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**Pakistan at Risk –  
Infiltration, Espionage,  
and Security Threat**



**Significance of Pakistan,  
Afghanistan and  
Iran border utility**



**Pakistan to host summit  
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**REKO DIQ PROJECT:  
ECC approves opening of  
\$900m escrow account**



**25 terrorists killed  
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hostage operation**



**Seminar of CISSS on**

**Strategic and Economic Dimensions of Pakistan - China  
Relations amid Deepening Global Geopolitical Divide**



**Pakistan to receive \$3 billion  
from 'friendly country'**



**Ukraine war tolls  
death knell for NATO**



**Russia, Iran open a trade  
route heralding a bloc**



**Chinese Yuan is the  
new dollar**



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January 2023

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## Editorial

### **Pakistan at risk – infiltration, espionage, and security threat**

History repeats itself, is a cliché that has perhaps lost all meaning because of short-term amnesia that people around the globe suffer from without realizing. People have stopped learning from history because either they don't remember it or because manipulation of facts through propaganda has become easy now. While it is a global phenomenon, Pakistan is perhaps one of the most affected nations and there are several reasons for that. To avoid history's vicious circle a nation needs to read and understand its past so that previous mistakes are not repeated. In Pakistan, like everything else, history is not recorded on facts but is highly politicized. Our education sector is in shambles due to corruption and a lack of political will. Our curriculum hasn't been updated in ages and even when it is, all updates are politically motivated by agents of the prevailing political regime. The most unbiased form of history lessons that the young minds of Pakistan receive is from their family members who have lived during specific eras and have a habit of enforcing their opinion on the young ones rather than stating facts and encouraging a thought-provoking debate to nourish the young mind which will, in turn, shape the future of the country. Our young generation is raised in a constant state of fear of being labeled. They are reminded that Pakistan had been infiltrated by enemy agents since its inception, all the while cementing the idea that corruption, moral degradation, and lack of necessities among other things are the only constants in Pakistan and while you may not like it your only job is to criticize the system in closed quarters but never raise your voice or attempt to bring about change for that's fooling. Our youth are told that their only goal in life is to earn a lot of money, they are told to follow religion only to the point that it serves their self-interest and that they must gain citizenship in a foreign country to live a good life. Another important thing that our youth learns at a vulnerable age is that questioning the system or criticizing the way their country is being run or criticizing the powerful institutions of Pakistan earns them the label of „Traitor“ resulting in a violent death. This mechanism worked for a long time till the internet and smartphones ensured that information from every corner of the world was accessible to everyone. The information is a mixture of lies and half-truths and even entirely truthful information is subject to the worst form of manipulation to form desired opinions. Now, the confused and frustrated youth of Pakistan, who lacked analytical power and in the absence of a strong narrative were and are easy prey for the enemy and their agents within Pakistan. Narratives portraying the enemy as the savior were developed and the existing situation in Pakistan validated those narratives. Infiltration was complete in all ways. Espionage has been done in many ways, but the most recent act was orchestrated from within. The regime change operation was when the people of Pakistan, particularly the youth, drew a line and exclaimed „Enough“. The enemy was already prepared to take full advantage of this and

is pushing the country to the edge. Right now, the truth, which was known to all Pakistanis, is causing more damage than anything else. The powerful institutions of the country are hell-bent on showing the people of Pakistan their place. Their institutional ego has been hurt and they have decided, as always, to do whatever it takes to enforce their will on the people. The enemy, being smart and cunning, had already banked on this and had succeeded in driving a wedge between the civilians and the institutions. This is a very serious matter and requires to be addressed immediately. Pakistan is under attack in every way possible, terrorists have resurfaced, economic activity is critically wounded, and the very existence of the country is now at stake. This is a time for all the stakeholders of the country to join forces in the interest of Pakistan, the country needs to take tough and serious decisions to up route the enemy agents and their networks and to save the country. The time calls for all patriotic forces to band together and puts aside their differences. Right now, Pakistan's existence is at stake and the hour calls for the unity of all patriotic people from all walks of life to band together and to form a united front against the corrupt, traitorous elements within Pakistan. The alternative to this is to witness the repetition of history and to watch our country damaged as it did in 1971, as the enemy intends.

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### **Summarized News & Articles**

#### **President of Pakistan, visited Military Hospital, Rawalpindi**

Doctor Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan, visited Combined Military Hospital (CMH) Rawalpindi. He met with the officers and soldiers who got injured while clearing CTD complex Bannu. President praised their bravery and resolve to fight against terrorism.

#### **COAS visited Miranshah - North Waziristan and Tarbela**

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir visited Miranshah North Waziristan and Tarbela. At Miranshah, COAS laid floral wreath at Martyrs' Monument to pay homage to brave soldiers who laid lives while defending the motherland. COAS was briefed by field commanders on latest security situation in the area and response mechanisms to thwart terrorist threat. COAS also visited frontline troops deployed along Pakistan - Afghanistan Border. While interacting with officers and men, COAS commended their professionalism, high morale and operational readiness. COAS said that Pak Army remains focused on evolving security situation and determined to take the battle to the terrorists and break nexus with their facilitators so as to ensure lasting peace through socioeconomic development. Pakistan Army will consolidate the hard earned peace, made possible by the supreme sacrifices of resilient Pakistani nation and LEAs. Later, COAS also visited HQ SSG Terbela. COAS met officers and men of SSG including the elite Zarrar Company whose soldiers gallantly acted in recent Bannu CTD

complex operation as well as Aviation. COAS praised their indomitable spirit, sacrifices and commitment to the duty in various operations. COAS said that SSG is the pride of Nation and it had proved its metal over the years. Earlier on arrival, COAS was received by Lieutenant General Hassan Azhar Hayat, Commander Peshawar Corps.

### **Operation initiated in Sambaza area of Zhob, Balochistan**

An Operation has been initiated in Sambaza area of Zhob, Balochistan for last 96 hours to deny Terrorists use of few suspected routes to move across Pakistan- Afghanistan Border to sneak into KP along interprovincial boundary and target citizens and security forces. As a result of continuous Surveillance and sanitisation of the area, a group of the Terrorists was intercepted in early hours today. During the establishment of blocking positions to deny them escape routes, terrorists opened fire onto the Security Forces. During ensuing heavy exchange of fire, 1 Terrorists was killed, while Sepoy Haq Nawaz embraced Shahadat and two other soldiers got injured. The terrorists were supported by their facilitators from across the border as well through fire. The sanitization Operation continues in the area to apprehend remaining perpetrators.

### **Funeral prayer of Capt. Fahad offered at Army Graveyard**

Namaz e Janaza of Captain Muhammad Fahad Khan, who embraced shahadat yesterday in IED Blast near Kahan Balochistan, was offered at Army Graveyard Rawalpindi, today. CJCS General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), and a large number of senior civil and military officers, soldiers, citizens and relatives of Shaheed attended the Namaz e Janaza. Shaheed was buried with full military honour.

### **Bannu CTD operation: Pakistan army kills all 25 militants Three Soldiers Martyred; 10 Terrorists in Custody: ISPR**

All the hostages had been freed by the army in the operation. Pakistan army's elite commandos killed 25 militants who had seized the Counter Terrorism Department police station in Bannu, the military's media wing said in a late night announcement on Tuesday 20 December. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the soldiers from the Special Service Group (SSG) foiled the militants' attempt to escape the facility after their demand to provide them a safe passage to Afghanistan was rejected. The ISPR denied that the SSG commandos came under attack from the outside, adding that the great sacrifice rendered by the army soldiers "raise our level of love for the country". Giving details of the incident, Director General ISPR Major General Ahmed Sharif said on December 18, a detained terrorist overpowered a constable in the CTD complex inside Bannu Cantt. After snatching the constable's weapon, Maj Gen Ahmed said, the terrorist freed 34 other detained comrades. "As soon as they came out of lockup, the terrorists got more weapons from the mall and started firing," the DG ISPR said, adding that terrorists killed one CTD constable and injured another. "Three sons of the soil were martyred fighting bravely in the operation. Subedar, Major Khurshid Akram, Sepoy

Saeed, and Sepoy Babar are among the martyrs." He further said 10 soldiers, including two officers, were injured in the operation. Senior Bannu police officials had told The Express Tribune on Sunday that two CTD men had been killed by the militants. They added that the hostage-takers wanted a safe passage via a ground route or by air to Afghanistan. However, the authorities refused to accept their demands and insisted on their surrender. Pakistani authorities had on Monday 20th December, opened talks to try to resolve the stand-off, but "all options failed and the terrorists refused to free innocent people, so we decided to use force", a senior security official told Reuters. With input from agencies.

### **Captain among five Pak Army personnel martyred in Balochistan IED blast**

As many as four Pakistan Army men including a captain got martyred on Sunday during an intelligence-based operation underway in Kahan area of Balochistan since 24 December 2022 against terrorists when an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded close to the leading party of the army personnel amid the rising wave of terrorism particularly in Balochistan. According to a statement issued here by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate, due to the explosion of the IED, Captain Fahad along with four other brave sons of the soil Lance Naik Imtiaz, Sepoy Asghar, Sepoy Mehran and Sepoy Shamoon embraced Shahadat, laying their lives in defence of the motherland against an externally perpetrated threat of terrorism. The Pakistan Army has reaffirmed its resolve to fight terrorism, saying that such cowardly attacks cannot sabotage the peace and prosperity in Balochistan. Earlier, four people were wounded in a grenade attack near a police station on Sabzal Road in Quetta. Terrorists have unleashed a fresh wave of attacks in different areas of Pakistan in recent days. On Friday, a policeman was martyred in the federal capital Islamabad when a suicide bomber blew himself up during the search of a vehicle in the I-10 Sector. Source: News Desk.

### **At least six killed in firing by Afghan forces on Pakistan border**

Heavy gunfire and artillery shelling by Afghan border forces have killed six civilians across the border in Pakistan and wounded another 17, the Pakistan army said. The latest violence hitting Chaman in southwestern Pakistan follows a series of deadly incidents and attacks that have skyrocketed tensions with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. Chaman is the main border crossing for trade between the countries. Pakistani troops retaliated at the Chaman border crossing, the army statement said, without giving details of any losses on the other side. The Pakistan army statement said: "Afghan Border Forces opened unprovoked and indiscriminate fire of heavy weapons including artillery/mortar onto the civilian population." Pakistan had also approached Kabul to highlight the severity of the situation and demand strict action to avoid recurrence of the incident, the army said. A deadly shooting in November shuttered the border at Chaman for eight days, causing heavy commercial losses and leaving thousands of people stranded on both sides. Later in the month, Pakistan's embassy in Kabul came

under gunfire. Pakistani officials called the incident an attack on its envoy there and blamed Afghan officials for the security breach. Source: TRTWorld and Agencies.

### **One policeman martyred in suicide blast in Islamabad's I-10; TTP claims responsibility**

A policeman was martyred and at least six people including four police officers and two civilians were injured in a suicide blast in Islamabad's I-10/4 sector on Friday, police officials said. According to Deputy Inspector General of Police Sohail Zafar Chattha, the police spotted a "suspicious vehicle" with a man and a woman aboard at 10:15am in the area. "When the police stopped the vehicle, the couple came out of the car. The long-haired man, while being checked by the officers, went inside the vehicle on some pretext and then detonated himself," he said in a media briefing at the crime scene alongside Islamabad Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon. Chattha said a police officer of the Eagle Squad was martyred in the blast while four other officers were injured. He lauded the police for "saving Islamabad from a major foul play". "The vehicle used in the blast was registered in Chakwal. The car entered Islamabad from Rawalpindi [...] it was packed with explosives and headed for a high-value target in the capital," he said. Sanaullah added that had the car reached its target, it would have caused heavy losses. The outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement released. Courtesy: Dawn News.

### **India, Pakistan foreign ministers trade heated barbs on 'terror' 'Butcher of Gujarat, epicentre of terror': A war of words at UN**

Pakistan's foreign minister has called India's prime minister the "Butcher of Gujarat" after his counterpart accused his country of being the "epicentre of terrorism" as the nuclear-armed neighbours engage in a war of words at the United Nations. The heated exchange between Pakistan's Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar came after the UN Security Council adopted a statement on Thursday, warning of the increasing dangers of terrorism. New Delhi accuses Islamabad of harbouring armed fighters who launch attacks on its soil, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks that left 175 people dead, including nine attackers. The Mumbai attackers were allegedly members of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba armed group. Indian investigators say their actions were directed over the phone by handlers in Pakistan.

#### **Heated accusations**

Talking to reporters after the UN meeting, Jaishankar called Pakistan the "epicentre of terrorism". "My advice is to clean up your act and try to be good neighbour," he said. "Hillary Clinton, during her visit to Pakistan, said that if you keep snakes in your back yard you can't expect them to bite only your neighbours, eventually they will bite the people who keep them in the back yard," he added. When Bhutto-Zardari was asked to respond to Jaishankar's allegation, he said the Indians continue to say "Muslim and

terrorist together”, whether in Pakistan or in India. India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi was chief minister of the state of Gujarat when religious riots in 2002 killed nearly 2,000 people most of them Muslims. Modi was accused of turning a blind eye to the violence. Until his election as prime minister in 2014, he was denied entry to the United States. Bhutto-Zardari said his country had lost far more lives to terrorism and that he, himself, was a victim, referring to his mother and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated by a suicide bomber in 2007. Bhutto was the first woman elected to lead a Muslim-majority country in 1988. “As a Muslim, as a Pakistani, as a victim of terrorism, I believe it is time that we move away from some of the Islamophobic narrative framing of this issue that took place after the awful attacks of September 11, 2001, because what we witnessed from that date up until now is that terrorism, of course, knows no religion, knows no boundaries,” Bhutto-Zardari said. “Why would we want our own people to suffer? We absolutely do not,” he added. Source: Al Jazeera & News Agencies.

