 22 of the 2014 Act.

The lawyers have urged the chief minister to direct Sepa to carry out strategic environmental assessment of the amendments prepared to be made to the Act and engage the public in the review process.

Ineffective Sepa

A reading of the draft of the Sindh Environmental Protection Act, 2014 (Amendment 2019) shows that it carries major amendments that would clip legal powers of local courts, the Environmental Protection Tribunal and Sepa — an important but neglected institution already too weak to implement the law and prosecute influential offenders.

Under the amended version of the law — yet to be approved — Sepa would lose the legal power to enter and carry out independent inspection of any premises where ‘there are reasonable grounds to believe that an offence under this act has been, or is being, or likely to be committed’.

The draft law says that inspection would be carried out at a ‘specified time’ (which would be communicated to the owner of the premises) along with a ‘representative of the concerned trade association’.

Similarly, search warrants by courts and the tribunal would be carried out at a ‘specified time’ and in the presence of a representative of the concerned trade association.

In addition, it removes all clauses mentioning the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Act V of 1898) which empowers the tribunal to decide criminal cases.

It, however, retains the clauses which empower the tribunal under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (Act V of 1908).

Sources said this would have far reaching implications as punishments for any offence could be awarded only under the Criminal Procedure Code, 1898.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 18/01/2021)

Sindh cabinet approves Rs4bn payment to rain-hit people via mobile banking

The Sindh cabinet on Tuesday approved disbursement of a relief grant worth Rs4.021 billion among people affected by last year’s heavy monsoon rainfall through the mobile banking system.

Presiding over the cabinet meeting here, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said that this would help the affected people to receive cash on showing their original computerized national identity cards (CNICs) to the mobile bank without going into the process of opening a bank account.

The cabinet was told that after analysing the pros and cons of various alternative modalities and mechanisms, the Board of Revenue (BoR), finance department and Social Protection Unit were in consonance that the disbursement of the relief grant might be made through mobile banking by inviting technical and financial proposals from various telecommunication companies/banks/consortia.

There are 103 injured persons and each one would get Rs25,000, the owners of fully damaged pukka house and fully damaged katcha houses would get Rs20,000 and Rs10,000, Rs10,000 for the loss of cattle and Rs2,000 for the loss of goat/sheep/donkey. The cabinet approved the proposal and granted exemption to the BoR from rules concerned.

Anti-encroachment PS for Tharparkar

The BoR presented another proposal requesting the cabinet to approve establishment of an anti-encroachment police station for district Tharparkar.

The cabinet was told that after installation of power plants and establishment of coal mining the lands of Tharparkar had achieved highest value, as a result the issue of encroachments was cropping up day by day.

A committee is formed to review the recruitment policy for schoolteachers in 15 days

The cabinet was told that the BoR had 18 anti-encroachment police stations in as many districts and now they would establish the nineteenth police station in Tharparkar, if the proposal was approved.

The cabinet approved the establishment of the anti-encroachment police station in Tharparkar and also approved Rs6.5 million for purchase of motorcycles, one pick-up, furniture, computer and other office equipment.

Schoolteachers’ recruitment

The school education department presented a recruitment policy of teaching and non-teaching staff through a third party.

Some of the cabinet members raised the objection on different positions/categories of teachers. They were of the view that there should be only two categories ie primary and secondary. Since the government was offering “best” salary packages, therefore, best teachers, or highly qualified teachers, should be appointed by offering only two positions with specific education.

The chief minister with the approval of the cabinet constituted a committee comprising two former education ministers, Nisar Khuhro and Syed Sardar Shah, and sitting Education Minister Saeed Ghani to review the recruitment policy and submit their report within 15 days.

It may be noted that there were 30,000 positions of primary schoolteachers and 7,000 of secondary schoolteachers vacant in the school education department.

Amendments to Sessi Act

The Labour department presented amendments in two different sections of Sindh Employees Social Security Institution (Sessi) Act to create provision for issuance of Benazir Mazdoor Card to insure the workers and to allow self-employed workers to contribute in Sessi and get themselves registered to be eligible for all the benefits.

The cabinet approved the proposal of universalisation of social security in the province.

The agriculture department presented an agenda requesting the cabinet to allow the department to create its works unit to construct its building such as markets, etc, on its own.

The CM constituted a three-member committee comprising Mr Khuhro, Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu and finance secretary to review the proposal and submit a report.

Body formed for Shaheed quota rules

The home department requested the cabinet to approve the incorporation of a Shaheed, Deceased and Ghazi quota in Police Rules called Sindh Police Family Claim Rules-2020.

The cabinet was told that the post of ASI was filled through the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC), while under the deceased quota it had to be filled directly. Therefore, a provision in the rules may be created so that the deceased, Shaheed and Ghazi quota request could be entertained.

The cabinet constituted a committee under Home Secretary Usman Chachar, services and law secretaries, and representative of police chief to review the rules and different judgements of the high court and Supreme Court and submit their recommendations in the next meeting.

The cabinet after a thorough discussion decided to transfer all the Darul Aman and Safe Houses from the social welfare department to the women development department.

The chief minister directed the chief secretary to review the functions of the women development department and social welfare department and if they were identical then both departments might be merged.

The chief minister also constituted a committee comprising Education Minister Saeed Ghani, Law Adviser Murtaza Wahab and Jails Adviser Aijaz Jakhrani to visit a convict, Junaid Rehman, in prison and submit their recommendations on human and legal grounds in the next cabinet meeting on a plea moved by his brother before high court for grant of education remission in favour of the convict. (By Tahir Siddiaui Dawn, 13, 27/01/2021)

Several infrastructure projects approved under public-private mode

The Public Private Policy (PPP) Board in its 32nd board meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Thursday approved a number of key projects for the province, particularly the metropolis.

These include Mauripur Expressway, link road to Korangi, water supply schemes, Lyari sewerage system, LDA scheme, five MGD desalination plant and construction of canal from Nabisar to Vajira on public private partnership basis.

The meeting was held at CM House and was attended by provincial ministers and officials concerned, along with the NED University vice chancellor.

Mauripur Expressway

The board discussed construction of Mauripur Expressway (ME). The chief minister said that the ME was expected to provide a speedy access to Karachi's beaches and it would be completed in two years. "It will bring an end to traffic congestion in the area," he added.

Link road to Korangi

The meeting was informed that the project was 11.5km long to provide speedy access to Korangi Industrial area. It would be completed in two years right from start of the project. The project includes construction of internal roads and a bridge within the city.

Hub water supply

The meeting was told that the Karachi-Hub water supply system consisted of the broad components such as Hub Dam constructed in 1981 with a live storage capacity of 656,000 acre feet.

It was informed that the eight-kilometre main canal was owned and operated by Wapda coming from the Hub Dam.

Head regulator has been installed at the point which the main canal splits into Karachi Hub Canal (going towards Karachi) and Lasbela Canal (going towards district Lasbela in Balochistan); 63.3 per cent of the incoming water is allocated to Karachi Canal while the remaining 36.7pc is supplied to Lasbela.

Karachi Hub Canal is a 22.4km stretch with a capacity of 100MGD from the head regulator to the city being operated by KWSB. The canal stretch has significant erosion and structural failure causing water losses.

There are two pump houses to pump the water from the canal through the rising mains to the filtration plant. The old pump house is not functional and the new one has surpassed its design life.

The meeting was informed that two-km long pipes were taking the water to the filtration plant. The pipes are 38 years old and have not been replaced since. The filtration plant has a treatment capacity of 80MGD and is mostly not functional. It has a solar power plant with a capacity of 6MW.

The policy board approved the project. The provincial government would talk to the Wapda authorities to share the cost.

Lyari sewerage

The meeting was informed that Lyari Sewerage Rehabilitation Project (LSRP) had 14 pumping stations and sewerage systems of various sizes and capacities in Lyari and its adjoining areas to pump sewage against gravity through nullahs and rising mains.

It was informed that all the pumping stations and interconnected sewerage network, including main trunk sewers, sub-main sewers were in extremely dilapidated state, barely functional and in dire need of rehabilitation.

The chief minister said that the sewerage system in Lyari and its adjoining areas needed to be revamped, primarily all the pumping stations, main sewer trunks and risings mains.

LDA scheme

The meeting was informed that the LDA Scheme 42 was established in 1994. The initial development of the project was carried out via funds raised through allotment of plots.

