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- Arch-rivals Pakistan, India to face-off on February 23

ICC announces Champions Trophy 2025 groups, schedule

- Champions Trophy: Mohsin Naqvi vows to welcome international teams with verve

TAHIR CH.

LAHORE

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday unveiled official fixtures and groups for the much-awaited event, Champions Trophy 2025, which would commence on February 19 in Karachi.

The eight-team tournament will feature 15 matches, and will be played across Pakistan and in Dubai, the top cricketing body announced, adding that all matches will be day-night encounters.

In Pakistan, Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi will be the three venues to host tournament. Each Pakistan venue will feature three group games apiece, with Lahore hosting the second semi-final.

Lahore will also host the final on March 9, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days.

The three group matches involving India, as well as the first semi-final, will be played in Dubai.

Pakistan take on New Zealand in the Group A tournament opener in Karachi on February 19. The Dubai leg begins the following day with India taking on Bangladesh.

Group B matches will begin on 21 February, with Afghanistan squaring up against the Proteas



in Karachi.

A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia set to clash in Lahore on Saturday (22 February), with the much-anticipated Pakistan-India clash set for the day later.

The eight sides in the Champions Trophy competing for the famous white winners' jackets are the teams that finished in the top eight positions on the points table of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.

Reacting to the announcement, ICC Chairman Jay Shah wrote on X: "Very excited for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy to start in February."

The tournament encountered an obstacle after the Indian government refused to allow its players to visit Pakistan for the mega event, citing security concerns.

However, both sides had resolved the matter by agreeing on a hybrid model, with India playing their matches at a neutral venue rather than in the host country, Pakistan.

The final of the tournament, however, is scheduled to be played in Lahore but if India qualify then it will also be held in Dubai.

Two days earlier, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) picked United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the neutral venue for India's matches.

Under the agreement, Pakistan will also play at neutral venues in the upcoming ICC tournaments hosted by India.

The agreement will extend to the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 hosted by India, and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 hosted by India and

Sri Lanka, the statement added.

Groups
Group A: Pakistan, India, New Zealand, Bangladesh

Group B: South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan, England

Champions Trophy schedule

February 19, Pakistan v New Zealand, Karachi

February 20, Bangladesh v India, Dubai, UAE

February 21, Afghanistan v South Africa, Karachi

February 22, Australia v England, Lahore

February 23, Pakistan v India, Dubai

February 24, Sri Lanka, the statement added.

Bangladesh v New Zealand, Rawalpindi

February 25, Australia v South Africa, Rawalpindi

February 26, Afghanistan v England, Lahore

February 27, Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi

February 28, Afghanistan v Australia, Lahore

March 1, South Africa v England, Karachi

March 2, New Zealand v India, Dubai, UAE

March 4, Semi-final 1, Dubai, UAE

March 5, Semi-final 2, Lahore

March 9, Final, Lahore (unless India qualify, when it will be played in Dubai)

March 10, Reserve day

Meanwhile, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi vowed on Tuesday to welcome the international teams to Pakistan for the forthcoming Champions Trophy with verve.

In a statement, Naqvi dubbed hosting the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 as a "significant milestone." He said: "The tournament will promise a memorable experience for the players, officials, and fans."

He said they have harmed democracy to keep PTI founder Imran Khan away. "He (Imran) represents 90 percent of the public," the former president added.

He expressed Pakistan's enthusiasm to welcome the cricketing world to the event. Naqvi said: "Pakistan will look forward to showcase its renowned hospitality."

"It is a matter of delight that the matters pertaining to the Champions Trophy had been resolved in a good fashion," said Naqvi.

The ICC has announced the fixtures and groupings for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to begin on February 19 in Karachi and conclude on March 9. The tournament will feature eight teams, 15 matches, and will be hosted across Pakistan and Dubai.