### **Country's brain drain situation accelerated in 2022**

According to documents available to The Express Tribune, 765,000 people left Pakistan for abroad in 2022, nearly triple the 225,000 departures in 2021 and 288,000 emigrants in 2020. This year's data also included 92,000 highly-educated people such as doctors, engineers, information technology experts and accountants. According to the Bureau of Emigration, an overwhelming majority of the emigrants went to the Middle Eastern countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Among the European destinations, the preferred choice of the Pakistanis appeared to be Romania. “The effects of the deteriorating economic situation as well the political uncertainty have begun to affect the workforce of Pakistan,” a bureau official told The Express Tribune on condition of anonymity because he was not officially authorised to speak with the media. According to the documents, those who left the country in 2022, included more than 92,000 graduates, 350,000 trained workers and the same number of untrained labourers went abroad. The documents also showed that 736,000 people went to the Gulf States. The emigrating educated youth included 5,534 engineers, 18,000 associate electrical engineers, 2,500 doctors, 2,000 computer experts, 6,500 accountants, 2,600 agricultural experts, over 900 teachers, 12,000 computer operators, 1,600 nurses and 21,517 technicians. The group of unskilled workers comprised 213,000 drivers. According to the data, over 730,000 youth went to the Gulf States, nearly 40,000 went to European and other Asian countries. The country-wise break down of the data showed 470,000 Pakistanis headed to Saudi Arabia for employment, 119,000 to UAE, 77,000 to Oman, 51,634 to Qatar and 2,000 to Kuwait. Also, according to the official documents, 2,000 Pakistanis went to Iraq, 5,000 to Malaysia, 602 to China, 815 to Japan, and 136 to Turkey. The documents also revealed that 478 Pakistan went to Sudan in Africa in search of employment. The highest number of people emigrating to a European country was



3,160 youth, going to Romania. It was followed by 2,500 to Great Britain, 677 to Spain, 566 to Germany, 497 to Greece, and 292 to Italy. The Bureau of Emigrants also registered 700 people going to the United States. More than half of those leaving the country were from Punjab. The documents said 424,000 emigrants this year were from Punjab, 206,000 from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa plus 38,000 from newly-merged tribal districts, 54,000 from Sindh, 27,000 from Azad Kashmir, 7,000 from Balochistan and 6,000 from Islamabad. Courtesy: Express Tribune.

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### News In Brief International

#### **Call to save Rohingya refugees adrift on boat without water, food Sri Lanka navy rescues over 104 Rohingya adrift in rough seas**

On December 8, a boat carrying 154 Rohingya refugees was rescued off the coast of Thailand by a Vietnamese oil service vessel. The refugees were handed over to the Myanmar navy. On Sunday 18 Dec., the Sri Lankan navy rescued another boat carrying 104 refugees, including 39 women and 23 children. The navy said the small trawler had set off from Myanmar and was on its way to Indonesia when it ran into engine trouble. The UN refugee agency reported earlier this month that there had been a “dramatic” increase in Rohingya refugees making risky boat journeys from Myanmar and Bangladesh to Southeast Asian countries, partly because of deteriorating conditions in the refugee camps they are confined to in Myanmar's Rakhine state and Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. An estimated 1,920 mostly Rohingya people left Myanmar and Bangladesh by sea between January and November this year, compared with just 287 in 2021, according to the UN. About 119 people were reported dead or missing on these journeys, the UN added. Many Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar risk their lives every year by attempting to reach Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia on rickety vessels. Their numbers have surged following deteriorating conditions in the camps and last year's military coup in Myanmar. The boat was first detected by the Sri Lanka navy when it was 3.5 nautical miles (6.5km) from the shore. A search and rescue operation was launched to eventually tow the vessel to the island nation's northern harbour on Sunday night, navy spokesman Captain Gayan Wickramasuriya said. “The people have been handed over to the police,” Wickramasuriya told Reuters news agency. A navy statement said 104 Myanmar nationals were found on board the small trawler suspected to have originated from Myanmar and was heading to Indonesia when it ran into engine trouble in rough seas. Wickramasuriya said 39 women and 23 minors were among the rescued people. An 80-year-old man, as well as a woman and her two children, all suffering from minor sickness, were admitted to hospital. Source: Al Jazeera & News Agencies.

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### **Saudi Arabia's lavish welcome of China's President Xi A warning to US and Biden**

Four royal air force fighter jets escorted Mr Xi's plane as it entered Saudi airspace, while six aerobatic jets dragged smoke trails in the colours of the Chinese national flag.

#### **Reporting by Aziz El Yaakoubi in Riyadh and Eduardo Baptista in Beijing**

King Salman signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership agreement" with Xi, who received a lavish welcome in a country forging new global partnerships beyond the West. King Salman signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership agreement" with Xi, who received a lavish welcome in a country forging new global partnerships beyond the West. Xi's car was escorted to the king's palace by members of the Saudi Royal Guard riding Arabian horses and carrying Chinese and Saudi flags, and he later attended a welcome banquet. The Chinese leader held talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, de facto ruler of the oil giant, who greeted him with a warm smile. Xi heralded "a new era" in Arab ties. The display stood in stark contrast to the low-key welcome extended in July to U.S. President Joe Biden, with whom ties have been strained by Saudi energy policy and the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi that had overshadowed the awkward visit. The United States, warily watching China's growing sway and with its ties to Riyadh at a nadir, said on Wednesday Xi's trip was an example of Chinese attempts to exert influence around the world and would not change U.S. policy towards the Middle East.

#### **Saudi Arabia signs Huawei deal, deepening China ties on Xi visit**

A memorandum with China's Huawei Technologies, on cloud computing and building high-tech complexes in Saudi cities, was agreed despite U.S. unease with Gulf allies over a possible security risk in using the Chinese firm's technology. Huawei has participated in building 5G networks in most Gulf States despite the U.S. concerns. In an op-ed published in Saudi media, Xi said he was on a "pioneering trip" to "open a new era of China's relations with the Arab world, the Arab countries of the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia". China and Arab countries would "continue to hold high the banner of non-interference in internal affairs", Xi added.

#### **"Trusted Partner"**

Chinese and Saudi firms also signed 34 deals for investment in green energy, information technology, cloud services, transport, construction and other sectors, state news agency SPA reported. It gave no figures, but had earlier said the two countries would seal initial agreements worth \$30 billion. Tang Tianbo, Middle East specialist at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) - a Chinese government-affiliated think tank - said the visit would result in further expansion of energy cooperation. Source: Reuters / Channel News Asia.

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### **At least three killed in Kabul hotel attack: Taliban officials**

Deadly attack at hotel popular with Chinese nationals comes a day after China's ambassador sought more attention on the security of its embassy in the Afghan capital.

At least three attackers have been reportedly killed by security forces after they opened fire at a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese nationals, according to a spokesperson for the Taliban-run Afghanistan administration. The unidentified gunmen launch the attack on the multi-storey Kabul Longan Hotel on Monday, with witnesses reporting multiple blasts and several bursts of gunfire. While the firing was continuing in the hotel on Monday, a fire also broke out on one of the floors, according to witnesses. The attack came a day after China's ambassador met the Afghan deputy foreign minister to discuss security-related matters and sought more attention on the security of its embassy. A hotel in the ShahrNow area of Kabul was attacked by attackers, where it is said that Chinese citizens were China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported that the attack took place near a Chinese guesthouse, and that its embassy in Kabul was closely monitoring the situation. Source: TRT World and agencies.

### **300 China troops entered LAC India Confirms First Border Clash with China Since 2020**

By Sudhi Ranjan Sen

Indian and Chinese troops clashed in the northeast Indian border state of Arunachal Pradesh, India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh told Parliament, officially confirming the first such encounter between the neighbors in about two years. Troops from both sides "exchanged blows" on Dec. 9 after hundreds of Chinese soldiers transgressed into India's side of the boundary, Singh said. India has raised the matter diplomatically with Beijing and military commanders from both sides have discussed it. Singh gave no other details on the nature of the fighting in the Indian-administered area of Yangtze in Arunachal Pradesh. Indian officials, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue, said nearly two dozen Indian troops were injured in the clash by Chinese soldiers armed with clubs. They added that Chinese soldiers were also injured. The border between the two countries is "generally stable," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular press briefing in Beijing, while declining to comment on specifics. The two sides had "smooth communication on boundary-related issues through diplomatic and military channels," he added. Senior Colonel Long Shaohua, a spokesperson for the Western theater of the People's Liberation Army, said in a statement that Chinese troops were conducting a routine patrol on their side of the frontier on Friday when they encountered "illegal obstruction" from Indian troops who crossed the line. China tackled the situation in a "professional, standard and forceful" manner, Long said, adding that troops have since disengaged and Beijing demands New Delhi "strictly regulate its frontline troops" to safeguard border peace. With assistance by Philip Glamann and Jing Li Source: Bloomberg.

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### **Russia-Ukraine live: Large attacks on Ukrainian cities reported**

By Edna Mohamed and Joseph Stepansky

Russian missile strikes caused “colossal” damage to infrastructure in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv and mainly affected the energy system, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said. “There is colossal damage to infrastructure, primarily the energy system,” he said on Telegram.

“I ask you to be patient with what is happening now. I know that in your houses there is no light, no heating, no water supply”.

### **Kremlin finalizing price cap response**

The Kremlin is finalising the last details of how it is going to respond to the Group of Seven (G7) price cap on Russia's oil exports. Moscow has repeatedly said it will not sell oil to countries that comply with the cap and has promised to publish a presidential decree outlining Russia's full response.

### **Ukrainian shelling kills eight people in Luhansk: Russian official**

Eight people were killed and 23 injured by Ukrainian shelling in the Russian-controlled Luhansk region of Ukraine, the Russian-installed administrator of the region said.

Source: Al Jazeera & News Agencies.

### **North Korea sent arms to Russia's Wagner Group, White House says**

The private Russian military company, the Wagner Group, took delivery of an arms shipment from North Korea to help bolster Russian forces in Ukraine, a sign of the group's expanding role in that conflict, the White House said on Thursday. “Wagner is searching around the world for arms suppliers to support its military operations in Ukraine,” John Kirby, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, told reporters. “We can confirm that North Korea has completed an initial arms delivery to Wagner, which paid for that equipment. Last month, North Korea delivered infantry rockets and missiles into Russia for use by Wagner,” Kirby said. The news was first reported by Reuters. The Wagner Group was founded in 2014 after Russia seized and annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula and sparked a separatist insurgency in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. The United States estimates that Wagner has 50,000 personnel deployed in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 convicts recruited from Russian prisons, Kirby said. The US assessment is that the amount of material delivered by North Korea will not change the battlefield dynamics in Ukraine, but more military equipment was expected to be delivered by Pyongyang.

### **Pacifist Japan unveils unprecedented \$320bn military build-up**

Japan has said it would begin a once-unthinkable \$320bn military build-up that would arm it with missiles capable of striking China and ready it for a sustained conflict as regional tensions and Russia's Ukraine invasion stoke war fears. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government worries that Russia has set a precedent that will encourage China to attack Taiwan, threatening nearby Japanese islands, disrupting supplies of advanced semiconductors, and putting a potential stranglehold on sea lanes that supply Middle East oil. Japan's post-World War II constitution does not officially recognise the military and limits it to nominally self-defensive capabilities. In its sweeping five-year plan and revamped national security strategy, the government said on Friday it would also

stockpile spare parts and other munitions, reinforce logistics, develop cyber-warfare capabilities, and cooperate more closely with the United States and other like-minded nations to deter threats to the established international order. "Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a serious violation of laws that forbid the use of force and has shaken the foundations of the international order," it said in the national security paper. "The strategic challenge posed by China is the biggest Japan has ever faced."

### **Third-biggest military spender**

Unthinkable under past administrations, the rapid arming of Japan, which already hosts US forces, including a carrier strike group and a Marine expeditionary force, has the backing of most voters, according to opinion polls. Some surveys put support as high as 70 percent of voters. Kishida's plan will double defence outlays to about 2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) over the next five years, and increase the defence ministry's share to about one-tenth of all public spending. It will also make Japan the world's third-biggest military spender after the US and China, based on current budgets. The five-year spending roadmap did not come with a detailed plan for how Kishida's administration would pay for it, as ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers continue to discuss whether to raise taxes or borrow money.

### **'Exclusively defense oriented'**

The strategy document previously said Japan was seeking a "mutually beneficial strategic partnership" with Beijing, a phrase that has disappeared from this iteration. Instead it suggests a "constructive and stable relationship" and better communication. China's foreign ministry urged Japan to "reflect on its policies". "Japan disregards the facts, deviates from the common understandings between China and Japan and its commitment to bilateral relations, and discredits China," ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters. Source: News Agencies.

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## **US researchers announce historic nuclear fusion breakthrough**

By Ella Nilsen

CNN US Department of Energy officials announced a history-making accomplishment in nuclear fusion Tuesday: For the first time, US scientists produced more energy from fusion than the laser energy they used to power the experiment. A so-called "net energy gain" is a major milestone in a decadeslong attempt to source clean, limitless energy from nuclear fusion the reaction that happens when two or more atoms are fused together. The experiment put in 2.05 megajoules of energy to the target and resulted in 3.15 megajoules of fusion energy output generating more than 50% more energy than was put in. It's the first time an experiment resulted in a meaningful gain of energy. "This monumental scientific breakthrough is a milestone for the future of clean energy," said Democratic US Sen. Alex Padilla of California in a statement. The breakthrough was made by a team of scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's National Ignition Facility in California on December 5 a facility the size of a sports stadium and

equipped with 192 lasers. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm on Tuesday called the breakthrough a "milestone." "Ignition allows us to replicate, for the first time, certain conditions that are only found in the stars and sun," Granholm said. "This milestone moves us one significant step closer to the possibility of zero-carbon, abundant fusion energy powering our society." Granholm said scientists at Livermore and other national labs do work that will help the US move quickly toward clean energy and maintain a nuclear deterrent without nuclear testing. "This is what it looks like for America to lead, and we're just getting started," Granholm said. "If we can advance fusion energy, we could use it to produce clean electricity, transportation fuels, power, heavy industry and so much more." Arati Prabhakar, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, spoke about how, as a young scientist early in her career, she spent three months at Lawrence Livermore working on its nuclear fusion project. Prabhakar reflected on the generations of scientists who got to today's achievement with nuclear fusion. "It took not just one generation but generations of people pursuing this goal," she said. "It's a century since we figured out it was fusion that was going on in our sun and all the other stars. In that century it took so many different kinds of advances that ultimately came together to the point that we could replicate that fusion activity in a laboratory."