The development of the project decelerated primarily due to shortage of funds and non-mutation of land in LDA's favour. The LDA intends to develop a strategy through the assistance of consultants to revive the entire scheme and develop infrastructure and utility networks under PPP mode.

Nabisar to Vajihar water project

The meeting was told that the provincial government required investment in laying the water infrastructure for IPPs in Thar block-I for generation of 1,650MW of power by constructing a canal from the Farsh regulator to Nabisar for discharge of 200 cusecs water. It was said that out of 200 cusecs, 45 cusecs had to be supplied to IPPs of Thar block-I.

Considering the significant cost of construction and the deadline, the Sindh cabinet decided to undertake this project through PPP mode. A private firm has submitted a proposal for development and operation of the water supply facility.

(By Nwspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 29/01/2021)

The parliament we need

THE Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services is an extremely useful institution created to assist members of parliament in the performance of their august tasks.



Among other things the institute publishes a magazine, *Parliamentary Research Digest*, which offers lawmakers rich material for study and absorption. The latest (December 2020) issue of the journal contains a discussion on the 'IPU's [Inter-Parliamentary Union] best practices on parliament and democracy in the 21st century', that Pakistan's parliamentarians will at least find interesting, notwithstanding the prime minister's confirmation of his contempt for democracy that one had suspected all along.

The IPU defines five features that a modern democratic parliament must possess. Such a parliament should be:

1. Socially and politically representative of diverse people and protect all members, especially minorities and other vulnerable elements of society. Although the authors of the article find the existing arrangements in Pakistan adequate they suggest parliament could be made more inclusive by reserving a small number of seats for farmers, industrial workers, students and people with disabilities;
2. Transparent in the conduct of business and open to the media;
3. Accessible to the people, including civil society, associations and the youth;
4. Accountable (ie its members) to the electorate;
5. Effective when it performs its legislative and oversight functions in accordance with the people's needs and aspirations and keeps in mind a proper comprehension of future generation's needs.

Under each of the five heads, suggestions are given for improvement in parliament's performance. In the discussion on accountability, data on the total number of questions asked on federal subjects in the Senate and the National Assembly during the 2019-2020 parliamentary year has been given. As regards effectiveness of parliament, it is suggested that the most satisfactory indicator could be the finding that its legislative and oversight functions serve the needs of the entire population.

Most of the suggestions offered to make parliament more effective should receive wide support from discerning sections of society. The first requirement for making parliament effective is to protect by law its authority against encroachment by the executive. No branch of administration should be outside the oversight powers of parliament. In some imperfect democracies, security matters are not debated in parliament which is quite dangerous. Security issues touch on the very survival of the state and exempting them from informed discussion in parliament can lead to disastrous consequences. But all this appears to be discussion for the sake of discussion, quite unrelated to the reality on the ground. As things stand today, an overly ambitious executive wants parliament to rubber-stamp its rule by whim and caprice.

In underdeveloped democracies, especially those wrestling with fears of collapse or demise, genuine or imagined, security concerns are not shared with parliamentarians while the very nature of such matters demands the fullest possible discussion with a view to working out strategies based on consensus. This is especially necessary in matters touching on issues of war and peace. The more underdeveloped a country is, the greater will be its need to proceed on the strength of the people's unity that can only be forged through unfettered discourse.

To be able to overcome the tendency among strong and arrogant executives to use parliament to rubber-stamp their initiatives, parliaments will need to enjoy the confidence of the people, something that can only be achieved through a strong tradition of governance by consultation and consent.

However, the kind of parliament the people of Pakistan need and deserve cannot be created without free and fair elections and that is a dream yet to be realised. Manipulations by a powerful elite apart, the system of election as it has been streamlined over the past many decades offers little scope for genuine representatives of the masses to get past the winning post, except for situations of extraordinary awakening among the people witnessed during the elections in the 1940s and in 1970.

The entire edifice of representative government in Pakistan has been raised on shifting sands and there is little evidence of efforts to go beyond cosmetic changes in electoral procedures that the ruling elite, to which all parties in power and in opposition have belonged, will allow.

The discussion in the journal concludes on a plea that parliamentary institutions at national and provincial levels ensure comprehensive application of legislation and scrutiny in such a manner that no part of government escapes assessment. But this sounds like yearning for a revolutionary change without any possibility of a revolution.

Democracy has little chance of taking root in a society riven by inequalities of the kind prevailing in Pakistan. All those who wish to see Pakistan acceding to a democratic dispensation must begin by demolishing divisions in society caused by structured social and political inequalities. At the moment, one can only hope that the people of Pakistan will discover their inherent strength to reorder their social and political structures on the pillars of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The possibilities for such a development are, unfortunately, not in sight. Indeed, Pakistan seems to be hurtling along in a direction opposite to the goal of a truly democratic dispensation. A meaningful start towards rebuilding Pakistan will be possible only after the state can be cured of its infatuation with a regressive outlook and concentration of power at the centre. And this in a state that is supposed to be a federation.

In view of an overbearing executive's insatiable lust for power the chances of Pakistan's acceptance of the supremacy of parliament are none too bright. As time passes and Pakistan continues to rely on distorted institutions of democracy, the task of reviving a genuinely democratic dispensation will become harder and harder. One wonders as to what will persuade the custodians of power to discard governance with executive's fiat and revert to governance with the people's consent.

(By I.A Rehman Dawn, 06, 04/02/2021)

CJP disposes of case as PM denies giving legislators uplift funds

Prime Minister Imran Khan denied before the Supreme Court on Thursday that Rs500 million public funds were distributed among the parliamentarians and said no money would be given to the legislators for carrying out any development scheme.

But Justice Qazi Faez Isa, a member of the five-judge special bench, questioned the assurance by presenting a Whatsapp message he had received from an unknown source on Wednesday. The message contained supporting documents showing doling out of massive amounts recently for building roads by the Pak-PWD department in the constituency NA-65 that belongs to an important coalition partner.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed however disposed of the matter with an observation that there had been a contest between a judge and the prime minister.

"The divergent opinions and the sharp divide among the judges were in display in the Courtroom No 1 today," observed a senior counsel who witnessed the episode.

The bench had taken up a case relating to the distribution of Rs500m uplift funds among the legislators.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Umar Ata Bandial, also a member of the bench, asked Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Jawed Khan whether he had considered that the prime minister was ever answerable in his personal capacity.

"Why don't you raise the question of protection available to the prime minister," Justice Bandial asked the AGP. He said that the court could go against the prime minister if he was answerable since the government spoke through (departmental) secretaries.

"Don't cause us to do illegal and unconstitutional things," Justice Bandial emphasised.

The AGP conceded that this was a matter of jurisdiction and the constitution and he would object to that.

"What are you objecting to, whether the constitution or the Feb 3 court orders," Justice Isa inquired. "Both," the AGP replied.

"I don't understand," Justice Isa said, adding that the AGP should have raised objection at the last hearing on Feb 10. The AGP replied that constitutional objection could be raised any time.

Justice Mushir Alam, another member of the bench, asked the AGP to read out the statement he was required to do under the Feb 10 court orders, which he did and the chief justice observed that it was a comprehensive reply.

Then Justice Isa referred to the Whatsapp message and wondered whether it was not a favour on behalf of the government through disbursement of public money or was it a mere coincidence that NA-65 was represented by an important coalition partner.

"We are not enemies but we are only trying to follow the constitution and want to ensure that corrupt practices are guarded against," Justice Isa observed and spoke about a barrage of tweets against him.

"Please be reminded that we are guided by the constitution which requires the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure that no corrupt practice takes place, especially at a time when Senate elections are round the corner," Justice Isa observed.

Was this not in the knowledge of the prime minister, he observed, adding that they (the judges) knew that the prime minister was protected under Article 248 of the Constitution but there was a difference between his political matters and official acts.

Justice Isa said that the court had not summoned the prime minister when in the past prime ministers and chief ministers had been summoned by the apex court.

"The nation wants to know whether it is the job of the prime minister to distribute envelopes as he did in the small gatherings recently," Justice Isa said, adding that there was concern among the people about his (PM's) recent statement that five-year term was a short period (for a government). "We only want compliance with the constitution and it is not a matter between A and B."

The chief justice however observed that the court did not control the prime minister office and that he (PM) had already denied the media reports.