In Pakistan, the matches will be held at three venues: Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi, each hosting three group games. Lahore is set to host the second semi-final and the final on March 9, unless India qualifies, in which case the final will be played in Dubai. Both semi-finals and the final will include reserve days.

Ex-president Alvi predicts Imran Khan will be released soon

STAFF REPORTER

PESHAWAR

Former President and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Dr. Arif Alvi on Tuesday predicted that "change is around the corner, and Imran Khan will be released soon; the planes have been moving."

Speaking to the media outside the Peshawar High Court alongside Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Omar Ayub, he called the treasury parliamentarians corrupt.

He said they have harmed democracy to keep PTI founder Imran Khan away. "He (Imran) represents 90 percent of the public," the former president added.

He said they (the government) have forbidden people to call the name of Imran Khan. They threatened the masses that their [constitutional] rights would be taken away if anyone mentioned the name of Imran, even in cricket matches. They have travelled back in time before 2018.

"Everything will have to start over again. We are worried about the country. I have to free the country from these usurpers and mafias," he continued.

Ex-president Alvi said the world would condemn trial of civilians by military courts. "The world is condemning it, but no one cares. The mafia is enjoying [privileges] while the poor have nothing to eat."

He refuted the government's claim that foreign investors were ready to come to invest \$70 billion in Pakistan. "No money is coming from any part of the world, not a single penny."

Maryam orders special discounts for Christians on Christmas

- Punjab CM directs foolproof security for Christmas celebrations



an increased deployment of police and other security personnel at churches in Lahore and other major cities.

Besides it, Maryam Nawaz emphasized the need for improved traffic management during the Christmas celebrations.

She decided to express solidarity with the Christian community by cutting a cake at the Police Meesaq Center and directed offering special discounts for the Christian community in subsidized markets.

The CM said that no negligence would be tolerated regarding the security of Christian brothers, and the relevant departments should ensure cleanliness around churches.

It was decided in the meeting that the PPP

PML-N seeks time to address PPP's reservations by first week of Jan

- PML-N takes PPP on board over transfer posting

STAFF REPORTER

LAHORE

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday sought time to address the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) reservations by first week of January.

The PML-N and PPP coordination committee meeting were held during which the key developments took place regarding the power sharing agreement between the two political parties.

Meanwhile, the TORs were also decided to be implemented on the agreement. During the meeting, the PPP had also expressed its reservations in Punjab.

It was decided to divide the funds equally

from the constituencies from which both the parties emerged victorious.

The meeting confirmed that the PPP will get representatives in the different committees at the district level.

Moreover, the PML-N had taken the PPP on board over the transfer posting.

It was emphasized in the meeting that there

were no disagreements between the Punjab chief minister and provincial governor.

Prominent among those who attended the meeting from the PPP were Punjab Governor Haji Saleem Haider, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Hassan Murtaza, Makhdoom Ahmed Mehmood, Nadeem Afzal Chan, Ali Haider Gillani.

From the PML-N, deputy prime minister Ishaq Dar, Rana Sanaullah, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmed Khan, Azam Naeer Tarar and Marriyum Aurangzeb attended the committee meeting.

The chief secretary, Punjab IG and C&W secretary also attended the meeting.

A Nation Built on Tolerance: Muhammad Ali Jinnah

- PM, President, CJCSC, the Service Chiefs, and the Armed Forces of Pakistan pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam on his 148th birthday



Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

"On this day, we honor the contributions of the Father of the Nation, who changed the course of history through a political struggle. Quaid-e-Azam's vision, determination, and unwavering resolve led to the creation of an independent homeland for Muslims of the sub-continent," President Secretariat Press Wing, in a press release, quoted the president as saying.

The president said Quaid-e-Azam's leadership during the most critical phase of their history demonstrated his extraordinary qualities, adding as a lawyer, a statesman, and the leader of the All-India Muslim League, he

vehemently advocated for the rights of Muslims.

