

PAKISTAN ECONOMY GROWING... BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

KARACHI: Shah Nawaz walks Karachi's dusty streets, one of thousands in the financial hub who are being fed by charities as Pakistan's economy picks up pace-but, some say, not fast enough for its poverty-stricken millions. Confidence in Pakistan is growing, with the International Monetary Fund claiming in October that the country has emerged from crisis and stabilized its economy after completing a bailout program.

Its credit rating has improved, while there are encouraging signs of foreign investment, such as a massive Chinese infrastructure project officials routinely call a "gamechanger". But all this glittering promise has yet to feed millions like Nawaz. The 14-year-old stands waiting with more than 100 others outside the Saylani Welfare building to receive free meals twice a day for his family. He dropped out of school four years ago, when Pakistan's GDP still hovered around a weak three percent, as his family struggled to survive on his father's meagre part-time wage of 250 rupees (\$2.30) a day. "I have immense passion for my studies and want to become a prosperous man, but I can't," he said. His despair resonates throughout Pakistan, where a new central bank report says 60.6 percent of the population do not have access to cooking fuel, half of all children are deprived of a basic education, and a third of Pakistanis have no access to a primary medical facility. "The number of people coming to our centers is growing, and they are not beggars but poor people who are not able to make ends meet," Aamir Saylani, one of the charity's officials said. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif vowed to boost the long-depressed economy after winning a third term in 2013.

The key challenge Sharif faced was a chronic energy crisis, as power outages shut down factories and bring businesses to a virtual standstill daily. He approved more than a dozen coal, hydro, gas and combined cycle power generation plants, most due to begin generating electricity by mid-2017. Meanwhile his advisers negotiated a three-year extended fund facility with the IMF to raise \$6.4 billion. That, coupled with remittances from Pakistanis overseas, have taken foreign exchange reserves to an estimated \$22 billion, from \$3 billion in 2008. In the 2015/2016 fiscal year the economy grew 4.7 percent, while inflation was at a low of 3.8

percent and interest rates down at 5.75 percent. Encouraged-and undeterred by domestic debt of \$182 billion-Islamabad set an ambitious yearly growth target of 5.7 percent for 2016/2017. The World Bank predicted 5.4 percent growth by 2018.

Grinding poverty

But independent economists doubt the growth is sustainable. "You were on artificial support, and it will be a real litmus test for the government once the IMF facility is over," said Abid Suleri, who heads the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad. It would take sustained growth of around six percent for five successive years to make a real dent in poverty, said Mohammad Sabir, a senior economist at the Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC) in Karachi. Hopes are pinned on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$46 billion initiative by Beijing that aims to link the Asian superpower's Xinjiang region with the Arabian Sea through Pakistan. The plan encompasses a series of infrastructure, power and transport upgrades that Islamabad hopes will kickstart the economy.

But experts say the deal is opaque, and much more transparency is needed before they can assess any impact for Pakistan-including, for example, whether the \$46 billion is an investment or a loan. "If it is a loan, it would severely hamper the future foreign payment capability of the country," warned Sabir. Foreign debt remains around \$73 billion, just over a quarter of GDP, the central bank says. Werner Liepach, Pakistan country director for the Asian Development Bank said it was "much too early to tell" what effect CPEC would have.

However given the challenging global context, "contrary to what many believe, Pakistan is actually doing quite well", he said. "The benefits of growth in Pakistan are actually more widespread... as compared to many other developing countries that may show higher levels of growth, but with greater inequality." Nevertheless there is room to improve, he added. Meanwhile, Pakistanis like Shah Nawaz still struggle. Days after speaking to AFP, the building housing the charity providing food for his family was flattened in an operation targeting illegal settlements on government land.—AFP



MANILA: Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Ronald dela Rosa (right) points to the nose of Kerwin Espinosa, son of the late mayor Rolando Espinosa, as he is presented to members of the media at the police headquarters in Manila, shortly after arriving from United Arab Emirates. Kerwin was arrested in the United Arab Emirates last month and will face drug trafficking charges. — AFP

PHILIPPINE POLICE CHIEF FIGHTS BACK TEARS, PLEDGES LOYALTY TO DUTERTE HIGH DRAMA IN TELEVISED HEARING

MANILA: The Philippines' police chief broke down before a Senate inquiry yesterday and vowed to stand by President Rodrigo Duterte and his deadly war on drugs, after a narcotics kingpin testified to entrenched police involvement in the illicit trade. Amid high drama in the televised hearing, an emotional Ronald dela Rosa grimaced and held back tears in animated remarks in which he promised to rid police ranks of crooked elements. Dela Rosa, a stocky, celebrity-like general nicknamed "Bato" (Rock), was responding to hours of testimony from Kerwin Espinosa, a confessed drugs dealer and son of a mayor who was shot dead last month by police while in prison on remand for narcotics links.