When Additional Advocate General of Punjab Qasim Ali Nawaz Chowhan assured the court that no public funds were being distributed among the lawmakers, Justice Isa asked whether the document, which he had provided to him and the judges, looked genuine or not.

The AGP came to the rescue of Mr Chowhan by saying that it was a genuine complaint and it needed to be examined since a judge was the complainant.

Justice Isa responded that he was only drawing attention by asking whether the document was genuine or not.

"No, no, this is a complaint because it is your Whatsapp message," the AGP replied but the chief justice immediately intervened to dispose of the case.

Earlier, the AGP read out the statements of the prime minister and Finance Secretary Kamran Ali Afzal and assured the court on behalf of the latter that the finance division had not allocated or given funds to any legislator, nor it intended to do so.

"There is no such provision in the public finance management system [for this]," Mr Afzal said. "Moreover, the finance division has also not received any directive or request from any quarter to allocate these funds or any other funds for any specific project or any project identified by a legislator or any other person."

(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 12/02/2021)

SHC seeks arguments on plea's maintainability

The Sindh High Court sought on Thursday arguments from the petitioners on the maintainability of a plea pertaining to the closure of Burnes Road and surrounding streets for vehicles following the pedestrianisation of the former.

In a recent development, as part of the restoration and renovation of the two-way street, vehicles have been banned from entering the site after 7pm.

A resident living in the vicinity of Burnes Road filed the plea challenging the move in the SHC.

The counsel for the petitioner contended before the court that the closure of Burns Road for traffic in the evening had made the lives of the residents "miserable", and moved the court to direct the relevant authorities to keep the food street open for vehicles throughout the day.

"But similar food streets abound in Lahore, and here, it is where [at Burns Road] poor people can dine out. Should we put a stop to this?" the court remarked.

In turn, the counsel told the court that residents were not able to ride their motorcycles to their homes after 6pm.

"There are around eight to 10 eateries on the street. Why punish 50,000 residents [for their sake]?" he argued.

At this, the court stated that if the residents were facing troubles due to the pedestrianisation of the street, all of them may submit affidavits, stating the same.

Then, seeking arguments on the maintainability of the plea from the counsel, the court adjourned the hearing.

Notice issued

Separately, the court issued a notice to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in a plea calling for a public in Malir's PS-88 constituency on February 16, when a by-poll would be held there.

The counsel for the petitioner maintained before the court that the ECP was obliged to declare February 16 a public holiday in the constituency.

He said many residents from the constituency had to go out of town for work daily, and if a public holiday was not declared on the day, a large fraction of voters would not be able to cast votes in the by-poll.

The counsel further informed the court that a letter in that regard had been written to the ECP, but no "satisfactory" reply was received.

At this, the court issued a notice to the ECP and sought replies from the respondents on February 15.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 12/02/2021)

PTI blames PPP for civic bodies' woes in Karachi

In a thinly veiled criticism directed at the Pakistan Peoples Party government in Sindh for 'intentionally neglecting' municipal bodies in the country's commercial capital, senior figures of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf said on Sunday that the federal government was working beyond its constitutional responsibility since it understood the importance of Karachi in national development.

The criticism came from federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi at a programme held to hand over recently imported fire tenders to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and other organisations.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Umar said it was highly regrettable that the municipal corporation of a city like Karachi, which contributed more than 40 per cent taxes to the exchequer and over 90pc taxes to Sindh, did not have fire tenders and not even money to arrange diesel to run the fire tenders.

He said that when the federal government decided to work with the Sindh government on the Rs1.1 trillion Karachi Transformation Package, it had asked the latter to return the civic bodies like water and sewerage board and building control authority that it had "provincialised" to Karachi. However, the Sindh government had so far not implemented it, he regretted.

Addressing the maritime affairs minister who was in the audience, Mr Umar said he often thought what would be the fate of these civic organisations, if returned to KMC, as the civic agency didn't have money to even pay salaries and arrange fuel for fire tenders.

Sindh governor hands over 50 fire tenders to KMC, other organisations

He said there was a need to own Karachi and whoever was responsible, whether the Sindh government or the Centre, must fulfil his responsibility towards this city. "Karachi is not an ordinary city...it is the city which provides resources to Pakistan. It has not been given its rights so the federal government is fulfilling its moral responsibility by trying to address legitimate grievances of Karachi, although it is the constitutional responsibility of the province," he said.

He said Prime Minister Imran Khan was himself monitoring the situation as he wanted to come up to the expectations of the people of Karachi.

Talking about different federal-funded development projects, he said a consultant had been appointed for the revival of Karachi Circular Railway while the prototype for a bus for the Green Line bus rapid transit project would be completed by March and delivery of the buses would begin from June. He expressed the hope that Green Line would start functioning by July-August.

About the much-delayed K-IV water supply project, Mr Umar said the federal government was told that the project would be completed by October 2023. "This timeline is not acceptable for us. A meeting has been called for finalising a revised schedule," he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Ismail also regretted that the Sindh government had taken over important functions of the local government. In a veiled reference to the toothless local government system in Sindh, he said the mayor of the city lacked powers, resources and funds. He also expressed concern over the situation of garbage collection in Karachi.

He said the fire tenders were a gift from the prime minister and these were equipped with latest technology, which could work more efficiently and effectively to put out fires. He said the new fire tenders would make the fire brigade department more efficient.

Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi, former Karachi mayor Wasim Akhtar of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan and Karachi Administrator Laiq Ahmed also spoke.

The Sindh governor handed over 24 fire tenders to the KMC and 26 to different bodies, organisations and NGOs, including the Export Processing Zone Authority, Bin Qasim Industry Park, Saylani Welfare Trust and Pakistan Rangers.
(By Azfar-ul-Ashfaq Dawn, 01, 15/02/2021)

Cabinet okays 25pc raise for federal employees

The cabinet on Wednesday gave a relief of Rs21 billion to the federal secretariat employees by approving a 25 per cent increase in their salaries, urging provinces to end wage disparity between their civil servants and those of the Centre.

The cabinet meeting, which was presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan, also expressed concern over the longstanding issue of missing persons and directed the authorities concerned to make prompt legislation in the parliament to ensure that there was no missing person in the present government.

PM Khan expressed his displeasure over the 'increasing' cases of sexual violence against women and children, and directed that the recently enacted laws be effectively implemented.

The cabinet also discussed the forthcoming Senate polls scheduled for March 3.

It gave credit to the present government for taking serious steps to close the door on horse-trading by promulgating an ordinance to hold Senate elections through open vote.

The cabinet approved the 25pc increase in salaries of the secretariat employees (disparity allowance) following their recent protest outside the Parliament House.

Speaking at a press conference after the cabinet meeting, Information Minister Shibli Faraz said the government had opted for the increase in basic pay of its employees.

"There are some fundamental structural issues; certain clauses of the 18th Amendment also need to be looked into. The government employees in the provincial departments get more salary and those in the federal institutions get less. As a result, they (federal employees) want to go to the provinces while those in the provinces do not want to join here (in Islamabad)," he added.

A source told *Dawn* that many cabinet members opposed the decision to increase salaries of the federal secretariat by 25pc.

"They were of the view that if the government comes under pressure once and raises salaries in such a way, some other group will rise tomorrow with a similar demand," the source added.

The meeting was informed that the government will bear an additional Rs21 billion burden annually by making the 25pc increase in the basic salaries of employees from grades 1 to 19.

Missing persons

Another source said Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed his concern on the issue of missing persons and informed the cabinet that some intelligence agencies sought amendments to specific laws in order to address the issue effectively.

At this, Law Minister Farogh Naseem expressed his dissatisfaction. However, Human Rights Minister Dr Shireen Mazari informed the prime minister that a proposed bill to stop disappearance of people was lying with the law ministry for over two years but nothing was being done on it.

The prime minister intervened and asked all stakeholders to sit together and proposed a consensus bill for necessary amendments to the relevant laws.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan directed the law minister to immediately reactivate the bill on the issue of missing persons as now, after drastic fall in terrorist acts, the issue ought to be redressed," Shibli Faraz said.

He said the issue was raised in the cabinet by Dr Mazari, who gave a complete perspective with regard to the proposed legislation.

"The prime minister recalled that he himself had visited such sit-ins for missing persons to show solidarity with them. The minister pointed out that almost every country faced security issues but there had to be a mechanism like three months, six months or nine months," he added.