"He presented the case for Pakistan with clarity and conviction, emphasizing the need for a separate homeland where Muslims could freely practice their religion, safeguard their culture, and secure their political and economic rights," he further observed.

Meanwhile, The Armed Forces honor the enduring vision and unparalleled leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, whose tireless efforts united our people and established the foundation for a sovereign and independent Pakistan. On this day of national significance, we renew our unwaver-

ing commitment to his guiding principles of Unity, Faith, and Discipline.

Furthermore, the Armed Forces extend heartfelt greetings to the Christian community on the joyous occasion of Christmas. In solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters, we celebrate the universal values of love, compassion, and peace that this occasion represents.

The Pakistan Armed Forces remain resolutely dedicated to safeguarding the nation and upholding the ideals of justice, equality, and harmony in the service of our people and our homeland.

us our homeland—Pakistan," the prime minister said in his message.

PM Shehbaz Sharif highlighted that his life continued to inspire countless people as an enlightened teacher, visionary lawyer, principled statesman, steadfast politician, and charismatic leader. "His journey is a testament to the power of conviction and the realization of dreams through hard work and dedication."

Meanwhile, resident Asif Ali Zardari stressed that Quaid-e-Azam's vision for a peaceful and moderate Pakistan obliges us to promote harmony within and beyond our borders," the president said in a message on the

economic equity, and the rule of law.

"To achieve Quaid-e-Azam's vision, we must invest in the education of our youth, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead Pakistan into a brighter future. We also

need to work for the uplift of downtrodden segments of society.

Jinnah's dream of a peaceful and moderate Pakistan called upon them to work harder by upholding the values of social justice, and equality.

"Today, as we celebrate the 148th birth anniversary of our founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, we are reminded of his extraordinary vision, unwavering courage, and unparalleled determination. He achieved what many thought impossible and gifted

Lt. Gen. Asif Ghafoor bids farewell after four decades of military service

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Lieutenant General Asif Ghafoor, the former director general (DG) for Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), and ex-spokesperson of armed forces bids farewell to military service after a glittering career.

Ghafoor, 57, got an emotional farewell from associates for leaving a legacy of strategic leadership and dedication. He was recently serving in National Defense University (NDU) and had several key positions during his career.

He was commissioned into the 87 SP Medium Regiment Artillery in 1988 and served at coveted positions throughout his career. He served as



Brigade Major, Assistant Military Secretary, GSO-I in Military Operations at GHQ, and Director of Military Operations before becoming DG ISPR from 2016 to 2020.

Known for his outspoken press conferences and active Twitter presence, Ghafoor was a prominent spokesperson during the 2019 Pakistan-India standoff. He was promoted to Lieutenant

General and became Commander of 12 Corps after the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Sarfraz Ali.

Ghafoor also contributed much as Inspector General of Communication & Information Technology. In his final role as President of NDU, he focused on fostering strategic studies and defense education, shaping the future leaders of Pakistan's military.



ISLAMABAD: Visitors looking decorated complex during celebration Christmas ceremony at a shopping mall, in the Federal Capital.

— Staff Photo

Turkish Envoy Irfan Naziroglu Pays Tribute to Abdul Rahman Peshawari at Conference in Islamabad

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Yunus Emre Institute, Pakistan, and Idara Farogh-e-Qaumi Zaban jointly organized a conference to commemorate the life and legacy of Abdul Rahman Peshawari, a renowned figure who symbolizes the cultural and historical ties between Turkey and Pakistan.

The conference, held at Awan e Urdu was presided over by Professor Dr. Kanwal Amin, Vice Chancellor, GC Women University, Faisalabad. The honorable Turkish Ambassador, Mr. Irfan Naziroglu, was the chief guest of the conference.

In his opening remarks, Yunus Emre Institute Country Director, Prof. Dr. Halil Toker, shed light on the aims and objectives of the conference. He highlighted the significance of Abdul Rahman



Peshawari's contributions to the cultural and historical heritage of both Turkey and Pakistan.