### **US unveils \$700m, next-generation B-21 nuclear bomber**

The United States has unveiled its latest high-tech strategic bomber the B-21 Raider which is capable of carrying a nuclear payload and can be flown without a crew on board. The next-generation stealth bomber was rolled out at arm's manufacturer Northrop Grumman's facility in California during a flashy ceremony attended by top US officials on Friday. The US Air Force plans to buy at least 100 of the B-21 aircraft, which comes with a \$700m price tag per plane, a Northrop Grumman spokesperson said. The unveiling of the new bombers comes at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions between the US, Russia and China amid the war in Ukraine and the territorial integrity of Taiwan. Russian and Chinese strategic bombers flew a joint eight-hour patrol over the western Pacific on Wednesday in a display of ongoing military cooperation between the two nations. China's Defence Ministry called the mission a "routine" effort in bolstering defence ties with Russia. Moscow and Beijing are also currently developing strategic stealth bombers China's Xian H-20 and Russia's nuclear-capable Tupolev PAK DA which are expected to compete with the B-21. While the B-21 is capable of taking to the air without a pilot, the US Air Force said the aircraft is "provisioned for the possibility, but there has been no decision to fly without a crew". "The B-21 Raider is the first strategic bomber in more than three decades," US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a prepared statement. Austin touted the aircraft's range and superior design. "Fifty years of advances in low-observable technology have gone into this aircraft," he said. "Even the most sophisticated air defence systems will struggle to detect the B-21 in the sky." The B-21, which carries a similar "flying wing" shape to its predecessor, will be capable

of carrying conventional and nuclear weapons around the world using long-range and midair refuelling capabilities. Northrop Grumman has hailed the new planes as “the backbone of our future bomber force”. The aerospace and design company said the long-range bomber's first flight is expected to take place in 2023. Six of the long-range bombers are in various stages of assembly and testing at its facility in California. Source: Al Jazeera & News Agencies.

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## **India conducts Night trial of Agni-5 nuclear-capable ballistic missile It can target Beijing**

By Vishnu Som

The test was carried out to validate new technologies and equipment on the missile and has proved that the missile can now hit targets further away than before, they added. The newly tested Agni-5 missile is capable of striking targets beyond the range of 7,000 kms. India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) - developed missile has been reduced in weight as well by replacing steel with composite materials, as per sources in the defence establishment. With the weight reduced by beyond 20 per cent, the government can easily increase the missile's range to 7,000 kms. The missile, using three-stage solid-fuelled engine, is capable of striking targets at ranges up to 5,000 kilometres with a very high degree of accuracy, as per Defence Ministry's statement. India on December 15 successfully carried out night trials of Agni-5 at its full range of 5400 kms. India also carried out a successful launch of a surface-to-surface ballistic missile, Agni-5 from APJ Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha, in October last year. India's nuclear weapon programme is mainly for deterrence against its adversaries including China and Pakistan as it has a no-first-use policy. The new missile and its extended range will also allow the country to strategise accordingly during times of conflict. Source: NDTV News and Deccan Herald.

## **India-made missile destroyer “INS Mormugao” commissioned**

Indigenous stealth guided-missile destroyer INS Mormugao, named after a port city in Goa, was commissioned on the eve of the Goa Liberation Day anniversary on Sunday 18 December. “INS Mormugao is one of the world's most technologically advanced missile carriers. With over 75 per cent indigenous content, it is a testimony to India's excellence in design and development of warships and a shining example of our growing indigenous defence production capabilities. “The warship will meet the present and future needs of our country as well as of our friendly countries across the globe,” he said. Safeguarding India's interests in the Indian Ocean Region is the Navy's prime responsibility, the Defence Minister said. He lauded the armed forces for protecting the borders and coasts with unmatched courage and dedication, terming them as the backbone of India's unprecedented growth. “In this era of globalization, almost all nations are dependent on each other in the field of trade. Hence, rule-based freedom of navigation, security of sea lanes, etc. have become more important than ever for stability

and economic progress of the world," he said. Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar described the commissioning of INS Mormugao as indicative of the large strides India had taken in warship design and building capability over the last decade. The Mormugao is the second warship of the four 'Visakhapatnam' class destroyers. Measuring 163m in length and 17m in breadth and with a displacement of 7,400 tonnes, INS Mormugao is packed with sophisticated state-of-the-art weapons and sensors such as surface-to-surface missile and surface-to-air missiles. The ship is fitted with a modern surveillance radar which provides target data to the gunnery weapon systems. Its anti-submarine warfare capabilities are provided by the indigenously developed rocket launchers, torpedo launchers and the ASW helicopters. It is equipped to fight under nuclear, biological and chemical warfare conditions. It is propelled by four powerful gas turbines, capable of achieving speeds in excess of 30 knots. Source: Tribune India.

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### **North Korea completes 'important' test of spy satellite: State media**

North Korea has conducted an "important, final phase" test in the development of a military reconnaissance satellite, which the country plans to complete by April 2023, North Korean state media has reported. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Monday that North Korea's National Aerospace Development Administration conducted the test on Sunday at the country's Sohae satellite launching station in Cholsan, in North Pyongan Province. A rocket carrying what was described as a "test-piece satellite" including multiple cameras, image transmitters and receivers, a control device and a storage battery was launched at a "lofted angle" to an altitude of 500km (311 miles), according to KCNA. According to KCNA, the test was designed to review satellite imaging capabilities, data transmission, and a ground control system. "We confirmed important technical indicators such as camera operating technology in the space environment, data processing and transmission ability of the communication devices, tracking and control accuracy of the ground control system," an unnamed North Korean aerospace spokesperson said in the KCNA dispatch. North Korea plans to complete "preparations for the first military reconnaissance satellite by April, 2023," the official said in the KCNA report. South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported on Monday that KCNA also released satellite imagery of the South Korean capital "Seoul and its adjacent city of Incheon presumed to be shot from the test-piece satellite". North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has promised to develop high-tech weaponry including spy satellites and tactical nuclear weapons as a means to both deter and provide real-time information on military actions by the US and regional allies South Korea and Japan, which he claims are threatening his country. Source: Al Jazeera & News Agencies.

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### **Netanyahu gov't says West Bank settlement expansion top priority**



Benjamin Netanyahu's incoming hardline Israeli government has put settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank at the top of its list of priorities, a day before it is set to be sworn into office. Netanyahu's Likud party released the new government's policy guidelines on Wednesday, the first of which promises to "advance and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel in the Galilee, Negev, Golan Heights, and Judea and Samaria" the Biblical names for the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority (PA) seeks the West Bank as the heartland of a future independent state. However, Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements, illegal under international law, that are now home to about 500,000 Israelis. Approximately 2.5 million Palestinians live in the occupied West Bank and have their movements severely restricted by the Israeli military, which operates separate roads designed to be used solely by Jewish settlers. Several of Netanyahu's key allies, including most of the Religious Zionism party, are ultranationalist West Bank settlers. The administration of US President Joe Biden has said it strongly opposes settlement expansion and has rebuked the Israeli government for it in the past. Source: AP.

### **What is the 'Qatargate' scandal that has rocked Europe? What happened?**

The scandal broke on the morning of December 9 when Belgium police carried out a series of raids across Brussels and arrested six people. This includes Kaili and Antonio Panzeri a former member of the European Parliament, who were implicated in money laundering and corruption scandal. Questions were also raised about Margaritis Schinas, VP of European Commission, who praised Qatar's labour reforms. The allegations include influencing EU policymakers, with Qatar funding her to security policies in favour of it. The police have found thousands of Euros in Kaili's possession across a range of private locations. The idea is to whitewash Qatar as a country in light of the recently concluded FIFA World Cup. Panzeri, who ran an NGO Fight Impunity, collected the finances, where individuals associated with the NGO and serving as parliamentary assistants to European members of Parliament were arrested in this scandal.

### **Why does Qatar need this influence?**

It is an energy-rich country trying to sell natural gas to the EU at a time when the latter is trying to cut its dependence on Russian energy supplies. It has already signed a lucrative deal with Germany for LNG. Second, FIFA World Cup has put Qatar's controversial views on LGBTQ and Kamala system in the spotlight. Third, Qatar is also trying to secure a relaxed visa regime for Qatari citizens wishing to enter the European Schengen area. As per some reports, 6500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since World Cup preparations started. Despite these issues, Kaili openly praised Qatar's human rights record. On the contrary, the official openly criticized Doha for its human rights policy. Following this episode, Kaili was expelled from the Greek political party Pasok. While the jury is still out, evidence points toward the accused (Source: Business IN).

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**Seminar organized by Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS) with Collaboration of University of Sindh at Jamshoro on the topic "Strategic and Economic Dimensions of Pakistan -China Relations amid Deepening Global Geopolitical Divide**

In this Seminar held in the Senate Hall of University of Sindh Jamshoro, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, Ambassador of Pakistan in China Mr. Moinul Haq, Ambassador (R) Qazi Khalillah Executive Director CISS, Dr. Ansar Parviaz former Chairman PAEC, Chinese Prof Hung Lee, Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja, and Dr. Hammad ullah Kakepoto spoke on the topic and sub-topics while Dr. Rafiq Ahmed Memon Pro-Vice Chancellor Sindh University presided first session and Ambassador Qazi (R) Khalillah presided the second session on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022. In this seminar the Speakers highlighted the importance of Pakistan China relations and CPEC such as:

- \* America has invested approximately 6.4 trillion in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya war until now while China is investing in trade (Mushahid Hussain)
- \* 25 Thousand Pakistan"s" Students are studying in China. Not only weapons but modern technology is also being transferred to Pakistan by its neighboring country China. (Moin ul Haq)
- \* TO meet the energy and power demands is a challenge. Producing electricity using nuclear power plant is cheaper. (Dr. Ansar Parvaiz).
- \* One Road Belt Initiative (BRI) will not only connect the region to the whole world but will also bring the entire world together. (Chinese Prof Hung Lee)
- \* Pak Chinese economic relations will prove to be a game changer for South Asian region (Qazi Khalil ullah)
- \* Geo-Political lobbies are encircling and blaming Pakistan (Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja)
- \* There are five nuclear powers in the region. Pakistan is one of the most important countries in South Asian Region. It's Impossible to be a world power without its support (Dr. Hammad Ullah Kakepoto)
- \* Pakistan is interested in healthy bilateral relationship with super powers. We can't tolerate Indian preeminence in the region (Dr. Rafiq Ahmed Memon)

In this Seminar **chairman senate Defense Committee Mr. Mushahid Hussain** Syed said that Pakistan has been focused as of great strategic importance China is always there to safeguard our safety and aerial protection (CPEC) Pak- China economical corridor is of great importance not only for the region but for other continents like Europe and Africa also. Pakistan is like a doorway for China to reach western countries as well as Muslim world. China is promoting trade to different regions. It has invested 4 trillion dollars on its One Road One Belt Plan while on other hand; America has wasted 6.4 trillion dollars in bombarding Afghanistan Iraq and Libya.

**Pakistani ambassador for China Moin ul Haq** said that CPEC was initiated in 2015 when Chinese President visited Pakistan. This visit Proved to be a milestone to economic progress. They call us their "Iron Brothers". Second generation of JF 17 is in under production in Kamra Pakistan. Submarine production was also made possible due to china's technical support. Our more than 25 thousand students are getting higher education in China. By directly invest 60 billion dollars in CPEC, Pakistani economy will definitely flourish and in return will bring prosperity. China is also helping in E-trade and both countries business transaction can reach up to 2 trillion Dollars, if worked seriously. The translation of the poetries of Allama Iqbal and Faiz Ahmad Faiz are being done in Chinese language.

**Former Chairman Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission Dr. Ansar Pervaiz** said that energy is very essential factor for industrial, agricultural and economic growth. We are working in collaboration with our neighbor, to produce cheap electricity by using civil nuclear technology. We will start producing 40 thousands megawatts by the year 2050 through nuclear source of Energy.

**Chinese professor Hung Lee** said that his country is interested to build economic ties with other countries in the region and to achieve this, they are working on One Road One Belt initiative. Gwadar, is the shortest distance to reach Middle East Europe and Africa. CPEC project will create Positive impact on Pakistan"s economy.

**Former Ambassador and Executive Director for CISSS Qazi M. Khalilullah** said that Pak Chinese relations started in 1951. Pakistan was the first to recognize China. It has our full support on the matter of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tibet. While Pakistan supports China on Taiwan and China is a firm supporter for Occupied Kashmir on all international forums and also support on Pakistan"s national security. Gwadar has a key role in CPEC and hence will be quiet beneficial for Pakistan economy.

**Pro Vice Chancellor of Sindh University Dr. Rafiq Ahmed Memon said that India wants to sabotage CPEC**

Through its criminal and terrorist activities. Pakistan knows its responsibilities being a nuclear power. We have great friendly relationship with our neighbor but we also want to have good relations with super powers just to create balance and peace in the region.

**Dean of Social science from Sindh University Dr. Hammad Ullah Kakepoto** said while addressing the audience that One Road One Belt Initiative (BRI) will connect the developing countries to the developed world. Industrial and economic zone will help Pakistan to grow its industries. High speed communication programmer will improve trades. Bullet trains and motorways will facilitate mobility and transportation. Chief Minister Sind Murad Ali shah has worked really hard to make Karachi Circular railway a part of CPEC. In future new and modern faculties will be introduced in the universities.

**Director for CISSS Azad Jammu And Kashmir Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja** said emphasizing the importance of foreign relations that we can"t be on the fence. We want to play our role as a liaison between Superpowers in to create serenity and peace. India

on one hand is manipulating Russia and is purchasing lethal weapons from America too. Consequently India is posing a great threat for the region but for our country as well. Though India is of China's great trade partner, but both countries relations are not good and have tension on their joint borders at Galwan valley and throughout Line of Actual Control.

**Chairperson for International relations Sindh University Dr. Ishrat Abbasi** thanked honorable guests and participants and also speakers. She further said that it's our utmost duty to keep our students updated about international affairs especially about Pak- Chinese strategic relations. Sindh University is one of the oldest educational institutes in Pakistan. He added we are grateful that people from different walks of life attended the seminar and all the media representatives who helped us to make this seminar a huge success. He also thanked the students for being attentive, patient and for listening to the speakers. Their intelligent questions show that they have a keen eye on the subject. On behalf of Sind University, she thanked Centre for International strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS) and showed his gratitude for selecting Sind University to host the seminar on such an important Topic. She assured full support for any future venture.