Senate elections

Asked about the nomination of Federal Minister Faisal Vawda, who was facing a disqualification case in the Election Commission, the minister said the matter was yet to be decided but the party leadership decided to give him representation in the Senate.

During the cabinet meeting, the prime minister pointed out that after the 1970 election, there had always been objections about the electoral process.

The minister recalled that electoral reforms were carried out in 2017 but the committee headed by Ishaq Dar ignored the issue of electronic voting.

"We want the forthcoming Senate elections and others after it to be transparent and impartial," he said, adding that the overseas Pakistanis were rendering great services for Pakistan and sending substantial remittances.

In the next elections, he said the overseas Pakistanis would be given the opportunity of electronic voting so that they could have a voice and participate in the country's polling process.

Sexual crimes

Shibli Faraz said the prime minister took strict notice of the increasing incidents of sexual crimes against women and children despite the passage of Zainab Alert Bill, and issued a direction to the relevant authorities to take measures to stop such incidents.

The minister said the inheritance bill had been passed by the parliament which was meant to protect the legal rights of women and to get succession certificate.

"Now the system has been revamped and the heirs of a deceased person can get a succession certificate in 15 days," he added.

Mr Faraz said the opposition just resorted to rhetoric instead of forming a committee like the PTI and finding out who had crossed the party line.

PTI had sent 20 of its MPAs home for violating party discipline, he said, asking why the opposition did not do so.

About high prices of essential commodities, the minister linked them to various factors.

"When PTI formed government, there was no governance and there was a huge gap between revenue and expenditure, and then coronavirus surfaced," Mr Faraz said.

He cited statistics to show that the expenditure of the Prime Minister Office and the Prime Minister House had reduced massively while Prime Minister Imran Khan did not have a single camp office.

On the other hand, during the past 10 years of PPP and PML-N governments, there were several camps, which incurred costs amounting to billions of rupees with thousands of policemen deployed for security.

The information minister said the Prime Minister House and Prime Minister Office's expenditure, which stood at Rs509 million and Rs514 million in 2018, respectively, fell to Rs339m and Rs305m, respectively, the next year and then reduced further to Rs280m and Rs334m.

He said these austerity steps showed that when the country and its people were passing through difficult times, their prime minister understood it.

(By Syed Irfan Raza Dawn, 01, 18/02/2021)

Ban on corporal punishment

Over decades, Pakistan has created a labyrinth of laws and acts, hard to traverse and harder to deconstruct. This maze, replete with nuanced contradictions, is held together by an outdated and archaic foundation. It still stands owing to patchworks and amendments made here and there by a sincere few.

In this regard, Shehzad Roy and his Zindagi Trust, along with officials concerned, have achieved a rather historic feat. After years of campaigning relentlessly against corporal punishment, a violent practice that is rampant in schools and madrassas all over the country, the musician and social worker finally convinced the National Assembly to pass the ICT Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill, which primarily addresses the PPC Section 89 loophole by effectively banning all forms of corporal punishment "however light" regardless of reasoning. Roy's tenacity towards a just cause should serve as an impetus for change and urge all to stand up against such inhumane practices. The musician has also effectively highlighted the need to re-evaluate existing rights laws owing to faults and cracks in its overall construction — an initiative that the government must consider.

While the first step has finally been taken, it is of paramount importance for provincial assemblies to follow suit. Apart from Sindh, no other province has formulated laws that protect children from corporal punishment and violence, the trauma of which lingers on till adulthood. Even though a major hurdle has been surpassed, there is an even bigger one waiting ahead — implementation. Not only is there a need to streamline a system whereby complaints are entertained and violators convicted, it is equally important to rid society of its violent and toxic mindset through awareness and education. Wellness and psycho-therapy should be included in the legal process and camps set up for children who have been violated or abused, at home or in school. The bitter truth is that cases of child abuse are increasingly surfacing especially during the pandemic. Therefore, there is no room for complacency.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 25/02/2021)

'Grand projects preferred over Karachi's needs'

'Grand projects preferred over Karachi's needs' The authorities have seemingly been prioritising grandiose projects over Karachi's needs, decried speakers on Saturday at a seminar focusing on 'The Priorities and Solution to the Festering Civic Problems of Karachi', organised by the Karachi Citizens Forum.

Urban planners Arif Hasan and Farhan Anwar, former Karachi mayor Fahimuz Zaman, economist Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Abdul Ghafoor Shoro of the KCF were among the panelists who spoke on the occasion.

During the session, it was highlighted that several promises were made and projects were announced over the past decade to make Karachi a smart city and the "envy of South Asia."

However, the speakers lamented, in the last few years, Karachi has been degraded to the status of one of the least livable and most polluted cities in the world.

Referring to the 1.13 trillion Karachi Transformation Plan announced last year when rains and floods devastated the metropolis, the panelists called to mind that the package was announced to permanently solve Karachi's problems within three years.

It was announced that under the package, the National Disaster Management Authority would clean nullahs, the Sindh government would resettle persons displaced as a consequence of anti-encroachment drives, the city's sewerage and solid waste management system would undergo an overhaul and transport facilities and infrastructure would be developed, they recalled.

But little progress has been made on these fronts, while the Sindh and federal government remain engaged in a "game of political one-upmanship," according to the speakers.

They criticised the authorities, particularly Sindh government, for prioritising mega projects like expressways, flyovers and neighbourhood improvement schemes, aimed at giving Karachi a "facelift", over fulfilling the city's needs.

The panellists noted that road projects had been completed at a "dizzying speed", without any consideration for the needs and demands of the public.

They were of the view that many of the projects seemed to be designed for the privileged few, depriving scores of basic necessities. Instead of rebuilding Karachi, the provincial and federal governments have shown interest in grandiose schemes, such as islands and beach resorts, they decried.

The example of Lyari Expressway was cited in particular in this regard.

It was built at a humungous cost and at the price of "human suffering", but failed to relieve the city of the traffic problem, they pointed out.

The speakers also listed Peoples Square, Bagh Ibne Qasim and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Park as projects that were more of a grandiose than contributing to resolving the metropolis' issues.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 07/03/2021)

Audit report accuses Sindh govt of committing Rs9.2bn 'fraud'

The director general of Sindh Audit, Miandad Rahoojo, on Tuesday called on Governor Imran Ismail and presented him the audit report of the provincial departments for the year 2020-21 and the special audit report of the provincial ombudsman from 2008-9 to 2018-19.

According to official sources, the audit chief informed the governor that out of total Rs289 billion annual development programme (ADP) for FY 2020-21, the Sindh government only utilized around Rs90bn, which is the 'lowest' in the last three years.

Similarly, out of total planned budget of Rs1.3 trillion, the provincial government had so far utilized over Rs894bn ie around 68 per cent.

Over Rs9.2bn misappropriations/fraud

According to the audit report, the Sindh government had allegedly committed over Rs9,242 million fraud, embezzlement and misappropriation during the said period.

Regarding alleged irregularities in different segments, the report said the Sindh government committed over Rs5,270m HR/employees-related irregularities, over Rs41,985m related to procurements, over Rs1,726m irregularities related to management of accounts with commercial banks, over Rs315m irregularities pertaining to service delivery and over Rs122m other irregularities.

The provincial govt has so far utilised Rs90bn out of total Rs289bn ADP allocations during 2020-21

The audit report accused the Sindh government of failing to provide record of billions of rupees for scrutiny.

"The analysis of observations pertaining to government of Sindh revealed that major cases under observation [out of 2,786 formations under 40 Principal Accounts Officers, only 27pc formations were selected for audit scrutiny] were due to non-compliance of SPPRA rules, improper deduction of govt taxes at applicable rates, non-compliance of govt rules and instructions while dealing with HR matters and govt formations' resistance to audit in terms of non-provision of auditable record, which indicates government's poor commitment towards transparency in public spending," read the official papers reviewed by Dawn.

The audit also found issues relating to year-end budget releases resulting into "rush of expenditure in the end of June causing multiple deviations from compliance of rules".

"Departure from the procedures resulted in non-transparent, un-economical expenditure due to violations of SPPRA rules and blockage of govt funds due to unjustified and irregular advance payments to avoid lapse of funds," said the audit report.

The report also detected "weak internal controls and poor financial management practices prevailing within the Sindh government".

It recommended serious efforts to increase revenues and widen the provincial tax base and compliance of rules while spending public money and making fresh appointments.