Mr. Salim Jan, the great-grandson of Abdul Rahman Peshawari, delivered the keynote address, paying tribute to the life and services of his illustrious ancestor.

Prominent intellectuals and writers from Turkey and Pakistan, including Dr. Mehmet Toyran, Education Counselor, Turkish Embassy, Ms.

Sima Nu Ercan, Mr. Abdul Akbar, Dr. Farooq Adil, Dr. Sadaf Naqvi, and Dr. Ziauddin, shared their insights on Abdul Rehman Peshawari's contributions.

Turkish Ambassador Irfan Naziroglu, in his address, paid tribute to the services of Abdul Rehman Peshawari. She highlighted the centuries-old brotherly relations between Turkey and Pakistan. He emphasized the importance of strengthening cultural

and historical ties between the two nations.

In her presidential address, Professor Dr. Kanwal Amin, Vice Chancellor, GC Women University, Faisalabad, emphasized the need to remember and honor the contributions of great heroes like Abdul Rahman Peshawari. She expressed her gratitude to the conference administration, particularly Prof. Dr. Halil Toker, Country Director, Yunus Emre Institute, and Prof.

Fourth meeting of Kashmir Committee held

STAFF REPORTER

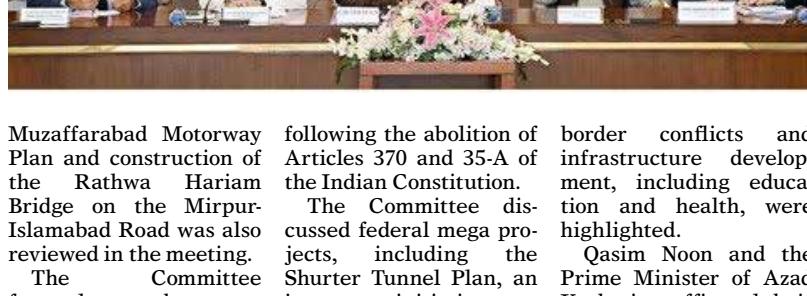
ISLAMABAD

The 4th meeting of the Kashmir Committee was held under the chairmanship of Qasim Noon here Wednesday.

The Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir also participated in the meeting and discussed the Kashmir issue and various developmental projects.

Chairman Qasim Noon stressed that Kashmir was the lifeline of Pakistan. He said that people of Pakistan were extending consistent support to Kashmiris at every level. "Pakistan stands by its Kashmiri brothers and sisters on moral, diplomatic, and all other fronts", he maintained.

Progress on the



Muzaffarabad Motorway Plan and construction of the Rathwa Hariam Bridge on the Mirpur-Islamabad Road was also reviewed in the meeting.

The Committee focused on the gross human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) and reaffirmed its commitment to raising global awareness of the inhumane treatment of Kashmiris, particularly

following the abolition of Articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution.

The Committee discussed federal mega projects, including the Shurter Tunnel Plan, an important initiative connecting Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Feasibility studies for Mirpur Airport were also part of the agenda.

The Committee also

discussed the plans for the restoration of populations affected by cross-border conflicts and infrastructure development, including education and health, were highlighted.

Qasim Noon and the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir reaffirmed their commitment for resisting the Hindutva agenda and supporting the Kashmiri people.

The ideology of

Pakistan remains central to the ongoing struggle for the rights of Kashmiris, he added.

The session was

chaired by Prof. Dr.

IIUI Board of Trustees convenes 16th meeting in Riyadh

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Board of Trustees (BOT) of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) convened its 16th session at Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, Riyadh.

The meeting evaluated decisions made in previous meetings, approved the strategic plan, and set the university's vision for the next five years, said a press release on Tuesday.

With a mix of in-person and virtual attendance, the session reiterated IIUI's commitment to advancing academic excellence and consolidating its global standing.