"I will not surrender, I will clean up the national police," Dela Rosa told senators. "I will be with you," Dela Rosa said of Duterte. "I will not abandon this fight even if the public is losing trust in the police." Parallel probes by both chambers of the Philippine legislature have been largely drab, though sometimes highly dramatic. The panels have heard gripping witness accounts of all things from death squads and sordid affairs to corruption, murder and sex tapes. Participants have included convicted kidnapers, prison gangsters, an assassin

and world boxing icon Manny Pacquiao.

In September, a self-proclaimed hit man testified to having heard Duterte order assassinations and to having watched him kill a man with a machine gun while a mayor in 1993. Duterte has rejected that as lies. Close to 2,500 people were killed in the first four months of Duterte's presidency, mostly in police operations and others by suspected vigilantes. Duterte has resolutely defended the police and is outraged by Western and activist concerns that extrajudicial killings could be taking place. Espinosa, who arrived at the hearing wearing a flak jacket, confessed to dealing in drugs and to paying police protection money. He accused two generals and numerous officers on his turf of complicity.

No superhero

Dela Rosa vowed to do everything to stop it. "I'm not Superman, I'm an ordinary policeman," he said. "But I'll do my best to clean the police force even if it will cost my life. We will survive this." Central to the probes has been Senator Leila de Lima, who initiated and led the investigation into Duterte's crackdown, but found herself ousted by his Senate allies. Days later, she was subject to a congressional investigation into Duterte's accusations that she herself was

involved in drugs deals while justice minister.

It did not stop there. Duterte has humiliated de Lima during speeches, accusing her of adultery, making a sex tape of her affair with her driver and bagman, and even recommending she hang herself. De Lima has petitioned the Supreme Court to muzzle Duterte. Though she has admitted to the affair, she has rejected testimony by a string of criminals linking her to drugs deals. Espinosa also implicated de Lima on Wednesday, saying he paid protection money to her driver on four occasions when she was in the cabinet.

De Lima denied knowing him and said his testimony was at gunpoint, under duress. "May God forgive you for all your sins, and may God forgive you for all your lies about me," she said. In an interview last week, de Lima told Reuters she feared for her life, having stood up to a president who had a following of "diehard fanatics". "The president has a personal vendetta against me, and then it got worse because of my initiative ... the Senate enquiry, into the extra-judicial killings," she said. "He has staged all of these personal attacks, revealing even my personal private life and portraying me as an immoral woman so that people would no longer believe me."— Reuters



KARACHI: Pakistani residents visit a donation centre to receive food in Karachi. — AFP

COURT UPHOLDS SENTENCES FOR KHMER ROUGE LEADERS

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's UN-backed court upheld life sentences for two top former Khmer Rouge leaders yesterday for crimes against humanity, in a verdict welcomed by survivors of the brutal regime. "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, 90, and ex-head of state Khieu Samphan, 85, were the first top leaders to be jailed in 2014 from a regime responsible for the deaths of up to two million Cambodians from 1975-1979. They appealed their convictions, accusing the court of a string of errors and the judges of failing to remain impartial due to their personal experiences under the regime.

In a lengthy ruling yesterday after months of hearings, the bench upheld the bulk of the convictions and the jail terms, but accepted some legal errors had been made in the initial trial. Kong Srim, the Supreme Court Chamber's top judge, said the pair "had a complete lack of consideration for the ultimate fate of the Cambodian population", adding that the scale of their crimes was "massive". "The Supreme Court Chamber considers that the imposition of a life sentence for each of the accused is appropriate," he said.

Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan sat impassively as the decision was read out. The Khmer Rouge regime dismantled modern society in Cambodia in their quest for an agrarian Marxist utopia, killing vast numbers and leaving a generational scar. "I am so happy with the convictions," Chhun Leap, 74, who lost around 50 relatives during the Khmer Rouge years, told AFP after leaving the courtroom. "They are monsters and this is their fate."