The audit also called for revisiting budgetary requirements by the Principal Accounts Officers on realistic grounds "in order to avoid unnecessary savings causing blockage of government funds".

It also suggested timely release of funds coupled with adherence to laws and rules concerned as it would result in "economical cost of development projects besides timely completion".

Irregularities found in ombudsman's special audit

The special audit of the Sindh Ombudsman (from 2008-9 to 2018-19) showed alleged serious violations of laws and rules in recruitments and other matters.

The audit accused that six advisers and as many consultants were appointed "without advertisement and eligibility criteria and pointed out the irregular appointment of a consultant, Firoze Khan, as director general-finance since 2013-14 without due process".

Besides, it said 16 regional directors were appointed without giving any ads and following due process. "Some of the regional directors are working since 2006 on a contract basis," said the audit report.

The audit report also revealed irregular appointment of six individuals without ads and selection criteria, irregular appointment of 60-plus security interns, irregular appointment of 235 non-gazetted employees without ads and sanctioned strength, irregular increase in pay packages of contractual employees in violation of the finance department notifications and irregular payment of honorarium to contract employees.

It also detected irregular payment of foreign TA-DA during leave period, irregular payments from DDO account worth Rs155.189m and irregular expenditure on repair and maintenance of private residence of the ombudsman.

Audit necessary for transparency: governor

Meanwhile, an official statement said that the governor during his meeting with the DG-Audit observed that effective management of audit was essential to maintain transparency in government agencies and projects.

"Corruption can be curbed by identifying waste and misappropriation of public funds," he added.

He said that computerisation of the system of salaries of employees and pensions and other dues of retired employees was a 'good step'.

Mr Ismail believed that timely action on the irregularities identified during the audit could make the performance of the institutions more efficient while the system of auditing public funds could be made more effective.

Separately, DG-Audit (Local Govt) Qadir Bakhsh Baloch called on the governor and presented him the audit report of the LG department for 2020-21.

The governor observed that the government could provide immediate relief to the people through the LG department as public health and hygiene matters were being carried out by the department.

He said the audit process should be conducted "without any discrimination and pressure" as timely detection of any defect was tantamount to protection from any major loss.

He believed that the audit department was of key importance for eradication of corruption in the province and there was a need to make it more active.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 15, 10/03/2021)

Murad says Sindh govt ready to hold LG polls in province after delimitation

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said his government was ready to hold local government elections in the province, but constituencies were to be delimited after the approval of 2017 census.

"The Council of Common Interests (CCI) has to decide about Census 2017, but I have heard that the PTI government, on the demand of their coalition partners [MQM], has decided to conduct the census afresh in 2023," he added.

The chief minister said this while talking to the media along with Sindh Governor Imran Ismail at Mazar-i-Quaid.

To a question, the chief minister said that according to the Constitution, delimitation of constituencies were to be held after every census.

Rejects rumours about differences between him and the governor

Replying to a question, Mr Shah said that an ordinance under which twin islands off Karachi's coast were taken over by the federal government had lapsed and now the issue was "over".

To another question about the administrative control of three hospitals of Karachi — Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and National Institute of Child Health — he said that he had discussed the issue with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the presence of the Sindh governor at Governor House.

"The prime minister was of the view that the provincial government was capable enough to run these hospitals efficiently and had also admitted that the federal government could not control them [hospitals] from Islamabad," he said.

The chief minister requested the federal government to withdraw its decision of running these three hospitals through the Boards of Governors and let the provincial government continue their administrative control.

As for the protest of headmasters who had passed a test conducted by the IBA-Sukkur, he said that the courts had decided that the regularisation of headmasters would be made through the Sindh Public Service Commission.

But sorry to say, neither these headmasters are appearing in the commission exams nor going back to their schools," he said, adding that their contract was extended by the provincial cabinet.

He urged the headmasters to stop protests and appear before the commission for their regularisation.

Centre's rotation policy termed unilateral

Replying to a question about the rotation (transfer/posting) policy of the federal government, the CM said that there was an agreement between the federal and the provincial governments about transfer/posting of federal officers in the province.

He said that mutual understanding between the federal and the provincial governments was mandatory for posting or transfer of a federal officer in or from the province under that agreement.

"This unilateral rotation policy initiated by the federal government to call the services of some of the PSP and DMG officers back to the federal government would create shortage of officers in Sindh," he said.

To a question about the provincial government's coordination with the federal government, Mr Shah said some development issues had cropped up in the city, therefore a coordination committee was constituted which was doing its work properly.

He brushed aside the impression that there were differences between him and the governor. "We meet over a cup of tea off and on, but we do not release the news in the media," he said with the governor endorsing it.

Paying rich tribute to Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mr Shah said that it was the vision of the Father of the Nation that he announced equal rights for the minorities just after creation of Pakistan.

"Our minorities enjoy equal rights and opportunities in the country, whereas minorities in India are being suppressed," he said.

He also talked about atrocities against people of Kashmir and Palestine and expressed solidarity with them.

Earlier, the chief minister along with the governor laid floral wreath on the mazar and offered fateha.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 24/03/2021)

Finance minister's removal

THE abrupt ouster of Hafeez Sheikh as the ruling PTI's finance minister has triggered a greater level of uncertainty about the economic governance of the country. On Monday, Prime Minister Imran Khan relieved Mr Sheikh of his responsibilities and handed them over to Industries Minister Hammad Azhar. Mr Sheikh had been skating on thin ice ever since his shock defeat at the hands of the opposition candidate Yousuf Raza Gilani in the Senate elections.

This election, as it turned out, was a do-or-die one for Mr Sheikh. As adviser on finance, he had been barred by the decision of the Islamabad High Court to chair important forums such as the National Finance Commission and the Economic Coordination Committee. The court in its decision had declared that unelected advisers could not perform executive functions and head ministries. To bypass this restriction, the government had made Mr Sheikh a minister through an ordinance. However, the ordinance was set to lapse in June, which meant that either he had to get elected before that, or pack his bags. The government considered finding another way to get him into the Senate but, as is clear from his sacking, it decided it was not worth the cost. For PTI, the liabilities that Mr Sheikh now carried outweighed the assets he had brought to the job.

The government's decision to replace him could have been explained quite reasonably. It was, therefore, strange, and a bit unfortunate, that it decided to — rather ungraciously — throw Mr Sheikh under the bus. Government spokespersons were tutored to say that Mr Sheikh had been sent packing because he could not control the spiralling inflation in the country. Had this been the case, the government would not have cashed its chips in a bid to get him elected. If Mr Sheikh won, it is reasonable to expect that he would have stayed on in the job regardless of the inflation rate. Hafeez Sheikh deserved a better send-off than the one he was given.

That said, Hammad Azhar is not a surprise choice. He has performed well in his responsibilities over the last two years and won praise from the prime minister. He has also displayed a fairly good understanding of the subject and brings with him the political heft of an elected politician. It would be interesting to see whether he is provided a good team to repair the economy before the next general elections. The cabinet reshuffle that appears to be in the offing will indicate the priorities of the prime minister for the rest of his term. If the reshuffle is confined to replacing one tried and tested person with another, it may not inspire too much confidence. However if the prime minister brings in a radical change by ushering in fresh blood, it could mean that he is prepared to come out of his crease for the final overs.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 31/03/2021)

Federal govt considering 70 uplift projects for Sindh in budget 2021-22

The federal government will consider 70 new projects for Sindh in next year's budget 2021-22 for uplift of social sectors and development of infrastructure, especially in the interior of the province.

The projects would be considered in energy, water resources, infrastructure, health, education, higher education and information technology sectors in Sindh, said a meeting chaired by Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar.

It said that in the power sector, Hesco and Sepco would be upgraded, 10 new grid stations would be built in Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas,

Kotri, Tando Allahyar and Ghotki, and transmission lines would be converted into double circuit in Umerkot, Mithi and Islamkot.

Upgrade of railway stations, power sector in province being considered

It said that 1,490km gas pipeline infrastructure would also be upgraded and 180 villages would be provided gas under a five-km gasification plan. Sukkur and Hyderabad airport cargo service would be expanded and Sindh coastal area would be provided modern facilities through National Disaster Risk Management Fund for tsunami and earthquake protection, it said.

The meeting proposed setting up Nadra facilitation centres in 30 talukas of the province and upgrading passport offices in 16 districts. A new programme for encouraging youngsters in sports had also been proposed, it said.