The session was

Ahmad Salem and Mohammad Al-Ameri, Pro-Chancellor of IIUI and Rector of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University.

Prof. Dr. Al-Ameri welcomed participants and acknowledged the hybrid nature of the meeting, with members attending both in person at the Round Hall of the Conference Building in Riyadh and virtually from various locations.

Expressing gratitude to the President of Pakistan and Chancellor of IIUI, Asif Ali Zardari, for entrusting him with this responsibility, Prof.

Dr. Al-Ameri lauded IIUI's contributions to Pakistan and the Muslim world.

He emphasized the need for collective efforts to elevate IIUI into the ranks of leading global

universities and expressed optimism about addressing institutional challenges and promoting progress.

The board deliberated on the implementation status of decisions from the 14th and 15th BOT meetings, held on June 30, 2020, and December 11, 2023, respectively. The IIUI Strategic Plan (2022-2026), emphasizing academic excellence, research expansion, and institutional growth, received formal approval.

The session was graced by notable attendees, including the Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Malki; Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), Dr. Salem Mohammed Al-Malik; President of

Ummul Qura University, Makkah, Prof. Dr. Moaddi Mohammed Al-Madhib; President of the Islamic University of Madina, Dr. Saleh bin Ali Al-Aqila; Chairman of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan; Rector IIUI, Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed and the Acting President of IIUI, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shujah Syed Ch. Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Chairman, Capital Development Authority, Islamabad, Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani

— Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training, Allama Muhammad Raghib Hussain Naeem — Chairman, Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), Muhammad Shakeel Malik, Secretary to the President of Pakistan, Awan-e-Sadr.

Known for his unwavering determination, integrity and commitment to justice and democracy, Muhammad Ali Jinnah became Pakistan's first

governor-general, serving until he passed away on August 14, 1947.

Known for his unwavering determination, integrity and commitment to justice and democracy, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a distinguished barrister and politician, led the All-India Muslim League from 1913 until Pakistan's independence on August 14, 1947.

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governor-general, serving until he passed away on September 11, 1948.

Revolution in Dengue Diagnosis: Pakistani Researchers Introduce AI-Based Advanced System

● Pakistan takes immense pride in these exceptional researchers from Azad Jammu and Kashmir

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Pakistani researchers from the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir have achieved a significant milestone in medical diagnostics by developing an artificial intelligence (AI)-based advanced system for the diagnosis and classification of dengue virus. The groundbreaking research has been published in the international journal Computing and Artificial Intelligence, highlighting the system's remarkable performance with 100% sensitivity, 99.8% precision, and 98.7% specificity, setting new benchmarks in dengue diagnosis.

The research was spearheaded by Mr. Safdar Hayat, an M.Phil. scholar from Iqra

University Islamabad, currently serving as a Technical Support Engineer at the Prime Minister Secretariat Muzaffarabad Azad Jammu & Kashmir. According to Safdar Hayat, the idea for this research stemmed from his personal battle with dengue fever. Reflecting on his experience, he shared, "When I contracted dengue, I came face-to-face with death. The challenges in diagnosing and treating dengue at that time motivated me to create a modern system that could aid in the early detection of the disease."

Fueled by this determination, Mr. Safdar Hayat collaborated with his team, which included Dr. Rahila Anwar, a lecturer in computer science at the Higher Education Department,

and Mr. Sartaj Aziz, an M.Phil. scholar from NUST University and an IT officer at the Prime Minister Secretariat. All three researchers hail from the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and worked tirelessly to develop this advanced framework based on artificial neural networks.

The AI-based system aims to assist doctors in diagnosing dengue more accurately and swiftly, overcoming the delays and resource inefficiencies of traditional diag-

nostic methods. Not only does this system expedite the diagnostic process, but it also ensures early treatment for patients. Moreover, it provides classification of the dengue virus, significantly enhancing physicians' diagnostic confidence and expertise.