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## **ARTICLE**

### **PAKISTAN**

#### **Pakistan - Afghanistan - Iran border management**

Written on Abdul Mateen Akhundzada

Mr. Abdul Mateen Akhundzada's speech in verbatim follows: "I wish to focus on Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran border management. Our border with Afghanistan is facing complex border disputes while the borders with Iran is relatively peaceful and safe. The borders are accessible to everyone without any hurdles. With Afghanistan the horrors of the coronavirus, climate change, socio-economic chaos, better friendly relations ought to be sought. Pakistan's border with Afghanistan is frequently closed while the border with Iran is difficult for trade due to the international sanctions on Iran. I hold the British responsible for the border disputes in South Asia, including the dispute of Kashmir, the division of the Kurds, the issue of the Durand Line and the issue of Balochistan. Instead of fighting each other, we should spend our energy on strengthening the hands of the leaders who are managing these complex problems and we should not listen to those who are creating chaos and promoting instability in the region. We should support those leaders who work hard for the development and peace of the region. Despite disagreements with Pakistani rulers and leaders, it can be hoped that they will make positive progress on these long-standing political- and regional disputes. Due to the evolving situation in the region, the regional countries need to engage in a useful and

constructive dialogue to promote humanity and produce true leaders. All the provincial bodies of Balochistan, including the interior ministry, industry and crafts, trade authority and agriculture, livestock, border forces, tribal leaders, Army Command, political parties, and development sector need to adopt a socio-economic development approach in determining priorities and to start working for a new era of trade at the borders. In July 2020, the provincial government of Balochistan constituted committees of administrative and public representatives to look after the issues on the Pak-Afghan border such as Afghan transit trade, smuggling of prohibited and non-prohibited items, law and order situation, and the issue of the pedestrian smugglers. The committee acknowledged the following prevailing environment at the Pak-Afghan border and suggested some recommendations:

1. On the Pak-Afghan border, 12 to 15 thousand people cross the border from both sides, including the walking-smugglers.
2. Under the Afghan transit trade, goods destined for Afghanistan are unloaded at the customs border, of which ninety percent of the goods are brought back to Pakistan without payment of duties and taxes.
3. Under the guise of smuggling and illegal trafficking, militants also get an opportunity to take advantage of the situation.
4. The committee suggested resolving the issues of local businessmen and the petty smuggler. Additionally, the committee proposed alternative economic activities, effective border trade procedures, the establishment of border markets and warehouses, immigration, and customs facilities.
5. Alternative economic activities will create regular and legal employment opportunities in the border areas on both sides and the promotion of legal trade will benefit the governments and local businessmen.
6. Decisions will have to be made in the interest of the country by both relevant federal and provincial departments.
7. The issues related to the federal government should be communicated the federal government so that the problem can be solved on short- and long-term basis.

We need to understand the Pak-Afghan issue from two aspects, that is, the History and nature of their relationship. Historically, Afghanistan has been an independent and prestigious region long before Pakistan came into being. Contemporary Pakistan has remained under the occupation / administration of Afghanistan during various periods. Pakistan was considered the gateway between Central Asia and India. The caravans from the Arab region also used to reach Multan through Mekran, Bela, Karachi, and Sindh. Due to the Partition of the subcontinent, this region faced many problems including the issue of the Pak-Afghan border. The history of nations, cultures and ethnic affiliations can never be changed by geographic and borders closures, and divisions. In Pakistan due to various reasons, the problem of Divided Pashtuns did not become violent as Kashmir, Baloch, and Kurds. Unfortunately, Pak-Afghan relations have been a victim of

border conflicts, and the interests of great powers in the region. Keeping in view the overall historical and geographical facts and the changing world dynamics (economy, politics, globalization, and technology), the charismatic leaders from both countries should try to build an environment of trust and confidence. The most important and difficult problem is the attitude of the officials of both the countries as well as the attitude and emotions of the people over the Durand Line. But ultimately, we need to move forward and address this issue openly with honesty and a big heart. The National Assembly of Pakistan constituted Parliamentary Friendship Groups with four task forces on 16 July 2020, under the Chairmanship of the Speaker National Assembly with relevance to trade with Afghanistan. The first task force was established for the clearance of container traffic to Afghanistan. The second task force was tasked to look after the border trade with Afghanistan. The third task force was responsible for the issues of customs duty on imported goods from Afghanistan. The fourth task force was assigned the task of tracking and scanning of containers at the time of arrival and departure from Pakistan. It is an important effort to improve the promotion of public relations including Afghanistan transit trade for mutual trade with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The main objective of Parliamentary Friendship Groups is to strengthen the cordial relations between Pakistan and other neighbouring friendly countries. Chairman Senate Mr. Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, went to Iran to participate in the oath-taking ceremony of the Iranian President. He asked the Iranian President and the government to reduce the border issues and create new business opportunities. The agreement with Iran for the supply of electricity and gas to the coastal areas and Quetta and its surroundings is very important for social development and prosperity.

### **Recommendations**

I now wish to present some recommendations. Peace and reconciliation with both Afghanistan and Iran are the first steps towards trade, prosperity, development, and harmony. Islamic thinkers and scholars should frequently tell the verses of the Holy Quran, that the killing of one person is equal to killing of the whole of humanity. Similarly, the saving of one person is equal to saving of the entire humanity. There is a need to break the current political stasis through direct communications, negotiations to build understanding in accordance with the international rules and norms which should be adopted on the Durand Line. We must develop friendly and brotherly relations with both Afghanistan and Iran. From Chaman to Taftan, and from Gwadar to Kakar Khorasan, we must start border trade and help economically develop the people due to our geographical, cultural, and historical linkages. I suggest the following steps towards potential trade between Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran.

8. A comprehensive approach to sustainable peace is a need of the time and there should be no delay in applying the rules and regulations of border trade that will promote peace and prosperity in the region.

9. Pakistan and Afghanistan must discuss and negotiate the issues related to the Durand line. For this, the governments and people of both sides should show some maturity, employ confidence-building measures to promote peace and stability in the region.
10. If direct communication and negotiations are not considered suitable at this time, then a joint effort should be initiated to use the efforts of respected and trusted personalities from both sides to ultimately find out the solution of the problems of the border region.
11. There is a need to initiate a positive and constructive environment for border trade, otherwise, opportunities for change and potential will be lost.

Under the banner of Majlis Fikar-o-Danish and Pak-Afghan Iran-Iqbal Dialogue Research and Development Forum, we want to develop a new paradigm to adopt a development approach for the creation of scientific and intellectual dialogue. Efforts to formulate policies according to the changing trends and dictates of the new age should be considered the basic steps towards a prosperous and dignified life."

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### **Significance of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran Border utility**

Written on Barrister Sheikh Amir Khan Mandokhail

"I am grateful for inviting us to this Seminar. This Seminar is important for various reasons, as it discusses the academic and political aspect of the cross-border management. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are still at early stages of development. Iran is slightly better than the other two countries because it has more natural resources in the form of oil and a better industry than Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Iran, almost all the products are manufactured domestically which is helping their economy even during the time of international sanctions. Afghanistan has abundant natural resources that can be put to good use and it may be more convenient for Pakistan to purchase it from Afghanistan rather than the global market. An increase in cross-border trade will be beneficial for the economies of all the regional countries. If I may quote the example South Korea, it is leading in the production of semi-conductors which many other major economic powers are unable to compete in this industry due to the lack of human resources and technological capabilities. India is also interested in investing \$10 million in this industry and is planning to expand it to \$300 million. If they can do it, why should not we? Pakistan's economy is based on agriculture while it is moving towards industrialization. Global warming is a major issue for agrarian economies like Pakistan, as evident by the recent floods and heavy rains across the country. I do not have specific figures, but the recent climatic disaster has paralyzed about 50% of the country. Financial losses have been experienced by the people in the country. South Punjab, Cholistan and Balochistan have all been affected by this natural catastrophe. Another aspect of global warming in Pakistan is that our country was once a water surplus

country, but it is now a water deficit country. There numerous economic opportunities for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan's food security is dependent on Pakistan. Due to delays at the border, the trade of fresh vegetables and coal gets severely affected. Pakistan is being isolated on the world stage. I believe our economy is being negatively impacted as if our decision makers are not aware of it. Economy is a prime need of our national interest, so we must prioritize it. China is investing in almost every part of the world to achieve its desire of becoming a global hegemon. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an example. All these three countries should try to maintain good ties with each other to achieve peace and economic prosperity. If we do not treat our neighbors with dignity and honor, we will not have any friends around. It is important to strengthen our ties with India to have peace and stability in the region. Although we are finally focusing on the cross-border commerce concerns after neglecting them for so long, there is still much to be done in this area. Our poor infrastructure, roads and railways is a significant barrier of trade in Pakistan. In the past, democratic governments somehow managed to handle this grave issue by building roads and other infrastructure. Pakistan has total of 1,26,000 km roads, of which 1,06,000 km are not paved and 10,000 km are motor ways and highways, making up 3.6% of the total. Around 60% of trade is conducted on the 1,01,756 km of road infrastructure that runs from north to south across the country. Although there were only 50,000 km of roads in 1947, but the traffic on, roads was just 7 %. Now 96% of traffic is on roads bringing road network under strain. Around 20,000 km of Balochistan's total 29,000 km of roads are paved. Balochistan makes up 37% of Pakistan's high-speed road infrastructure, however, when traffic and road density are compared, the province only makes up 0.0 126% of the nation. Additionally, just 43% of Balochistan's infrastructure has been developed. Population is sparse as such more than half of Balochistan is deprived of energy. The lack of development in the province had a significant impact on the living standards of the people. The people of the province are dependent on livestock and agriculture. Due to long distances, sparse population, and poor infrastructure, the agriculture products and cattle cannot reach the market on time. I feel the transportation system also requires improvement. All logistics currently fall under National Logistic Cell (NLC). The NLC is responsible for all vehicle and freight transportation. In addition, our vehicles are subjected to significant tasks, loading, and unloading of the consignments account for 70% of the issues. The Logistic Performance Index places Pakistan at the 71st number, out of 155 nations. If our country's transportation system improves, we will generate savings of up to \$2.5 million. The NLC must help create policies that will improve trade with the neighboring countries. I conclude by saying that if the Central Asian Road network is operationalized, it will increase the output of commerce transit by 116%, which will help Pakistan's economy grow. The path of commerce would also aid in ending poverty. Pakistan must maintain positive relations with its neighbors.”

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## **Pakistan to host summit of Central Asian leaders soon of focus on trade, connectivity**

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said that Pakistan would soon host a summit of the leaders of Central Asian states that would focus on connectivity through road and rail links to boost regional trade and investment. The prime minister, in a meeting with a nine-member parliamentary delegation of Kazakhstan led by Chairman of the Lower House (Mazhilis) of the Parliament, Yerlan Koshanov here, underscored the need to establish and strengthen bilateral cooperation in the energy, transport, and transit trade and logistics sectors. Welcoming the delegation, he highlighted the special nature of Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations which were deeply rooted in history, religion and culture. He underscored that Pakistan is keen to further deepen cooperation with the Central Asian states, particularly Kazakhstan. Recalling his meeting with Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on the sidelines of the CICA summit in Astana and SCO Summit in Samarkand, the prime minister said both sides had fruitful discussions for boosting ties. Prime Minister Shehbaz said he was looking forward to the Pakistan visit of the Kazakhstan president. He informed that Pakistan would soon be hosting a summit of the leaders of Central Asian states that would focus on connectivity through road and rail links to boost regional trade and investment. Yerlan Koshanov updated the prime minister about the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group which was held during the ongoing visit of the Kazakhstan parliamentary delegation. He underlined the need for exchange of parliamentary delegations that would further promote people-to-people exchanges between the two brotherly countries. Chairman Yerlan Koshanov informed that Kazakhstan can benefit from the huge Pakistani market and showed keen interest in bilateral trade and cooperation in connectivity, pharmaceuticals industry and surgical and sports goods. He informed that current bilateral trade was only \$ 95 million which is not commensurate with the huge trade potential between the two countries. He said the bilateral trade could be easily doubled within a short span of time. On behalf of the people and Government of Kazakhstan, the chairman's of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan expressed deep condolence and sincere sympathies for the victims of recent catastrophic floods in Pakistan. National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf, Minister of State for Petroleum Dr. Musadik Malik, and Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Coordination Syed Tariq Fatemi also attended the meeting.

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## **Reko Diq Project: ECC approves opening of \$900m escrow account**

Written on Mehtab Haider

After endorsement of the multi-billion dollars Reko Diq project deal by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet on Sunday approved opening of an escrow account for depositing \$900 million for making the project operational. The ECC also approved another summary for approving the

Government of Pakistan's funding plan to the tune of \$717 million over a period of six years. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Ishaq Dar presided over the ECC of the Cabinet meeting virtually. With the approval of the federal and provincial cabinets, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) and the provincial government of Balochistan (GoB) have entered into an out-of-court settlement with M/s Tethyan Copper Company Pvt. Limited, Australia (TCCA) [jointly owned by Barrick Gold Corporation of Canada and M/s Antofagasta PLC of Chile] in respect of Reko-Diq Copper-Gold Project - Chagai district (Balochistan) after the adverse arbitral awards of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and expected similar award from International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) against the federation and the Balochistan province, respectively. Under the settlement arrangement, the joint venture was divided into 50 per cent shares by Barrick Gold Corporation, 25 per cent by federal government through a single special purpose vehicle, namely, Pakistan Minerals (Private) Limited (SOEs' SPV) and 25 per cent by Balochistan as 10pc direct free carried + 15% through Balochistan Mineral Resources Limited (GoB SPV), to be paid by GoP along with capital and operating expenses on the project. According to an official statement, issued by the Ministry of Finance, the ECC considered and approved two important agenda items related to the Reko Diq project, thus paving the way for early start of the project. The Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) submitted a summary of accrued interest with respect to the amount held in an escrow account in connection with the Reko Diq project dispute settlement. It was presented that the government of Pakistan (GoP) and the provincial Government of Balochistan (GoB) entered into an out-of-court dispute settlement with M/s Tethyan Copper Company (Pvt) Limited- a consortium of Barrick Gold Corporation of Canada and M/s Antofagasta PLC of Chile, in respect of Reko Diq Copper-Gold Project in Chagai district of Balochistan. As per settlement terms, the GoP has to clear liabilities to Antofagasta PLC. In the light of the terms of agreed settlement, the ECC allowed Finance Division to direct GHPL (for its own as well as GoB's share), OGDCL and PPL to deposit the aggregate amount of interest to the sum of US\$22,718,173, in the escrow account from March 31, 2022 to December 15, 2022. The ECC further allowed Finance Division to arrange the interest payable for GoB's share amounting to US\$ 8,519,314 from the loan of Rs. 65 billion already raised by the GHPL with the GoP guarantee. Further, the ECC allowed the Divisions of GoP concerned and the SOEs to act in such a manner to ensure that the deposited amount, along with interest deposited by the SOEs in the escrow account to form part of the consideration for share purchase of Reko Diq Mining Company Limited. The ECC also considered and approved a proposal of Finance Division through a summary on funding plan of Government of Pakistan for share of Government of Balochistan in Reko Diq project. As per proposal, overall funding commitment of US\$717 million over the period of 6 years by the GoP in respect of GoB SPV Project Capital Commitment to be provided by the Government of Pakistan.