The meeting said that ministry of railways had informed that major railway stations like Hyderabad, Nawabshah and Rohri would be upgraded under public-private partnership. The meeting briefed the federal minister about the plans to improve internet and telecom infrastructure in 12 districts of Sindh.

The federal minister directed the meeting to use modern technology in new projects and instructed officers concerned to upgrade 66kV grid station to 132kV so that better electricity service was provided to consumers.

He asked the officers concerned to complete the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway (M-6) project as soon as possible under public-private partnership. The first priority of Prime Minister Imran Khan was to provide modern facilities to backward areas and raise living standard of people, he said.

Meeting on CPEC projects

The minister met the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) vice president Sun Yaoguo and his delegation to review the Rashakai Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and CRBC's mega-project Karachi Coastal Comprehensive Development Zone here on Friday.

Mr Yaoguo said that the development work on Rashakai SEZ was being carried out at a fast pace and assured the minister that the timelines for the projects would be met. He highlighted that external marketing of the SEZ to local and foreign investors was crucial for its full operationalisation.

He said the company would carry out the marketing campaign for the SEZ and was keen to work with BOI in this regard.

Mr Umar said that industrial cooperation was the need of CPEC and the government was keen to see early completion of the project. The ministry of energy had already expedited work on supply of electricity and gas to the SEZ and BOI would fully cooperate with CRBC for effective marketing of the SEZ, he said.

He said that it was the first time in Pakistan that a foreign developer would be marketing an industrial zone and hoped that CRBC would be able to attract substantial investment to the SEZ from Chinese investors.

He said that the Karachi Coastal Development Project was an important project and the federal cabinet had approved the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in this regard. It would give a boost to business and technology sectors and provide employment opportunities to people, he said.

(By Mubarak Zeb Khan Dawn, 14, 03/04/2021)

Murad says Sindh's share in national resources reduced due to 'faulty' census

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Wednesday said that the faulty census of 2017 had shown 47.8 million population of the province but a Unicef survey suggested that the population of Sindh stood at 61.04m.

"If the population of the province is counted at 61.04 million, the share of the province in the national resources will go up from about 24 per cent to 29pc," he added.

Speaking at a press conference here at CM House, Mr Shah said that the 2017 census was conducted after 19 years of the 1998 census, but it became controversial as soon as its provisional results were declared during the tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government.

"Almost all the chief ministers, including the Punjab CM had criticised its results," he said, adding that the 2018 election was held under the provisional results of the 2017 census for which the PML-N government had taken all the parties, including the Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on board.

According to 2017 census, on average 5.64 persons live in a household in Sindh compared to KP's 8.03 persons per household

Mr Shah said that the Council of Common Interests (CCI) decided that one per cent of census blocks would be verified. A similar suggestion had also been given from the Senate and the senators had also prepared a document but the federal government in the CCI had vowed to verify five per cent of the census blocks.

He said that on May 27, 2018 the Statistics Division informed the CCI that they could not verify five per cent of the blocks.

The chief minister disclosed that in the 2017 census it was said that Sindh had total 8,478,047 households with 5.64 persons per house that constituted a population of 47,854,510.

"As per the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey undertaken by all the provincial governments in coordination with Unicef the average household for Sindh is 7.2 persons per household," he said.

He added that based on the Unicef survey the total population of Sindh would come to 61,041,938 as opposed to 47,854,510 shown in the 2017 census.

Mr Shah said that the 2017 census said that the number of a household in KP was 8.03 persons and it had a total of 3,801,046 households, therefore, its population came to 30,508,920.

He said that as per the Unicef survey KP had 7.6 persons per household, therefore, its population would be 28,887,950.

He said that Punjab had 16,999,685 households with 6.47 persons per household and their population as per the census stood to 109,989,655, whereas the Unicef survey said it had 6.3 persons per household, meaning its population would be 107,098,016.

He said that the census said that Balochistan had 1,745,994 households with 7.06 persons living in a household and its population came to 12,335,129, whereas the Unicef survey said it had 7.7 persons per household and it meant the population of Balochistan would be 13,444,154.

Aggravating Covid-19 situation

Mr Shah said that the Covid-19 situation was aggravating and he had proposed to the federal government to ban interprovincial transport for at least two weeks so that the spread of the virus could be contained.

He said the situation could have been better if the government banned all modes of transportation.

The CM said that he was told that the new virus, UK variant, was brought here by the people who travelled from England to Pakistan.

"The federal government should have made screening and other arrangements at the airports, but this was not done," he said, adding that as a result the virus spread almost all over the country and now the British government had put Pakistan on its travel ban list.

Mr Shah said that the British government had vaccinated over 50pc of its population but hardly 0.5pc population was vaccinated in Pakistan.

He urged the federal government to make necessary arrangements for mass vaccination.

Talking about the protests staged by the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) in Sindh, the CM said that sit-ins were staged at 26 places and 24 of them had been cleared.

He said that five people were killed and 18 wounded, including 12 policemen, in the protests across Sindh. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 15/04/2021)

Govt body materialises without legal framework

Usually shy of performance and often late to the scene, the provincial bureaucracy, acting against script, appears to have granted a law more efficiency than ever merited. In that, a local government department that recently vaulted to announcing a new provincial authority on urban planning, appears to have missed all legal provisions needed for its groundwork.

As the story goes, certain local government officers of Hyderabad, through an official advertisement, had declared themselves representatives of the Sindh Master Plan Authority (SMPA). It was communicated to the general public, that they were to contact the new-found body before advertising their housing schemes or booking plots in any existing housing scheme within the province. The government advertisement, which was issued on March 17, had also warned the masses about several housing schemes operating illegally in various corners of Sindh, without approval of SMA's Department of Town Planning. As an icing on top of the peculiar notice, it also featured cellphone numbers of three local government officials, in addition to a landline number traced to Hyderabad.

When The Express Tribune rang one of the said phone numbers, the receiver, who introduced himself with the name Asghar Ali Shah, revealed that he was the assistant director of the Sindh Master Plan Authority. Addressing the body's purpose, he said that it deals with private housing schemes being run in districts other than Karachi and Hyderabad. "We will not touch housing schemes of Karachi and Hyderabad as they are looked after by different development authorities, who already attend to whatever master planning issues that stem there. Our work is entirely focused on other districts," he further elucidated.

Where the newly advertised authority seems to be fast on its track to enforcing laws, The Express Tribune, couldn't find any evidence to validate the presence of an official body called Sindh Master Plan Authority, within the province. However still, the formation of such an authority was touted by the local government department last year, but it could never be materialised owing to various undisclosed reasons. Which further reveals that neither has the Sindh Assembly has passed any law, nor has the provincial government formed any bylaws to support the Sindh Masterplan Authority. Thereby, leaving the department to operate in complete ambiguity, without any legal framework.

Sindh Local Government Department Master Plan Director Rafiq Ahmed Khan, corroborating SMPA's dubiety, revealed that he had no knowledge of any advertisement touting such a department. Speaking further, he also categorically denied any such government organisation functioning within the province. "It is Town Planning Department in Hyderabad that will be merged into the proposed authority whenever it is that it will be established. A draft law pertaining to proposed establishment of the authority is still pending at the Sindh Law Department for formal approval. We are working as officers of the Town Planning, Local government department," he informed.

Authority in theory

Per sources, the delay in formation of SMPA stems from its overriding effects on existing development authorities of the province, such as Sindh Building Control Authority, Karachi Development Authority, Hyderabad Development Authority and Lyari Development Authority.

According to the draft of the proposed provincial level authority, the provisions of master planning and town planning of all development authorities were to be repealed after promulgation of Sindh Master Plan Authority. The draft proposed further that provincial level authority will be responsible for development and improvement in the province, acquisition of land for housing schemes, rehabilitation of unplanned areas, re-housing and rehabilitation of displaced persons. While all the private and public institutions responsible for human settlement, spatial planning and use of land will come under domain of the proposed authority and a governing body will run affairs of the authority, with the inclusion of a chairperson, a director general and 11 members.

(By Razzak Abro The Express Tribune, 04, 15/04/2021)

Murad approves Rs17.7bn for snorkels, fire tenders, refuse trucks

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah approved on Tuesday Rs17.7 billion to buy eight snorkels, fire tenders, refuse trucks, tractors and trolleys for Sindh's local bodies.

He took this decision while presiding over a meeting here at CM House. The meeting was attended by Local Government Minister Nasir Husain Shah and relevant officials.