If implemented at a governmental level in hospitals, this system has the potential to be a game-changer for both doctors and patients, offering a reliable, cost-effective, and timely

solution for dengue diagnosis.

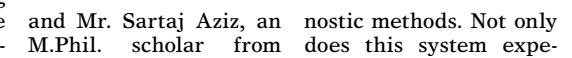
This research is a testament to the brilliance and perseverance of Azad Jammu and Kashmir's talented researchers, who have excelled on a global stage despite limited resources and demanding professional routines. It underscores the potential of fostering a research-friendly environment to encourage similar groundbreaking contributions.

For more details on this innovative work, you can access the research here: <https://doi.org/10.59400/cai489>

Pakistan takes immense pride in these exceptional researchers from Azad Jammu and Kashmir.



Mirpur: Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Omar Shahzad Jaral presenting the shield to Chicago Mayor Mary Alexandra during his visit to the United States. — Staff Photo



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Taxing Sugary Drinks: A Triple Win for Pakistan's Economy and Public Health

Recent media reports highlight the Revenue's (FBR) meet tax collection shortfalls in the part of contingency with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to implement several initiatives to bolster collections that includes raising the federal excise duty (FED) on aerated and sugary drinks.

The situation presents a unique opportunity for the government to transform the challenge into an advantage. Beyond fulfilling fiscal obligations, the option to increase FED on sugary drinks and aerated beverages, promises a "triple win" to the government. On the one hand, the decision would help government in generating crucial revenue, while on the other hand, it would discourage consumption of unhealthy food products, and alleviating the rapidly increasing disease-burden, particularly of the 'Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) on the healthcare system.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 60% of deaths in Pakistan are now because of NCDs. Diabetes in Pakistan has reached epidemic levels, with the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) reporting 33 million Pakistanis living with the disease in 2023, making Pakistan the third-highest country globally in diabetes prevalence. Obesity, another driver of NCDs, affects 40% of the population. Health experts believe that high consumption of sugary drinks is directly responsible for this health crisis, and these alarming trends necessitate bold policy measures. Currently, sugary drinks remain cheap and widely accessible, despite being one of the leading contributors to excess sugar consumption.

The economic implications of diet-related diseases are staggering. According to a study by the World Bank, diabetes-related annual health care costs in Pakistan reached USD 2.6 billion, a figure projected to rise if immediate action is not taken. By reducing sugary drink consumption, the government can reduce healthcare spending on preventable diseases, improving both economic and public health outcomes.

Sanaullah Ghuman, General Secretary of the Pakistan National Heart Association (PANAH), has been vocal in advocating for higher taxes on sugary drinks. "Pakistan's escalating diabetes and obesity crisis is directly linked to the overconsumption of sugary beverages. The government must prioritize public health by increasing taxes on these products and using the revenue to strengthen the healthcare system," he stated.

Globally, countries implementing taxes on sugary drinks have seen remarkable success in curbing the diabetes crisis. Mexico, for example, introduced a sugary drinks tax in 2014 and observed a significant decrease in consumption within two years. Munawar Hussain, Country Coordinator for the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI), echoed similar sentiments. "Evidence from many countries shows that higher taxes on sugary drinks reduce consumption, improve health outcomes, and generate significant revenue for governments. In Pakistan, this policy could help ease the healthcare burden and fund preventive programs to combat non-communicable diseases."

Pakistan's healthcare system is already overwhelmed, with limited resources to address the growing burden of NCDs. Treating diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity-related complications requires significant investments, which are currently lacking. A dedicated portion of the tax on sugary drinks could create a sustainable funding stream to invest in hospitals, clinics, and preventive health initiatives.