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## **25 terrorists killed in Bannu CTD hostage operation**

Security forces stormed the CTD compound, killing 25 terrorists, arresting two and forcing seven to surrender

Written on Muhammad Anis

Security forces on Tuesday stormed the Counter-Terrorism Department's (CTD) compound here, killing 25 terrorists, arresting two and forcing seven to surrender, said ISPR chief Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif. A junior commissioned officer and two sepoy were martyred while 10 soldiers, including three officers, were injured in the action. Speaking in Geo News programme Aapas Ki Baat, anchored by Muneeb Farooq, Gen Sharif said that on December 18, a detained terrorist overpowered the duty constable, snatched his weapon and freed 34 other terrorists, adding they grabbed more weapons from the armoury and started firing. A CTD constable was martyred while another was injured who died at hospital. Gen Sharif said the terrorists took a junior commissioned officer hostage. Upon hearing the firing, security forces from Bannu Cantt promptly reached the complex and put the area under siege. The ISPR chief said that right after the terrorists occupied the complex on December 18, the security forces killed two of the terrorists and arrested three of them. Two security personnel were injured. Gen Sharif said that while attempts were made over the next two days to convince the terrorists to surrender unconditionally, an effective siege foiled terrorists' every bid to escape. The terrorists had demanded safe passage to Afghanistan, but they were told it was out of the question, Gen Sharif added. He said that on their refusal to surrender, the security forces stormed the complex, killing 25 terrorists in a heavy exchange of fire. Gen Sharif said that besides three arrests, seven terrorists surrendered, three sons of the nation Subedar Major Khursheed Akram, Sepoy Saeed and Sepoy Babar embraced martyrdom. Ten soldiers, including three officers, were injured. Gen Sharif expressed the security forces' resolve to wipe out terrorism, adding sacrifices by the brave martyr's further firm the resolve. The situation remained tense in Bannu on the third day on Tuesday amid the operation to clear the CTD compound of the militants. On the other hand, Federal Minister Khwaja Asif told the National Assembly that all the terrorists had been killed in an operation conducted by the Special Services Group of the army. A few members of the security personnel also sustained injuries in the operation. He said there were 33 militants in the CTD compound when one of them snatched weapons from an official and took other officials hostage after releasing all those held in the facility. The federal minister said the operation was launched at around 12:30 pm. Khawaja Asif, speaking at the joint session of parliament, said that security forces had killed all 33 terrorists and freed all hostages held in the CTD compound in Bannu Cantonment in a successful operation. The minister said that two security officials embraced martyrdom in the operation, and while 10 to 15 SSG personnel, including an officer, were injured, some of them critical. He said the Special Services Group of the Pakistan Army started the operation at 12:30 pm. on Tuesday (December 20) and got the compound cleared by

2:30 pm. He told the house that there were 33 terrorists inside the compound, and one of them overpowered a CTD man inside the center. He snatched weapons from the officials, and then terrorists took over the center. He said that the militants did not belong to one group, but were instead from different outfits. At the outset, the Joint Session of the Parliament prayed for the departed souls, including the grandmother of Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durrani, martyred officials of the security forces who laid their lives down in the line of duty in defence of the country, and 12 other people who died in a cylinder blast in Balochistan. The house also prayed for the early recovery of injured. Later, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told a presser on Tuesday that the federal government would have to ask the Pakistan Army to launch an operation against terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the provincial government could not respond to terrorist acts. "This is the need of the hour given the situation there, which is also due to spillover impacts of the situation in Afghanistan," Khawaja Asif, while responding to a question at a media briefing about the possibility of any new operation with particular reference to THE KP province, said, adding Pakistan also wanted peace in the neighbouring country. The minister said the KP government, which is in charge of CTD in the province, had no involvement in the operation and had failed to fulfil its responsibilities. "This is an utter failure, and the security forces had to be involved, and they sacrificed their lives," the minister said, adding that the whole KP government is a hostage of Imran Khan in Zaman Park. On the other hand, the people of the province are being held hostage by terrorists. "This is the failure of nine years as the PTI government in the province repeatedly failed to deliver and come up to the expectations of people," he said, adding that Imran Khan, who still uses the helicopter of the provincial government, wanted to come to power again and destroy everything that was left. He pointed out that whenever there was a difficult time in the KP, including floods in the province, the provincial government fails to deliver and fulfil its responsibilities. "This is the total collapse of the KP government. There is a crisis in the province while the chief minister is a hostage of Imran Khan," he said. He said a process would have to be carried out mainly in the KP province, where the government had failed to fulfil its duties. "The federal government will have the armed forces come into action and defend our territory," the minister said. Khawaja Asif said. He said the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained irrelevant to the Bannu incident. He said the capacity of the Counter Terrorism Department of the KP province was found to be insufficient; rather, they lack the capacity and training to deal with acts of terrorism. "The whole provincial leadership of PTI's KP chapter is also sitting in Zaman Park, and you know very well what they are planning to do," the minister said. "Troops of the Pakistan Army reached there on Sunday, and completed the operation today," Khwaja Asif told newsmen. A medical emergency was declared in hospitals in Bannu, while all the public and private educational institutions were closed ahead of the operation to clear the CTD office that had been under the control of militants since

Sunday evening. Thick smoke was seen billowing into the sky and explosions were also heard when the commandos were carrying out the operation. Some reports said grenades were lobbed into the building through drones. Most of the roads were blocked, while internet services remained suspended in parts of Bannu during the operation. Meanwhile, terrorists stormed the city police station in Wana, South Waziristan, snatching weapons and vehicles from the cops before fleeing. One policeman was reportedly injured in the Wana attack. Reports said one attacker was killed by the law enforcement agencies' personnel when the Frontier Corps arrived and exchanged fire with the attackers. The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for the attack. Meanwhile, funeral prayers for the martyred official of Intelligence Bureau were offered at the Malik Saad Shaheed Police Lines in Peshawar. Governor Ghulam Ali and senior officials attended the funeral. There was no one from the provincial government to attend the funeral. IB Sub-Inspector Shaukat Mahboob was martyred in an apparent target-killing attack on the Warsak Road on Monday evening. KP Police Chief Moazzam Jah Ansari, along with Capital City Police Officer Muhammad Ijaz Khan, on Tuesday visited several places in the provincial capital to inspect the security and check the level of alertness of policemen at police posts and other places, including churches and sensitive buildings.

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### **Pakistan to receive \$3 billion from „friendly country“**

Ishaq Dar stresses he won't take dictation from IMF; assures that Pakistan will not default Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar said Friday, without naming the nation, that Pakistan would receive \$3 billion from a "friendly country". In an interview during Geo News programme "Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Sath", Dar assured that Pakistan would meet all the requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the ninth review and it would default. However, he stressed that the international money lender could not dictate Islamabad on managing its finances. Dar said he would not beg the IMF for providing loans to Pakistan and he has told the lender's officials that "you can't dictate; if the money doesn't come in, we'll manage". The FinMin said all the commitments with the international money lender were in order and the government has been holding weekly meetings with the Fund for the ninth review. The News reported that Pakistan and the IMF talks are continuing on the ninth review, but both sides are yet to strike a broader agreement on a revised macroeconomic framework for the current financial year. The lingering of the talks may delay the conclusion of the ninth review and release of the \$1 billion tranche till the next calendar year 2023. Both Pakistan and the global lender are tight-lipped and no one is willing to say anything on record but background discussions suggest that the talks were in limbo because of differences over the revised macroeconomic and fiscal framework shared with the IMF. But the finance minister said Pakistan has met all of the Fund's demands, but as both sides are yet to strike an

agreement, the lender is "behaving abnormally". "However, I have never and I will never take dictations from institutions like IMF. Luckily or unluckily, IMF has been declared as the financial doctor of countries," he lamented. The minister's statement comes amid Pakistan's foreign reserves not being in an ideal condition as they can cover imports for only the next 1.6 months and after the floods, the imports are expected to increase. Although the trade deficit shrunk by 30.14% to \$14.4 billion in the first five months of the ongoing fiscal year 2022-23, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)-held foreign exchange reserves declined by 4.17% to \$7,498.7 million as of November 25. Pakistan, which has suffered flood losses worth \$30 billion, is expected to receive funds from international donors, but the commitments from friendly are yet to materialise as they hang in limbo. However, the finance minister is hopeful that Pakistan would not only meet the requirements of the IMF, but the government would also ensure that funds keep trickling into the SBP's account.

### **Dar berates PTI, Miftah Ismail**

Categorically rejecting PTI Chairman Imran Khan's claims about the expected economic collapse, the finance minister assured Pakistan would never default. "Neither has Pakistan defaulted nor will it in the future, Inshallah." Berating the former PTI government, the finance minister said that it had left the country in "shambles". Referring to Khan's statements about default, Dar said that he should think that he was not serving the country by giving such remarks as it sends a "bad impression" to the international community. He reiterated that the government was taking measures to repay the debt on time. Dar maintained that Pakistan's potential default could be among Khan's wishes, however, it would never be fulfilled. The finance minister also accused the PTI chairman of giving priority to his politics over the state. Dar suggested Khan wait for the election as the schedule and procedure for the polls have been described in the constitution. Lashing out at the PTI, he maintained after the party was ousted from the government, it left \$9 billion in reserves and of that, \$3 billion were loans of a country and the rest of the amount was of other countries. Criticising the former finance minister of his own party, the finance czar said that Miftah Ismail should be asked what he had arranged to pay the debt. "Should Miftah Ismail have not arranged 32 million," asked the finance minister. Dar maintained that he did not want to respond to Miftah's statements as he was a member of his party.

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## **RUSSIA**

### **Ukraine war tolls death knell for NATO**

The defining moment in US President Joe Biden's press conference at the White House last Wednesday, during President Zelensky's visit, was his virtual admission that he is constrained in the proxy war in Ukraine, as European allies don't want a war with Russia.

To quote Biden, "Now, you say, 'why don't we just give Ukraine everything there is to give?' Well, for two reasons. One, there's an entire Alliance that is critical to stay with Ukraine. And the idea that we would give Ukraine material that is fundamentally different than is already going there would have a prospect of breaking up NATO and breaking up the European Union and the rest of the world... I've spent several hundred hours face-to-face with our European allies and the heads of state of those countries, and making the case as to why it was overwhelmingly in their interest that they continue to support Ukraine... They understand it fully, but they're not looking to go to war with Russia. They're not looking for a third World War." Biden realised at that point that "I probably already said too much" and abruptly ended the press conference. He probably forgot that he was dwelling on the fragility of Western unity. The whole point is that the western commentariat largely forgets that Russia's core agenda is not about territorial conquest much as Ukraine is vital to Russian interests but about NATO expansion. And that has not changed. Every now and then President Putin revisits the fundamental theme that the US consistently aimed to weaken and dismember Russia. As recently as last Wednesday, Putin invoked the Chechen war in the 1990s "the use of international terrorists in the Caucasus, to finish off Russia and to split the Russian Federation... They US claimed to condemn al-Qaeda and other criminals, yet they considered using them on the territory of Russia as acceptable and provided all kinds of assistance to them, including material, information, political and any other support, notably military support, to encourage them to continue fighting against Russia." Putin has a phenomenal memory and would have been alluding to Biden's careful choice of William Burns as his CIA chief. Burns was Moscow Embassy's point person for Chechnya in the 1990s! Putin has now ordered a nation-wide campaign to root out the vast tentacles that the US intelligence planted on Russian soil for internal subversion. Carnegie, once headed by Burns, has since shut down its Moscow office, and the Russian staff fled to the West! The leitmotif of the expanded meeting of the Board of the Defence Ministry in Moscow on Wednesday, which Putin addressed, was the profound reality that Russia's confrontation with the US is not going to end with Ukraine war. Putin exhorted the Russian top brass to "carefully analyse" the lessons of Ukraine and Syrian conflicts. Importantly, Putin said, "We will continue maintaining and improving the combat readiness of the nuclear triad. It is the main guarantee that our sovereignty and territorial integrity, strategic parity and the general balance of forces in the world are preserved. This year, the level of modern armaments in the strategic nuclear forces has already exceeded 91 percent. We continue rearming the regiments of our strategic missile forces with modern missile systems with Avangard hypersonic warheads." Equally, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu proposed at Wednesday's meeting a military build-up "to bolster Russia's security," including:

- Creation of a corresponding group of forces in Russia's northwest to counter Finland and Sweden's induction as NATO members;

- Creation of two new motorised infantry divisions in the Kherson and Zaporozhya regions, as well as an army corps in Karelia, facing Finnish border;
- Upgrade of 7 motorised infantry brigades into motorised infantry divisions in the Western, Central and Eastern military districts, and in the Northern Fleet;
- Addition of two more air assault divisions in the Airborne Forces;
- Provision of a composite aviation division and an army aviation brigade with 80-100 combat helicopters within each combined arms (tank) army;
- Creation of 3 additional air division commands, eight bomber aviation regiments, one fighter aviation regiment, and six army aviation brigades;
- Creation of 5 district artillery divisions, as well as super-heavy artillery brigades for building artillery reserves along the so-called strategic axis;
- Creation of 5 naval infantry brigades for the Navy's coastal troops based on the existing naval infantry brigades;
- Increase in the size of the Armed Forces to 1.5 million service personnel, with 695,000 people serving under contract.

Putin summed up: "We will not repeat the mistakes of the past... We are not going to militarise our country or militarise the economy... and we will not do things we do not really need, to the detriment of our people and the economy, the social sphere. We will improve the Russian Armed Forces and the entire military component. We will do it calmly, routinely and consistently, without haste." If the neocons in the driving seat in the Beltway wanted an arms race, they have it now. The paradox, however, is that this is going to be different from the bipolar Cold War era arms race. If the US intention was to weaken Russia before confronting China, things aren't working that way. Instead, the US is getting locked into a confrontation with Russia and the ties between the two big powers are at a breaking point. Russia expects the US to roll back NATO's expansion, as promised to the Soviet leadership in 1989. The neocons had expected a "win-win" in Ukraine: Russian defeat and a disgraceful end to Putin presidency; a weakened Russia, as in the 1990s, groping for a new start; consolidation of western unity under a triumphant America; a massive boost in the upcoming struggle with China for supremacy in the world order; and a New American Century under the "rules-based world order". But instead, this is turning out to be a classic Zugzwang in the endgame to borrow from German chess literature where the US is under obligation to make a move on Ukraine but whichever move it makes will only worsen its geopolitical position. Biden has understood that Russia cannot be defeated in Ukraine; nor are Russian people in any mood for an insurrection. Putin's popularity is soaring high, as Russian objectives in Ukraine are being steadily realised. Thus, Biden is getting a vague sense, perhaps, that Russia isn't exactly seeing things in Ukraine as a binary of victory and defeat, but is gearing up for the long haul to sort out NATO once and for all. The transformation of Belarus as a "nuclear-capable" state carries a profound message from Moscow to Brussels and Washington. Biden cannot miss it. (See my blog NATO nuclear compass



rendered unavailing, Indian Punchline, Dec. 21, 2022 Logically, the option open to the US at this point would be to disengage. But that becomes an abject admission of defeat and will mean the death knell for the NATO, and Washington's transatlantic leadership goes kaput. And, worse still, major west European powers Germany, France and Italy may start looking for a modus vivendi with Russia. Above all, how can NATO possibly survive without an "enemy"? Clearly, neither the US nor its allies are in a position to fight a continental war. But even if they are, what about the emerging scenario in the Asia-Pacific, where the "no limits" partnership between China and Russia has added an intriguing layer in the geopolitics? The neocons in the Beltway have bitten more than what they could chew. Their last card will be to push for a direct US military intervention in the Ukraine war under the banner of a "coalition of the willing."