Few brought to justice

The tribunal, known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), is a complex hybrid court on the outskirts of Phnom Penh combining elements of international and domestic law. It was set up following an agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations to prosecute senior Khmer Rouge leaders. The number of allegations against Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan-and the complexity of their cases-was so vast that the court split their trials into a series of smaller hearings in 2011, fearful the pair might die before justice could be served.

Their convictions in August 2014 followed a two-year trial focused on the forced evacuation of around two million Cambodians from Phnom Penh into rural labor camps and the murders of hundreds of enemy soldiers at one of several execution sites. Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan are also currently undergoing a second trial for genocide of ethnic Vietnamese and Muslim minorities, forced marriage and rape. But the tribunal has had mixed successes. Despite the sheer brutality unleashed by the Khmer Rouge, survivors have seen just a handful of perpetrators brought to justice. Many key leaders have died without facing justice, including "Brother Number One" Pol Pot who passed away in 1998.—AFP

TRACKSUITED THAI JUNTA CHIEF LEADS WORKOUT FOR BUREAUCRATS

BANGKOK: He's a mercurial army general known for penning saccharine ballads and angry tirades against his critics. Now Thailand's junta chief has launched a new eye-catching project: trimming the waistlines of the kingdom's civil servants. Former army chief turned Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha ditched his fatigues for a tracksuit and trainers yesterday as he led hundreds of bureaucrats in a mass exercise session.

As music blasted out of loudspeakers he boxed, played volleyball and led an aerobics class, complete with star-jumps and squats, alongside hundreds of employees of Government House. The trim 62-year-old, who seized power in 2014, has ordered all civil servants to exercise every Wednesday afternoon following concerns that Thailand's famously laid back attitude to life has thickened their waistlines. Prayut revels in being macho, plain-speaking and unpredictable—a demeanor that creates many amusing press appearances and is a gift to social media meme-makers.

Highlights have included him kicking a muay thai boxer, throwing a banana at a cameraman, tickling a reporter's ear and riding a bike around Government House as his security detail jogged behind in the tropical heat. Each Friday night he delivers a nationally broadcast "bringing happiness back" speech in which he doles out advice to Thais—anything from how to get foreigners to appreciate pungent durian fruit to the best Korean soap opera.

He has also written two ballads since his coup emphasizing love for the nation and what it means to be Thai. Thailand has been politically divided since the military launched a coup in 2006 that toppled Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his elected government. Years of debilitating street protests and another coup in 2014 that toppled Yingluck Shinawatra-Thaksin's sister—followed.

The Shinawatra clan is loved by Thailand's rural and urban poor. But they are loathed by Bangkok's middle

classes and military elite, who say the family were corrupt. Prayut has vowed to bridge the country's divides but reconciliation seems far off. His critics see him as the most authoritarian ruler Thailand has had in a generation. Some have likened him to Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, a Second World War-era dictator who famously issued decrees on how Thais should behave, including how long they should sleep for, how they should spend their days off and how they should dress.— AFP



BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha plays with a ball during an exercise with government officials at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. —AFP



Announcement from Ministry of Commerce & Industry Consumer Protection Department

Ministry of Commerce & Industry - Consumer Protection Department, in accordance with Law No. 39/2014, and in cooperation with Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est. Co. (Authorized Distributor and Provider for LEXUS Kuwait).

As an After sales service and commitment to customer satisfaction, Lexus announces recall of 2016-LEXUS RX 350 because the power back door becomes inoperative due to insufficient heat resistance. Hence the power back door won't be able to open and close using power function.

Lexus takes this opportunity to further confirm its commitment to its customers in Kuwait, sparing no effort to provide them with best products and services to the highest safety and quality standards.

Steps and Procedures to be taken by Al Sayer Lexus:

First: Call:

Dealer will call car owners.

Second: Replacement:

Lexus Service Center will replace the power back door ECU free of charge.

Third: Service and Maintenance Center:

Customers are kindly requested to call Al Sayer Lexus Service on 1830030 for proper advice and guidance.

Lexus apologizes for any inconvenience, sparing no effort to ensure best customer service and safety levels.

Dear Valuable Customers:

LEXUS vehicles belonging to new owners of any model year/ ages are requested to register your vehicle details and contact number with us. We need your co-operation to serve you better for any customer satisfaction program.