The local government department presented a proposal to purchase eight snorkels for extinguishing fires in high-rise buildings.

The chief minister was told that eight snorkels, each one 35 metres long, would be purchased for the divisional headquarters — three for Karachi, one each for the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, Nawabshah, Sukkur, Mirpurkhas and Larkana divisions.

The local government minister told the chief minister that tenders for the purchase of snorkels had been floated. He added that the snorkels were needed for all divisional headquarters. At this the chief minister said that Rs1.5bn would be made available in the next financial year.

The LG minister further informed the meeting that the municipal committees had to transport garbage collected in their respective areas to their landfill sites, therefore, 102 tractors and trolleys were required and the purchase would cost Rs4.1bn.

The chief minister, in principle, approved the proposal and directed the finance department to make the amount available at the start of the next financial year.

The local government department presented another scheme for the purchase of 89 fire tenders for different municipal committees.

The local government minister said that most of the municipal committees were in need of fire tenders for firefighting.

Murad Ali Shah approved Rs2.8bn for purchase of 89 fire tenders to be provided to the municipal committees all over Sindh.

The chief minister approved another proposal of the local government department under which 115 refuse trucks would be purchased for Rs9.3bn in the next financial year.

Murad Ali Shah directed the LG minister to activate the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and the DMCs to clean their major nullahs. "The monsoon season is approaching, therefore, desilting of major nullahs should be started shortly," he said. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/04/2021)

Bill for protection of media persons presented in Sindh Assembly

The journalists and other media practitioners shall have protection against disclosure of professional sources of information under The Sindh Protection of Journalists and other Media Practitioners Bill 2021 that also bars government officials and institutions from forcing them to disclose the identity of their professional sources.

According to the draft of the new media law, the protected information gathered by journalists and other media practitioners includes, but is not limited to, information gathered in the field through interviews or personal observations, telephone conversations, and information gathered online or through digital platforms.

Besides, the draft bill says that no journalist or other media person shall be subjected to any unlawful or arbitrary restrictions on their ability to perform their work independently, and without undue interference.

'Employers shall be responsible for providing adequate insurance for vulnerable media practitioners'

The bill was presented in the Sindh Assembly on Friday by Information Minister Syed Nasir Shah and later referred to the Standing Committee on Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Human Rights, which will present its report within three days in the house after its scrutiny.

The bill enables the provincial government to take effective steps to ensure that every journalist and media practitioner's right to life, safety and security as provided under Article 9 of the Constitution are safeguarded.

The government will also ensure that effective steps are taken to protect journalists and other media practitioners from harassment, violence, and threats of violence by any person or groups of persons or public or private institution or authority in both physical as well as online and digital spaces.

Training and insurance

Under the Act, the employers shall be responsible for providing adequate insurance and training for vulnerable journalists and other media practitioners who may be at risk of being attacked, injured, or killed because of their work.

The government will coordinate with the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) to ensure the provision of adequate insurance of and training for journalists and other media practitioners who may be at risk of being attacked, injured, or killed because of their work.

The government will coordinate with stakeholders including, but not limited to, PFUJ, APNS, CPNE, and PBA and civil society organisations to develop safety policies and protocols for journalists and other media practitioners and to institute effective safety programmes catering to different categories of journalists and other media professionals such as reporters, photojournalists, video camera persons, district correspondents, etc.

Combating impunity

The bill said that no act of harassment and violence committed against journalists or other media practitioners shall be exempted from immediate and effective investigation and prosecution.

It added that threats of violence or harassment against journalists or other media practitioners shall be considered as actual acts of violence or harassment for the purposes of this Act.

Under the Act, the government shall develop and implement effective strategies for combating impunity for crimes against the media that will include:

- i. Monitoring and conducting investigations into cases reported by journalists and other media practitioners, their families, unions, media associations, or civil society organisations, working on the protection of life, safety and security of journalists and other media practitioners.
- ii. Coordinating policy and action between relevant government authorities at local, provincial, and federal level.
- iii. Coordinating with relevant stakeholders including civil society organisations, unions, employers, and media industry associations as well as government departments to implement the United Nations Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

Establishment of a commission

As per the new media law, the government shall establish a commission to be known as the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and other Media Practitioners (CPJMP) to exercise the powers and perform the functions under the Act.

It will consist of a chairperson, secretaries of the information, home, law and human rights departments as ex-officio members and non-official members from the PFUJ, APNS, CPNE, PBA, Sindh Bar Council, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Sindh Information Commission.

The commission would be headed by a chairperson, who would be a serving or retired judge of the high court or a retired civil servant of BPS-20 grade having demonstrable knowledge of, or practical experience in, the matter relating to law, justice, public administration and human rights.

The commission shall be an autonomous body and shall have powers to regulate its own procedures and to formulate its own rules and regulations.

The CPJMP may also raise money from other sources subject to its procedures, rules and regulations and it will have authority and autonomy to staff and manage the secretariat.

Functions of CPJMP

The commission will look into the complaints to be filed before it in respect of an act of harassment, sexual harassment, violence, and threats of violence committed as per Article 3 of this Act against a journalist or media practitioner.

Whether perpetrated by any person or group of persons or public or private institution or authority, the aggrieved journalist or other media practitioner, employer, union, relevant civil society organisation, or media association, shall file a complaint against the same before the commission within 30 days of the incident.

Under the Act, the commission can also take suo motu notice of any attack on a journalist or media practitioner.

It said that if the commission finds that any person or groups of persons or public or private institution or authority is, directly or indirectly, involved in violating, or attempting to violate, the rights to life and safety as defined in Article 3 of this Act, it shall report the same to the government within 14 days of the incident, and recommend an appropriate course of action against the perpetrators of these violations.

As per the Act, the commission shall be deemed to be a civil court to the extent that is described in sections 175, 178, 179, 180 and 228 of the Pakistan Penal Code, and it shall have the equivalent of contempt of court powers if its directives relating to Article 14 (g) are not complied with.

The commission will create a website to enable online registration of complaints, and to provide updates and the status of the cases reported to it.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 24/05/2021)

Sindh Public Service Commission defunct, rules court

After carrying out recruitments of public servants for three decades, the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) will now cease to exist following the Sindh High Court's order, which has established the illegality of the commission, its act and rules.

"All tests, interviews, selection, appointments, tenders or any act doable under SPSC Act 1989 or the rules are suspended forthwith," reads the 30-page judgment penned down by Justice Zulfiqar Ahmed Khan and Justice Muhammad Saleem Jessar of SHC Hyderabad circuit bench.

"The individuals [chairperson and secretary SPSC] suspended by our order dated April 15, 2021, shall remain so." The bench stated that the commission has lost every shred of legitimacy and should be brought to a nullity in its present form.

The order has been given in six identical petitions challenging combined competitive exams, 2018, recruitment of 1,783 medical officers and 269 assistant sub-inspectors. The court heard the cases on May 19 and the detailed judgment, which disposed of all the petitions, was issued on Thursday.

The SHC set aside and cancelled the results and proceedings of the CCE-2018 as well as the appointments of 1,783 medical and women medical officers carried out in the light of advertisement dated July 19, 2018. The court also ordered taking off SPSC's website from the web.

"In the meantime, all new recruitments strictly on merit be made in the same manner as those prior to the enactment of 1989, Act, as if the said act never existed."

The court found SPSC Act, 1989, ultra vires the Constitution of Pakistan and, likewise, the rules of appointment of chairperson and members as ultra vires the Sindh government rules of business, 1986. The SPSC rules, 1990, in a similar way violated the 1989, Act. The court advised the provincial government to follow the laws and rules of Australia and New Zealand if it wanted to re-enact the commission's law or to make new rules.

Colonial origins

The court traced the origin of the public service commission in the subcontinent to 1919, when the British regime felt the need to protect the public service from political influence. The law for setting up the commission was enacted the same year as the Government of India Act, 1919, and the commission began to exist from October 1, 1926.

The ordinances to set up the provincial public service commissions in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) were promulgated in 1978 but it was not until 1989 when the SPSC Act, 1989, was passed. The judgment dwelt at length over the laws and rules, which were made and revised from time to time with regard to the federal and provincial commissions.