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### **A German-China-Russia triangle on Ukraine**

Germany defies US by maintaining constructive engagement with China, which Berlin sees as uniquely placed as peacemaker in Ukraine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken probably thought that in his self-appointed role as the world's policeman, it was his prerogative to check out what is going on between Germany, China and Russia that he wasn't privy to. Certainly, Blinken's call to Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Friday turned out to be a fiasco. Most certainly, his intention was to gather details on two high-level exchanges that Chinese President Xi Jinping had on successive days last week with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the Chairman of the United Russia Party and former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev respectively. Blinken made an intelligent guess that Steinmeier's phone call to Xi on Tuesday and Medvedev's surprise visit to Beijing and his meeting with Xi on Wednesday might not have been coincidental. Medvedev's mission would have been to transmit some highly sensitive message from Putin to Xi Jinping. Only last week, reports said Moscow and Beijing were working on a meeting between Putin and Xi Jinping later this month. Steinmeier is an experienced diplomat who held the post of foreign minister from 2005 to 2009 and again from 2013 to 2017, as well as of Vice Chancellor of Germany from 2007 to 2009 and all of it during the period Angela Merkel was the German chancellor (2005- 2021). Merkel left a legacy of surge in Germany's relations with both Russia and China. Steinmeier is a senior politician belonging to the Social Democratic Party same as present chancellor Olaf Scholz. It is certain that Steinmeier's call with Xi was in consultation with Scholz. This is one thing. Most importantly, Steinmeier had played a seminal role in negotiating the two Minsk Agreements (2014 and 2015), which provided for a package of measures to stop the fighting in Donbass in the downstream of the US-sponsored coup in Kiev. When the Minsk agreements began unravelling by 2016, Steinmeier stepped in with an ingenious idea that later came to be known as the Steinmeier Formula spelling out the sequencing of events spelt out in the

agreements. Specifically, the Steinmeier formula called for elections to be held in the separatist-held territories of Donbass under Ukrainian legislation and the supervision of the OSCE. It proposed that if the OSCE judged the balloting to be free and fair, then a special self-governing status for the territories would be initiated. Of course, all that is history today. Merkel "confessed" recently in an interview with Zeit newspaper that in reality, the Minsk agreement was a western attempt to buy "invaluable time" for Kiev to rearm itself. Given this complex backdrop, Blinken would have sensed something was amiss when Steinmeier had a call with Xi Jinping out of the blue, and Medvedev made a sudden appearance in Beijing the next day and was received by the Chinese president. Notably, Beijing's readouts were rather upbeat on China's relationship with Germany and Russia. Xi Jinping put forward a three-point proposal to Steinmeier on the development of China-Germany relations and stated that "China and Germany have always been partners of dialogue, development, and cooperation as well as partners for addressing global challenges." Similarly, in the meeting with Medvedev, he underscored that "China is ready to work with Russia to constantly push forward China-Russia relations in the new era and make global governance more just and equitable." Both readouts mentioned Ukraine as a topic of discussion, with Xi stressing that "China stays committed to promoting peace talks" (to Steinmeier) and "actively promoted peace talks" (to Medvedev). But Blinken went about his mission clumsily by bringing to the fore the contentious US-China issues, especially "the current COVID-19 situation" in China and "the importance of transparency for the international community." It comes as no surprise that Wang Yi gave a stern lecturing to Blinken not to "engage in dialogue and containment at the same time", or to "talk cooperation, but stab China simultaneously". Wang Yi said, "This is not reasonable competition, but irrational suppression. It is not meant to properly manage disputes, but to intensify conflicts. In fact, it is still the old practice of unilateral bullying. This did not work for China in the past, nor will it work in the future." Specifically, on Ukraine, Wang Yi said, "China has always stood on the side of peace, of the purposes of the UN Charter, and of the international society to promote peace and talks. China will continue to play a constructive role in resolving the crisis in China's own way." From the US state department readout, Blinken failed to engage Wang Yi in a meaningful conversation on Ukraine. Indeed, Germany's recent overtures to Beijing in quick succession Chancellor Olaf Scholz's high-profile visit to China last month with a delegation of top German CEOs and Steinmeier's phone call last week have not gone down well in the Beltway. The Biden Administration expects Germany to coordinate with Washington first instead of taking own initiatives toward China. (Interestingly, Xi Jinping underscored the importance of Germany preserving its strategic autonomy.) The current pro-American foreign minister of Germany Annalena Baerbock distanced herself from Chancellor Scholz's China visit. Evidently, Steinmeier's phone call to Xi confirms that Scholz is moving according to a plan to pursue a path of constructive engagement with China, as

Merkel did, no matter the state of play in the US' tense relationship with China. That said, discussing peacemaking in Ukraine with China is a daring move on the part of the German leadership at the present juncture when the Biden Administration is deeply engaged in a proxy war with Russia and has every intention to support Ukraine "for as long as it takes." But there is another side to it. Germany has been internalising its anger and humiliation during the past several months. Germany cannot but feel that it has been played in the countdown to the Ukraine conflict something particularly galling for a country that is genuinely Atlanticist in its foreign-policy orientation. German ministers have expressed displeasure publicly that American oil companies are brazenly exploiting the ensuing energy crisis to make windfall profits by selling gas at three to four times the domestic price in the US. Germany also fears that Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act building on foundational climate and clean energy investments may lead to the migration of German industry to America. The unkindest cut of all has been the destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline. Germany must be having a fairly good idea as to the forces that were behind that terrorist act, but it cannot even call them out and must suppress its sense of humiliation and indignation. The destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines makes a revival of German-Russian relationship an extremely tortuous affair. For any nation with a proud history, it is a bit too much to accept being pushed around like a pawn. Scholz and Steinmeier are seasoned politicians and would know when to dig in and hunker down. In any case, China is a crucially important partner for Germany's economic recovery. Germany can ill afford to let the US destroy its partnership with China also, and reduce it to a vassal state. When it comes to Ukraine war, Germany becomes a frontline state but it is Washington that determines the western tactic and strategy. Germany estimates that China is uniquely placed to be a peacemaker in Ukraine. The signs are that Beijing is warming up to that idea too.

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### **The west waging Media war against Russia**

Written on Ahmad Ali Khan

The west's best weapon against its opponent is media war in which West has the best tools under control and very advance in propagating machinery right from Canada, USA, Europe, Australia and other associated countries. The West's installed puppet government of Ukraine and its president Zelenskyy has presented 10 point peace plan with the consultation of American President Joe Biden including Global Peace Summit. This plan is just to isolate Russia having global attraction such as Radiation and nuclear safety, Food Security, Energy Security, releasing of prisoners of war and accusation of Russia of inhuman treatment of civilian population in Ukraine which according to Russia is baseless. But one can understand that in war such things can happen but from both sides and both sides claim compliance of international conventions and whatever is done it is in defense of their citizens and their territory. Russian blame that Kyiv is

interested in increasing the number of victims of war for their subsequent accusation of Moscow and formation of negative image of Russia in the world. In fact Russia must be knowing that USA is using this tool to control all the countries of the world even more the European countries which are helpless in front of USA design of keeping its primacy over the world. Russia has been trying to come out from keeping itself isolated and has not developed counter Propaganda Machinery except Russian Television. It has to increase the reach of its media mechanism to counter USA. Russia and China are trying their best to control the use of petro-dollar which is the real strength of USA. Once USA is out petro-dollar wealth it will be like any other country of the world. The visit of China's president to Saudi Arabia and made an agreement on the basis of Chinese currency Yuan. After this agreement in the west there is hue and cry that Yuan will replace dollar as world's new currency. Further, Russia's 300 years' romance with Europe has been broken and Europe is slipping from the grip of USA. In Italy, Russian entertainment troop was well received as the Italian President and Prime Minister attended the show to demonstrate solidarity with Russia. Germany also shown tilt towards Russia and intellectuals are saying that there is going to be an alliance among China, Russia and Germany. Though it is too far and seems to be American propaganda but Germany is feeling too cold and paying high price of siding USA. In spite of this development, Russian blames that Europeans and American leadership keeping blind eyes to the crimes that Ukraine military is doing. The government of Ukraine or Military leadership was held responsible or accountable for the murder of a lady journalist Daria Dugina or other such incidents like Pre-trial detention center, train station attack and burning of people in the house of Trade Union Odessa. Americans are working two things: (1) To bring Russian citizens to justice for war crime on Ukraine territory and (2) to create international tribunals against leadership of Russia and the military an instrument of political pressure. This is not any legal credibility, according to legal experts without UN mechanism. Ukraine has as usual, have some blames as it is usual in wars and this blame game shall increase if the war is prolongs. Therefore, it is in the best interest of Ukraine and Russia together with the mankind that war ends amicably and Russian fear of coming NATO at it doorstep should be addressed and also Ukraine's fear should also be considered.

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### **SCO's effectiveness yet to emerge**

Written on Interaction Desk

With Russian Ukraine conflict Russia's importance has increased manifold. It has shown mussels to Europe as well as shown sympathy with them in supplying gas in winter. It has offered Pakistan also to supply gas and oil which Pakistan needs badly. So its influence is increasing in Pakistan as well. On the other side, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has emerged as a strong alternative to the western alliance but its

effectiveness is yet to be determined. Having established its roots now the members leading members namely China and Russia intend to enhance the cooperation between the members and limit reliance on the prevailing American-led system. In April 2022, In light of Russia's continued exclusion from international sports, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) establish an "Association of sports organizations" and host "Major sporting events" under its auspices. Putin's invasion of Ukraine prompted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to recommend that athletes and officials from Russia and Belarus not participate in international sporting events. Most international federations have actually accepted this recommendation Since February 2022 when "safeguards" were put in place; Russia has only been able to participate in a limited number of sporting events with its allies, especially Belarus, which supports the invasion of Ukraine. However, Russia is a key member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which also includes Iran and the Central Asian former Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. China, India, and Pakistan are also members. In Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where the SCO nations met, Putin promoted the idea of an organization hosting sports events, highlighting that such events are good opportunities for enhancing sports cooperation with the vision of hosting major sports events under the SCO umbrella. He emphasized the need for creating an association of sports organizations within SCO. In addition to this, the need for higher military cooperation among SCO member states was discussed in the SCO defense ministers meeting on August 24, 2022. Ministers decided to hold Peaceful Mission 2023 joint military counter-terrorism command exercise in the Russian Federation in response to new tactics used by international terrorists. Russia proposed that during the exercise, stakeholders should focus on combating unmanned aerial vehicles, ensuring information security, and preventing terrorist attacks using chemical and biological weapons. The ties of the SCO with other international organizations are becoming a tool for strengthening regional security. In this context, Russia proposed to consider the possibility of inviting military units of other international organizations, as well as soldiers and observers from friendly countries, to participate in the Peaceful Mission exercise. The ministers agreed to continue their efforts to strengthen friendship and neighborly relations among SCO member states and expand security cooperation to ensure peace, stability, and sustainable development in the region. In this context, they spoke in favor of strengthening the practical cooperation of the SCO with other regional partner organizations. Defense ministers expressed their commitment to expanding military-to-military cooperation and welcomed Russia's initiative to invite SCO member states to participate in the Vostok 2022 strategic command exercise hosted by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. The Defense Ministers emphasized the need for the Trumpet of Peace International Military Band Festival to continue as a major platform for stronger mutual understanding, friendship, and promotion of cultural exchanges among the armed

forces of the SCO member states. The participants agreed to further expand cooperation in order to ensure regional stability and create favorable conditions to guarantee the continuous progress and development of the SCO. These propositions and steps seem to be in the right direction for enhancing the capabilities and the effectiveness of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), however, SCO has still a long way to go if it wants to establish itself as a viable alternative to the western alliance. This can only be done through commitment and not through half-hearted measures of some of the member states like India which have one foot in SCO and the rest of itself in the American Block. India is sailing in two boats at a time. One should clearly and clean in supporting SCO in sports and Military. Anyhow, to begin with Russian efforts are good to establish a parallel system of the world to end the primacy of USA ultimately in all fields: sports, Banking and Military. Russia importance and effectiveness is coming in lime light slowly and gradually as USA's influence is apparently diminishes. Let us hope for good and better relation with Pakistan. We hope that Pakistan will be helped by Russia to become a friend in need.

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### **'Cold war never ended' says Angela Merkel**

Former chancellor refuses to apologize for Germany's reliance on Russian gas, arguing alternative energy was too expensive

Written on Jorg Luyken

Angela Merkel has said "the Cold War never ended" as she admitted she should have spent more money on Germany's military while she was chancellor. In her most critical comments yet on her own legacy, Ms. Merkel conceded that "we should have 'reacted more quickly to Russia's aggressiveness," saying she took personal responsibility for not "making impassioned speeches about it every day". The recognition that she should have done more to build a compelling military deterrence "preoccupied" her, Ms. Merkel told Die Zeit newspaper. "The Cold War never really ended because Russia was basically not satisfied," she said. After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Germany raised its military spending but never managed to hit a NATO spending target of two per cent of GDP under her watch. In the interview, she conceded that this had weakened her ability to negotiate with Vladimir Putin, saying she "didn't do enough" to deter Mr. Putin by modernising the German military. But the former chancellor refused to repent from the energy policies which led Germany to deepen its reliance on Russian gas, particularly through the Nord Stream pipelines under the Baltic Sea. Arguing that alternative sources of energy would have been too expensive, she said that buying elsewhere would have been "a massive political decision" that "wouldn't have been accepted". She added that blocking the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would have "dangerously damaged" relations with the Kremlin at a time when Berlin was trying to mediate a cease-fire in the

east of Ukraine. Any admission of fault would be disingenuous, she insisted, claiming that it would be “pathetic” to show contrition “just to have peace of mind”.

### **Legacy has fallen apart**

Ms. Merkel left office after 16 years in power a year ago, when she handed over the reins to Olaf Scholz of the Social Democrats. After years of economic stability, her approval ratings were sky-high when she left office. But since then, much of her legacy has fallen apart in a remarkably short time. Last month, Wolfgang Schäuble, her long-time finance minister, said in an interview that he found it remarkable that “even now she cannot say that we made mistakes”. “We didn't want to see it,” Mr. Schäuble said of Germany's dependence on Russia, adding that “that was true for everyone”. „Mr. Putins invasion of Ukraine left Germany scrambling to find new supplies of gas. The higher energy prices that German industry is likely to have to pay in the future has led to anxiety that the German economy has become vulnerable.

### **Soft approach on China**

Ms. Merkel's soft approach on China has also come in for criticism. Mr. Scholz' own coalition allies have pleaded with him not to do “Merkel as usual” as he visited Beijing, a reference to her policy of putting business before human rights issues. Meanwhile, Mr. Scholz has said that he plans to have a European air defence system up and running within five years. He told French newspaper Ouest-France that his government is “talking to the manufacturers of the various systems to get ready for concrete decisions”. The air defence system, the so-called European Sky Shield, has the backing of Germany and more than a dozen other NATO countries. The weapon systems under consideration include German Iris-T, Israel's Arrow 3 system, and the US Patriot system. Source: The Telegraph, United Kingdom.

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### **Russia, Iran open a trade route heralding a bloc**

Consequent upon the Ukraine war, as the Sea of Azov becomes an inland sea for Russia, bracketed by the Crimean Peninsula and the mouth of the River Don, the sea and rail networks of the region extend to Iranian hubs on the Caspian Sea and ultimately lead to the Indian Ocean. A feature article in Bloomberg last week titled Russia and Iran Are Building a Trade Route That Defies Sanctions brings to centre stage this “sanctions-busting” project in the region. Last month, Mehr News Agency reported that a first 12 millionton shipment of Russian grain bound for India already transited Iran. The time has come for the inland trade corridor known as the International North-South Transport Corridor or the INSTC, which was launched in 2000 to connect the Baltic Sea with the Indian Ocean. Ironically, the West's “sanctions from hell” against Moscow roused the INSTC to life. Moscow is currently finalising the rules that would give ships from Iran the right of passage along inland waterways on the Volga and Don rivers! The INSTC was conceived as a 7,200 km-long multimodal transportation network

encompassing sea, road, and rail routes to move freight between Russia, Central Asia and the Caspian regions, Iran and India. At its core, this is a Russian-Iranian project who are stakeholders in countering the West's weaponization of sanctions. But there is much more to their congruent interests. The Western sanctions motivate them to look for optimally developing their economies, and both Russia and Iran are pivoting to the Asian market, and in the process, a new trading bloc is forming that is completely free of Western presence. "The goal is to shield commercial links from Western interference and build new ones with the giant and fastgrowing economies of Asia," Bloomberg noted. Speaking to a group of senior Russian editors on Monday the 26th December 2022 in Moscow, Foreign Minister Lavrov said, "Rest assured that in the near future, we will see a serious drop in the West's ability to 'steer' the global economy the way it pleases. Whether it wants it or not, it will have to sit down and talk." This is the crux of the matter force the western powers to negotiate. In the near term, INSTC's takeoff will depend on some big projects. On Monday (26th December 2022), the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak spoke about an energy grid involving Russia, Iran and Central Asia and the South Asian region. Novak said, "A constant influx of national currencies gives confidence to the market. At the beginning of the year, we faced a situation where it was not very clear what to do with these currencies. At the moment, they are traded on the stock exchange and ensure mutual trade turnover... If at the beginning of the year this flywheel swayed very hard, then in just a few months it became common place, and we began to trade steadily in national currencies." De-dollarisation provides an underpinning of the INSTC. This is one thing. Second, Novak made the disclosure that Russia and Iran may reach an agreement on swap supplies of oil and gas by the end of this year. As he put it, "If we talk about perspective, this includes exports of gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan either using the infrastructure projects of Central Asia, or through a swap from the territory of Iran. That is, we will receive their gas in the south of the country [Iran], and in exchange we will supply gas to the north for Iranian consumers." Novak added, "We expect around 5 million tons [of oil] per year and up to 10 billion cubic meters [of gas] at the first stage." Pakistan is interested in sourcing Russian gas. Novak referred to Russia's agreement with Azerbaijan, which is set to increase gas supplies, and "when they increase gas production, we will be able to discuss swaps." Pakistan has an inherent advantage, as all the participating countries of the INSTC except India also happen to be members of China's Belt and Road Initiative. At some point early enough, the two designated Iranian ports in the INSTC Bandar Abbas and Chabahar will likely get linked to Gwadar Port, which is the gateway to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC] leading to Xinjiang, and an important component of the BRI. Clearly, the INSTC will spawn a web of international economic corridors. Iran is destined to become the hub of converging strategic interests with significant economic dimensions that will determine new alliances and impact the geopolitics of South and West Asia in the 21st century. The US has been waging an information war to debunk



the CPEC and fuel anti-China sentiments in the Pakistani public opinion. But it is a hopeless endeavour to malign the INSTC as a geopolitical project and impractical to threaten regional states from associating with what is an intercontinental trade route that is no single country's franchise. After all, how to sanction a trading bloc? The facts speak for themselves. The INSTC trials carried out to transport containers from Mumbai to St Petersburg using the trade corridor are able to reduce the delivery time of cargo from 45 days to 25 days at 30% cheaper rates than via Suez Canal, justifying the hopes for enhanced connectivity and utility of the corridor. Clearly, the trade potential of INSTC is immense. However, Russia and Iran are determined to decouple the West. Lavrov said on Monday, "We can no longer rely on these people. Neither our people nor history will forgive us if we do... we too openly and naively put our faith in the assurances that we heard in the early 1990s about a common European home and the need for an international division of labour that would rely on the best performance and competitive advantages of each country, so that, by pulling our efforts together and saving resources, we would be able achieve the best and cost-effective results. All of that was empty talk." Iran and Eurasian Economic Union [comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan] have reportedly finalised the terms for a free trade agreement involving more than 7,500 types of commodities. A market as big as \$700 billion is opening up to Iranian products and services as of the next Iranian year [starting March 21, 2023]. The FTA encourages free movement of goods and services, and provides for common policies in the macroeconomic sphere, transport, industry and agriculture, energy, foreign trade and investment, customs, technical regulation, competition, and antitrust regulation. It will be a game changer for the INSTC, transforming the power dynamic in the vast Eurasian landmass and the Gulf region. The INSTC signifies a strategic axis between Russia and Iran built around a trade route heralding a non-western trading bloc of free-wheeling regional states with common interests in resisting western hegemony.

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### **Italy distances from „cancellation' of Russia**

Noam Chomsky once wrote that the astronomical cost of the Bush-Obama wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, estimated into trillions of dollars, is a major victory for Osama bin Laden, whose announced goal was to bankrupt America by drawing it into a trap. The Ukraine war too was planned as a trap for Russia. No one other than the the Bill Clinton administration's point person for Russia, Strobe Talbot tweeted early this year when Russia's special military operations began congratulating President Biden's foreign policy team Victoria Nuland, Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan for having successfully cornered Russia. Talbot didn't call it a trap. For, a trap is only a trap if you don't know about it; on the other hand, if you know about it, it's a challenge. Russia already knew way back in 2014 that the US and its European allies France, Germany and Poland were

posing a challenge to its security interests in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea was Russia's instinctive reaction. Where Talbot erred was that the US and its allies underestimated Russia, overestimated the trap and underestimated the fact that they overestimated themselves. To recapitulate, the so-called Agreement on settlement of political crisis in Ukraine signed by then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition under the mediation of the European Union and Russia on 21 February 2014 was formally witnessed as guarantors by the Foreign Ministers of Germany and Poland and a French Foreign Ministry official, while Russia's Special Representative, although a participant in the negotiations, refused to put his signature under the document. Moscow was unsure of the intentions of the three western "guarantors." For sure, within the next 24 hours, the ground beneath the feet shifted dramatically in Kiev following the takeover by the armed protestors backed by the western intelligence. Till today, the three "guarantors" have not cared to explain their strange acquiescence. But then, it is a well-known fact that the present US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland midwifed the transition in Kiev in February and even nominated the successor to Yanukovich. (By the way, Nuland was in Kiev last week amidst speculations about another regime change in Ukraine.) All this becomes relevant today, as the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a series of interviews recently with the Spiegel and Die Zeit admitted that the subsequent 2014 Minsk Agreement to address the Donbass situation was itself only "an attempt to buy time for Ukraine. Ukraine used this time to become stronger, as you can see today. Ukraine in 2014-2015 and Ukraine today are not the same." Merkel added that "it was clear for everyone" that the conflict was suspended and the problem was not resolved, "but it was exactly what gave Ukraine the priceless time." Indeed, the Minsk Agreement was intended as a wayside station as the US pursued the agenda to introduce NATO and build up Ukraine's military capability to eventually take on Russia. President Putin has repeatedly argued that Russia was left with no option but to react as the US/NATO "mission creep" began slouching toward its west borders. This is also the reason why Russia cannot afford to leave an anti-Russian Ukraine as its neighbour. If the proxy war continues, Russia will reduce Ukraine to a rump state. And that is where trouble, big trouble, lies ahead. It is apparent that Polish nationalist elements who have been in deep slumber are waking up to ponder how to return their so-called historical territories that were taken away by Joseph Stalin after the Second World War and merged with Soviet Ukraine. On the other hand, German revanchism is also apparent. Chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote an essay last week in Foreign Affairs where he underscored the new "mindset" in Berlin as he put it against the backdrop of the "epochal tectonic shift" toward "this new multipolar world, [as] different countries and models of government are competing for power and influence." Germany senses that its hour has come once again to lead in Mitteleuropa German term for Central Europe. The Prussian vision of Mitteleuropa was a pan-Germanist state-centric imperium, an idea that was later adopted in a modified

form by Nazi geopoliticians. The Mitteleuropa plan was to achieve an economic and cultural hegemony over Central Europe and subsequent economic and financial exploitation of this region, making of puppet states as a buffer between Germany and Russia. Scholz asserted in his essay that Germany is on a path of militarisation, shedding its post-World War II inhibitions, will promote arms exports hoping to be "one of the main providers of security in Europe... beefing up our military presence on NATO's eastern flank." Clearly, there isn't going to be enough space for Poland and Germany in western Ukraine. While Ukrainian nationalists will resist Polish revanchism, they will see Germany as a counterweight to Poland. It is useful to recall that the history of the Black Sea Germans is more than 200 years old. The group of settlers commonly referred to as "Germans from Odessa and the Black Sea" were immigrants from western and southern Germany who migrated at the invitations extended by Catherine the Great and Tsar Alexander I to colonise large areas of Russia. Scholz wrote: "Putin needs to understand that not a single sanction will be lifted should Russia try to dictate the terms of a peace deal... Germany stands ready to reach arrangements to sustain Ukraine's security as part of a potential postwar peace settlement. We will not, however, accept the illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory... To end this war, Russia must withdraw its troops." Putin may have replied to Scholz inadvertently, of course when in remarks on Wednesday, he said the Russian operations in Ukraine may be "a long process." Putin said that "new territories have appeared this is still a significant result for Russia, this is a serious issue. And, to be honest, the Sea of Azov has become the inland sea of the Russian Federation these are serious things." And, Putin remarked: "Peter I was still fighting to reach the Sea of Azov." Scholz has opened a Pandora's Box. The ghosts of German history are returning and the profound question in European history: Where are the borders of Germany? Poland announced in October that it wants to start negotiations with Germany on reparations during World War II, and Polish foreign ministry sent an official note to Berlin demanding around €1.3 trillion in damages to address the effects of Nazi Germany's occupation of Poland from 1939 to 1945. To be sure, an assertive Germany will be a matter of disquiet for west Europe, especially France and Italy. Interestingly, the new season at the La Scala theatre in the Italian city of Milan opened on Thursday with premiere of Modest Mussorgsky's opera Boris Godunov, with the title role performed by prominent Russian opera singer Ildar Abdrazakov. Italian president Sergio Mattarella, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Italy's high society, including politicians, businessmen, actors, directors, fashion designers and architects, attended the Russian opera. Italy is marking distance from the Russophobic narrative in Europe. Again, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday that the West should consider how to address Russia's need for security guarantees.

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## **CHINA**

### **Chinese Yuan is the new dollar**

Chinese entrepreneur Wang Min is delighted about Russia's embrace of the yuan. His LED lights company can price contracts to Russian customers in yuan rather than dollars or euros, and they can pay him in yuan. It's "win-win", he says. Wang's plans have been transformed by the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent Western sanctions on Moscow that have shut Russia's banks and many of its companies out of the dollar and euro payment systems. His contract manufacturing business with Russia has been small in the past, but now he's preparing to invest in warehousing there. "We hope that next year sales in Russia can account for 10-15% of our total sales," said the businessman from China's southern coastal province of Guangdong, whose annual revenue of about \$20 million mainly comes from Africa and South America. Wang is seeking to capitalise on a rapid "yuanisation" of Russia's economy this year as the isolated country seeks financial security from Asian powerhouse China. He sees a win-win situation in Chinese exporters reducing their currency risks and payment becoming more convenient for Russian buyers. While the yuan, or renminbi, has been making gradual inroads into Russia for years, the crawl has turned into a sprint in the past nine months as the currency has swept into the country's markets and trade flows, according to a Reuter's review of data and interviews with 10 business and finance players. Russia's financial shift eastwards could boost cross-border commerce, present a growing economic counterweight to the dollar and limit Western efforts to pressure Moscow by economic means. Total transactions in the yuan-rouble pair on the Moscow Exchange ballooned to an average of almost 9 billion yuan (\$1.25 billion) a day last month, exchange data analysed by Reuters showed. Previously, they rarely exceeded 1 billion yuan in an entire week. "What happened was that it became suddenly very risky and expensive to keep traditional currencies dollar, euro, British pounds," said Andrei Akopian, managing director of Moscow-based investment firm Caderus Capital, citing the potential danger of a bank that keeps foreign currency deposits being sanctioned. "Everybody was motivated and even pushed towards the rouble or other currencies including, and first of all, the renminbi." Indeed, yuan-rouble trading totalled 185 billion yuan in October, more than 80 times the level seen in February when Russia launched what it refers to as a "special military operation" in Ukraine near the end of the month, according to exchange data. The surge of interest has seen the yuan's share of the currency market jump to 40-45% from less than 1% at the start of the year, said Dmitry Piskulov, international projects head at the Moscow Exchange's foreign-exchange market department. By comparison, the dollar/rouble pair, which commanded more than 80% of trading volumes on the Russian market in January, has seen its share drop to about 40% as of October, according to exchange data and the central bank. The U.S. Treasury declined to comment on the yuan's growing presence in Russia.