Questionable powers

The judgment noted that except Sindh, where the chief minister made appointments of the chairperson and members of the SPSC, governors of the remaining three provinces were vested with the authority for these appointments. Likewise, the country's president appointed the chairperson and members of the federal public service commission. The terms of offices are three years in Punjab and K-P and five years in Sindh with three years of re-employment in Sindh alone. No age restriction is applied over the chairperson and members in the SPSC.

The court referred to schedule III under rule 5(ii) to point out that the Sindh government is not competent to appoint the chairperson and members of the commission. The bench also referred to a Supreme Court judgment, which had identified that no formal mechanism for appointing chairperson and members has been framed by the provincial government. "... in utter disregard of such de facto disability and in absence of any statutory authority, notifications of such appointments have been made over the years," the bench noted.

Dubious rules

The court further found a deliberate deviation from following the principle of merit in the SPSC Functions Rules, 1990. The 1989 Act states that the commission shall conduct tests and examinations while the 1990 rules only use the word tests.

"The difference between examination and test is that of a mountain and a rock," the bench said, referring to separate definition of the two words as provided in the Oxford dictionaries.

The bench stated that bureaucracy used to function more efficiently under Sindh Civil Servants Act, 1973, and Sindh Civil Servants Rules, 1974 and 1975 and half a dozen other similar laws and rules. "The province had been served by honest, qualified and motivated civil servants before 1989 when this institution [SPSC] in its present form was born - according to one view to serve as one-window facility to foster whole-sale corruption."

Petitions

According to the petitioners Amara Gohar, Asma Makhdoom, Rubina Begum and Naheed Akhtar, SPSC on July 19, 2018, invited applications against 1,783 posts of medical officers and women medical officers. They applied for WMO and sat in the written test on December 9, 2018. However, after qualifying the written test they were declared fail in the subsequent interview. Some 302 MOs and 434 WMOs out of 446 available positions were declared successful for their appointment on January 8, 2019.

The court was apprised that on January 10, 2019, the commission again advertised the same posts albeit the interested candidates were informed that the selection will be carried out only through the interviews.

The petitioners alleged that the candidates, who had previously failed to qualify the written test were selected for the jobs after the interviews, which they alleged smacked of political influence and nepotism.

Makhdoom's counsel, advocate Sajjad Chandio, argued that the commission violated the apex court's order by not timely displaying the result of the written test. Advocate Arshad S Pathan, Gohar's counsel, said his client secured 557 marks in the written test but was given only 94 marks out of 300 in the viva. Whereas, some candidates, who had obtained 400 or less marks qualified for the interview.

A separate petition concerned recruitment over 269 vacancies of assistant sub-inspectors in the police department. The petitioners maintained that the posts were advertised on August 19, 2016. On February 14, 2020, the commission declared 914 candidates as having passed the physical and written tests. On October 20, 2020, 269 candidates among them were declared to have succeeded in qualifying the interviews. But the petitioners alleged that even those candidates who had failed in the physical test were selected for the job.

Another petition challenged transparency in the combined competitive examinations, 2018, conducted by the SPSC. The petitioners Imtiaz Thebo and others maintained that the commission did not provide marks sheet to the candidates who failed to qualify.

Moreover, two categories were made among the qualified candidates - allocated and non-allocated. The latter candidates were also provided their marks sheets belatedly while the former were given priority.

They further contended that some of the qualified candidates obtained almost full marks in their interviews so that after addition of their marks of the written test they may find placement among the top candidates in the merit list.
(By Z Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 04/06/2021)

Sindh Assembly passes bill to set up provincial evacuee trust property board

Amid protest by two main opposition parties, the Sindh Assembly on Friday passed the Sindh Evacuee Trust Properties (Management and Disposal) Bill, 2019 enabling the provincial government to manage evacuee properties attached to charitable, religious or educational trusts or institutions.

Presented by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Kumar Chawla, the new provincial law also repeals the provision of the Evacuee Trust Properties (Management and Disposal) Act, 1975, a federal law, to the extent of Sindh.

The statement of objects and reasons of the new law said that the subject fell within the provincial domain and the provincial assembly was competent to enact a law in the subject matter as provided by Article 142 (c) of the Constitution in view of the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List by the 18th Amendment.

After enactment of the bill, a board namely Sindh Evacuee Trust Property Board would also be established.

Opposition protests over water shortage in Karachi

While the house witnessed ruckus for umpteenth time with opposition Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan protesting over water shortage in Karachi, the assembly completed its entire agenda by taking up all questions, calling-attention notices, privilege and adjournment motions and a government bill.

At the outset, the PTI and MQM-P members rose to speak on what they termed a very important matter for the people of Karachi. However, they were denied by Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani, who said: "I will give you time but let this agenda be completed."

The chair's assurances, however, did not stop the opposition members from protesting as they gathered in front of the rostrum, held placards inscribed with anti-government slogans and demands of provision of water.

Leader of the Opposition Haleem Adil Sheikh said that the people of Karachi were "dying" of water shortage. He demanded that the speaker allow opposition's members to speak on the very important issue.

"Business of the house is also very important, I am assuring that you would be given floor to speak," Speaker Durrani told the PTI and MQM-P members before calling Question Hour.

The speaker's refusal prompted a strong protest by the opposition members, who started chanting slogans Karachi ko pani do (Give water to Karachi) and Pani chor, pani chor, Sindh hukumat pani chor (Sindh government is water thief).

After failing to calm down the protesting opposition members, the speaker had to adjourn the house for 10 minutes.

However, PTI and MQM-P lawmakers continued their protest even after resumption of the proceedings, but the chair kept calling agenda items.

The protesting members didn't raise their questions during Question Hour and calling-attention notices but those asked by PPP members were responded to by the parliamentary secretary.

After Question Hour, the speaker asked Mohammad Hussain of the MQM-P if he wanted to speak on a point of order, but the latter refused and continued chanting slogans with his colleagues.

Responding to a calling-attention notice moved by Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal lawmaker Syed Abdul Rasheed, Education Minister Saeed Ghani said that matric and intermediate examinations would be held in July, adding that students would be giving exams of optional subjects only.

He said that duration of each paper would be reduced to two hours and it would comprise of 50 per cent multiple choice questions, 30pc short questions and 20pc long question.

"Examination would be held on time, if everything goes as per plan," Mr Ghani hoped.

Speaking on his calling-attention notice, the lawmaker had asked the provincial government to defer the examinations, maintaining that the students were not fully prepared.

"Every student did not have facility to attend online classes," he added.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 06/06/2021)

Sindh budget

A CURSORY reading of the Sindh budget 2021-22 reinforces the impression that Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah's government has got its development preferences right. Health, education, agriculture, irrigation, labour, small and medium enterprises, women development and social protection for the poor are the main areas the PPP government appears to be focusing on through enhanced allocations in the budget. Yet the document also cements the perception that the party needs to work hard to improve its capacity and competence to execute the development interventions it proposes in the budget, instead of hiding behind the pretext of resource constraints because of the shortfall from federal transfers. Instead of competing with an uncooperative centre to prove its credentials as a more pro-people administration through higher allocations, it is better to work on building its capacity to use whatever funds it can get to execute schemes for improving public service delivery in the province. There is no doubt that the uncertainties caused by Covid-19 during the current fiscal year and the lower-than-targeted federal and provincial revenue collection must have affected spending priorities and decelerated work on the projects announced. But that does not justify the Sindh government's inability to fully utilise whatever money it had in its coffers. It is especially scandalous because the socioeconomic infrastructure in the country's largest city and business hub, Karachi, is collapsing with every passing minute.

The Rs1,477.9bn provincial budget based mainly on expectations of increased federal transfers of Rs869.7bn, higher provincial tax revenues of Rs304.9bn and enhanced foreign project assistance of over Rs71.5bn is largely an extension of the priorities the government had set for the outgoing fiscal year. Allocations for health, education, irrigation, agriculture and other priority areas have been raised significantly. The government has further proposed a considerably large sum of Rs30.9bn for its pro-poor social protection and economic sustainability programme and decided to invest in automation of tax payments to create ease for taxpayers and boost collection. Women, special children and IT-based start-ups will also get a small share from the provincial resources. The decision to raise the minimum wage to Rs25000 a month and the pay of provincial employees by 20pc need to be appreciated. In short, Mr Shah's spending priorities are commendable. But the question is: will he be able to deliver on his promises to the people? Doubts remain. Especially because Sindh is perceived to be controlled from somewhere other than the chief minister's office.
(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 17/06/2021)