### **Russian giants want Yuan**

International money flows reflect a similar trend. Until April, Russia didn't even make the top 15 list of countries using the yuan outside mainland China, in terms of the value of inbound and outbound flows, according to data from global financial networking system SWIFT. It has since jumped to No. 4, lagging only Hong Kong, the city's former colonial ruler Britain and Singapore. To put this in a global context, though, the dollar and euro are still by far the dominant currencies, representing more than 42% and 35% of flows respectively as of September this year. The yuan has risen to almost 2.5% from below 2% two years earlier. Wang's business optimism is echoed by Shen Muhui, who heads a trade group for small exporters to Russia in neighbouring Fujian province. He said more and more Russian buyers were opening yuan accounts and settling transactions directly in the Chinese currency, which he said was a big advantage. "The Russia-Ukraine conflict has brought opportunities for Chinese businessman," said Shen, adding that his association had received many inquiries from Chinese companies interested in doing business in Russia. It's not only Chinese companies, or small companies, joining the yuan train. Seven Russian corporate giants, including Rusal, Rosneft and Polyus, have raised a total of 42 billion yuan in bonds on the Russian market, according to Reuters calculations, and the list could grow with No.1 lender Sberbank and oil firm Gazpromneft saying they're also considering renminbi debt. Aluminium producer Rusal, which buys raw materials from China and then sells a large chunk of its finished goods there, told Reuters it had stepped up the share of yuan used in those purchases and sales this year, and that the share would continue to rise, though it declined to provide a detailed breakdown.

### **Xi and Putin: 'no limits'**

While President Vladimir Putin has long sought to reduce Russia's reliance on the dollar, geopolitics has turbo-charged this trend in 2022. China, the world's No. 2 economy, is the biggest global power not to join economic sanctions against Russia. Indeed, Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping sealed a "no limits" partnership in February, weeks before Moscow launched what it describes as a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

The yuan comprised about 19% of Russia's trade settlements with China in 2021 versus the dollar's 49% share, Andrey Melnikov, deputy director at international cooperation department at the Russian central bank, said in September. While 2022 figures haven't been published yet, the Chinese currency is gaining ground, according to Melnikov, who told a conference that demand for yuan liquidity had risen sharply due to reduced access to traditional payment methods and the freezing of its overseas gold and foreign exchange reserves. Bank governor Elvira Nabiullina is tracking the growth, telling lawmakers this month that the influx of yuan illustrated a "transformation of the currency composition of our economy". Regulators are also aware of potential perils, such as a disparity between a growing number of yuan-held current accounts and deposits of the currency, with yuan-denominated lending only starting to develop. The central bank has said lenders should seek to reduce the growing risks of yuanisation of

their balance sheets or gaps between yuan assets and liabilities by increasing payments in yuan for imports, investing in yuan-denominated securities or using yuan in trade transactions with other countries. Regulators do not plan to limit yuan usage now and may encourage banks to use more by relaxing provisioning requirements for the currency while tightening them for dollars and euros, Elizaveta Danilova, director at the central bank's financial stability department, told a conference this month.

### **'Abundance of renminbi'**

Akopian at Caderus Capital said some Russian brokerages reported that their clients were keeping an increasingly large part of their assets in yuan. The inflows have led to a broad fall in interest rates on yuan deposits within Russia. They range from 0.01% to 2.45% for one-year yuan deposits in Russia, compared with 1.6% for one-year deposits on the mainland, according to Russian banking aggregators and major Chinese banks. "You can open a renminbi account in most Russian banks already. Interest rates are very low, because there is an abundance of renminbi in investors' pockets," Akopian added. "That's why as soon as any renminbi product comes to the market, it becomes very popular. There's great demand." Some small Russian savers are also getting onboard, seeking to hedge against rouble uncertainty. Andrey, a communications specialist from Moscow who said he relocated to Dubai in September to avoid being called up to fight in Ukraine, bought both yuan and dirhams online through his Russian bank, as a safety play before he left. "I see it as a way to save my funds from an unpredictable drop in the rouble value," said the 35-year-old, who asked for his surname to be withheld because he evaded the mobilisation. "I can convert my roubles to these alternative currencies, but it's more like buying a share or a bond."

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## **AMERICA**

### **America has lost its proxy war in Ukraine**

Written on Chris Kanthan

French leader Macron released an astonishing statement today: "One of the essential points we must address as President Putin has always said is the fear that NATO comes right up to its doors and the deployment of weapons that could threaten Russia." Talking about NATO expansion being a threat to Russia? This simple truth has been the geopolitical sacrilege among Western elites. Plus, how it's "President Putin" and not brutal dictator or other hysterical terms. By the way, this comes after Macron met with Biden at the White House and after German Chancellor Scholz spoke with Putin. Hence, the new approach is a clear sign that seismic changes are happening in Washington and European elite circles. So what went wrong and why is the great American proxy war faltering?

Here are 7 things that went wrong in the grand US/EU plan to defeat Russia:

## **1. Lack of Global Support**

Most of the world has refused to sanction Russia. Governments representing 84% of the world's population continue to have normal relations with Russia. Large economies like China and India continue to buy Russian products. India's imports of Russian oil, gas, coal and fertilizer have skyrocketed since the war began.

## **2. Unhappy Europeans**

There are huge protests and strikes all over Europe in UK, France, Germany, Italy, Greece etc. against cost of living, inflation, lack of electricity and even food. Many protests are also directly against NATO's involvement in Ukraine war. About 75% of Germans, French, British and other Europeans say that their country is going in the wrong track.

## **3. "My country first"**

Hungary is having a referendum to determine if it should buy Russia's oil and gas. Other nations might follow this. Expect movements like "Italy First" and "Czech First". Nobody cares about virtue signaling for Ukraine.

## **4. Skyrocketing inflation**

Inflation of energy (electricity, natural gas, diesel) are anywhere from 10-100%. In Germany, the powerhouse of Europe, energy inflation in 40%. Food and energy prices are intolerable. Blackouts and electricity shortage are common now. In schools, kids are given blankets rather than turning on the heat. And winter is just beginning.

## **5. Three hundred thousand Europeans could die this winter!**

One estimate is that 300,000 Europeans will die this winter due to lack of proper heating. More Europeans could die freezing to death than Ukrainian soldiers dying in the war! Will Europeans die passively or rise up against their idiotic governments, which are committing economic and physical suicide?

## **6. De-industrialization and Unemployment**

As explained in my other article "EU Dies, Russia Survives...", numerous vital German companies auto, steel, fertilizer, glass, paper, chemicals etc. have been idled or shut down. Unemployment due to this unprecedented de-industrialization will have massive and potentially permanent consequences. Anyone in Europe with a brain should be extremely worried.

## **7. Russia is winning, in spite of the Western propaganda blitz**

Look at the latest Ukraine map. Russia has managed to hold on to virtually all of the land it conquered. And Putin has been a gentle warrior by American standards. He could have destroyed Kiev's infrastructure on day 1, back in February. He is now just punching gently to remind the European and American puppet masters how bad things could get. EU's lunatic President Ursula von der Leyen admitted in a speech that more than 100,000 Ukrainian "officers" have died so far. So, the actual number is likely much higher. Many 1000s of mercenaries from Poland, UK, USA and other countries have also died.

## **Conclusion**

In the echo chambers of Washington and Brussels, defeating Russia was an easy proposition. This was their grand plan: Impose shock-and-awe economic sanctions, steal Russia's foreign exchange reserves, crush the Russian economy, turn "Ruble into rubble," and confiscate all the foreign assets of Russia's billionaires... Viola! The Russian people will rise up and overthrow evil Putin, who will be replaced by a Western puppet. Then, breakup Russia into smaller countries so that it could never rise up again. However, nothing worked out as planned. Now the globalists have to swallow their pride and make a deal with Putin. My guess is that Russia will keep the liberated parts of Ukraine, demand complete de-Nazification, and ensure that Ukraine will never again be a threat to Russia's national, security and cultural interests.

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### **My Reflection: 12 months in 897 words**

Written on Bismah Mirza

We are almost nearing the end of 2022, its 20th of the month and I thought to share my reflection, analysis of 'Kya Khoya, Kya Paya' (What lost and what gained) of this year. I had lost two very important people in my life starting from 2021. First I lost my mother and its impact carried forward to this year as well. Secondly, in this year my father in law passed away. Both were loving creations of Allah. They loved and cared unconditionally. My mother's death news came as a shock and at that time it was difficult to digest and comprehend as around 4 months back my uncle passed away and a year earlier my grandmother. It took me 8 months to get out of grieving phase and in a moment's realization, I realized that 'Oh God it has been 8 months' I was grieving for so long. To the outer world it seemed, I have come to terms with the loss and is moving on but only the closed ones knew that the storm is yet not over. That moment of realization made me look at my house, the piles of clutter, and the clutter in relations especially with my husband. He in that phase gave me the space, time and care I needed. Many in such a situation would have said, 'why you don't die with dead' but my husband understood the following, 'true you don't die with the dead, but something dies within you'. He realized it and gave me ample time to overcome my grief. It was after a year I was coming to terms, started picking up things and was facing the world with a new outlook, when this year my father in law passed away. He passed away exactly on the same date when we got marriage knot. What a strange coincidence! Now it was my turn to switch roles with my husband but he grieved differently, he shouted out instructions, busied himself at work and anxiously tried to keep things under control but Allah had a different plan for us. There was a wedding overseas which we thought to attend before the demise of my father in law and the chances were very slim that we would get the visa. But to Allah's plan it came with 40 days of my fil's death and not only this we got the visa for Umrah as well. We didn't have much time to plan and travel but we did. As we flew, I could feel the sorrows being shed, worries diminishing and yet we were not at



peace. We were clicking pictures and saving the sceneries in our memories without feelings but with the thought it is something we should do. During the wedding, we came to a couple of realizations; that we have not brought certain essentials of Pakistani wedding for our brother and second how all the celebrations it has made us forget the bitterness as well. It was not until we reached Riyadh, which I assure was not an easy journey, on every step of the way we faced hurdles, from boarding to luggage being lost and being recovered, till we reached Makkah our mind was not at ease. I don't know what was Allah's reasoning in this but I think these hurdles made us more focused and determined to perform Umrah. Maybe it was his way of testing us or preparing us. It was in Makkah, I realized I was in trance and that to while performing my second Umrah. When I completed my second Umrah, I realized I was in a trance performing my first one. As if I was mechanically doing all the rituals. It was after the second Umrah I prayed and poured my heart out to Allah. I was asking myself, we have made it here but how come a person like me has come to Allah's Home? Did I do something right? Or is it my prayers being accepted? Or Allah wants to show the miracles of this place? Or He wants us to be on the right side? May be He wants us to be peaceful? It seems it was Allah's Mercy? But since then I have felt peace. From being fearful, anxious, troubled, confused, I became fearless, calm, poised, courageous to make & accept mistakes, repent them and move on. Life after coming to Pakistan (which we all crave to return) was not easy but it was bearable. We had to shift immediately, and had to deal with family responsibilities and worries but all seemed manageable with the assurance that if Allah wills nothing is impossible. May Allah make it easy for us and bless us with His blessings! Ameen So in a nutshell where I lost two important people in life, I gained two important saadats / opportunities / blessings

1. I got the saadat or opportunity of doing Umrah, got a chance to visit Makkah & Madinah
  2. I started covering my head from February, of this year. Not perfect in it but still perfecting it. I prayed to Allah that day in February, why is it so difficult to do the right thing and immediately the thought of a shop came to my mind which I cross every day. It was in February, I bought my hijab and attended a wedding in it. Truly I never felt so peaceful & beautiful since then. I am still perfecting it.
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### **My 2022 best books review in 3 minutes**

Written on Bismah Mirza

I have dedicated a small amount of my daily time into reading and this year it was my goal to revive my reading habits. From being a person who enjoyed reading what I could literally lay my hands on; fiction, magazines, reports, non-fiction and even newspapers, I have become a person who only reads emails and updates. There was a time if I didn't read a newspaper, I would get anxious and now I am satisfied with just

scrolling. But this year I made a conscious effort to read books and here are my top 3 reads of 2022.

Following are my reads:

1. The 5 am club by Robin Sharma All changes are difficult in the beginning, messy in the middle and beautiful in the end! I heard a lot about this book and thought to give it a try. In the book, the author discusses the lives of a painter and entrepreneur both stuck in their professional and personal life. They have made something out of their lives but could not move ahead.

What makes this book interesting is the story telling style of the author to cultivate the habits of a better future. These two individuals embark on a journey of greatness by taking a 21 days Challenge of 5am Club. All those who find reading difficult will enjoy reading this book of its storytelling style.

2. Atomic Habits by James Clear: I think by far one of the best books to understand why we do what we do. Again the author starts with a scenario where he is being rushed to the hospital. He shares his life misfortunes in such a successful way because of the habits he developed and turned himself into a success.

His journey from being a sportsman to a writer is based on how he used the resources at hand and turned himself into a success. In the book he explains the concept, 'How habits are formed & can be changed?' in a fiction style. He explains complex concepts with a lot of relatable examples and simple writing styles. A must read!

3. How to Win Friends & Influence People by Dale Carnegie: If you want to understand why we fail to communicate effectively then this book helps you to do it. I am on the last section of the book and I find it difficult to put it down. The only time I do so is when I need to reflect on the concepts or debate it with my own thoughts.

The concepts taught are nothing new under the sun but it explains what we have learned, observed and practiced earlier with examples and authenticity. This is how this book is unique. It helps to explain why we struggle while communicating despite being a success in our professions or why we fail at home or personal life and it also restores your faith in communication. Not only the book makes you realize that communication is not a rocket science and that we all can excel in it. Some time, we don't know when to read with mobile in our hands and an easy way to start is to start small and build on it. Set a timer for 5 minutes and read just in that time. The next best option is to develop interest and you can do that through book summaries. All the books mentioned have been summarized in numerous languages but once you read it you reflect it and internalize it much better. The inspiration of this article goes to a colleague of mine, Faiza Yousuf.