As Pakistan faces a twin crisis of economic instability and a rising disease burden, increasing taxes on sugary drinks is a pragmatic and necessary step. The evidence is clear: such taxes work. They reduce consumption, save lives, and bolster government revenues. Now is the time for decisive action. The government must move swiftly to implement higher taxes on sugary beverages, ensuring that revenue is reinvested in health sector improvements. The IMF agreement for increasing the sugary drinks tax should be viewed as an opportunity to align fiscal policy with public health priorities. Pakistan cannot afford to delay; the health of its people and the stability of its economy depend on it.

Another rate cut

The economy seems to be gradually opening up as the State Bank takes a decisive yet cautious step by cutting the key policy rate by 200 bps, bringing it down to 13%. Effective from December 17, this move comes about as the central bank's attempts to balance the dual objectives of stimulating growth and controlling inflation.

The SBP's Monetary Policy Committee attributed this rate cut to a steady decline in food inflation and the phasing out of the gas tariff hike introduced last year. November's headline inflation dropped to 4.9%, creating substantial room for easing. However, the central bank refrained from aggressive cuts, opting for a measured approach. This restraint acknowledges core inflation's stubbornness at 9.7% and the volatility in inflation expectations, which continue to cast a shadow over economic stability.

The impact of this policy shift can be gauged from the fact that the stock market index surged over 1,700 points even in anticipation of a rate cut. Investor confidence appears to be returning, and early signs of improved economic activity further reinforce the belief that Pakistan may be on the path to recovery. Businesses, however, had been vocal in their demand for a sharper reduction of 400 to 500 bps, arguing that the "still-high" cost of borrowing remains a significant impediment to growth. The SBP's decision to limit the cut to 200 bps aligns more closely with the forecasts of financial experts, who warned against drastic monetary easing. A steep reduction to single-digit interest rates could destabilise the banking sector and reignite inflation – risks the central bank seems determined to avoid.

(Courtesy The Express Tribune)

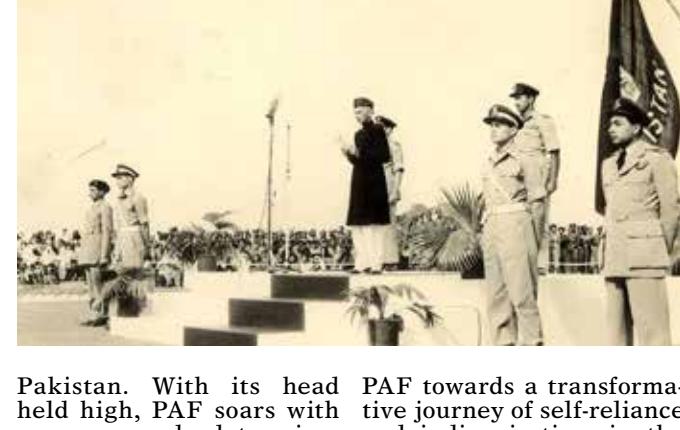
Appointment of judges

An impartial and competent judiciary is a must for ushering in rule of law. While the Constitution has bestowed the judicial arm with the space to exercise its writ in nonpartisanship, the letter from the senior puisne judge calling for induction of judges on merit is on the spot, and goes on to reflect the aspirations of an ordained society.

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah in his letter to the Chairman of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan's rule-making committee, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, has stated the obvious by urging the learned Brother jurist to comply with the fundamental essentials of making sure that judges are nominated on the premise of their "integrity, ethical standards, judicial efficiency and diversity". Perhaps Justice Mansoor felt the necessity of bringing to the fore this issue, through an open disclosure, keeping in mind the distractions that the superior judiciary is witnessing these days as judicial officers are being named randomly by the executive on the tenets of a controversial 26th amendment legislation, which is itself now in the dock. The firm contention of the puisne judge that the judges-nominating committee should hold on till the impugned amendment is reviewed by the apex court, and then chalk out "clear and transparent rules" for appointing judges to constitutional bench is lawfully righteous. Chief Justice Yahya Afridi and the honourable JCP members should ponder over the stated specifics and urgency of the letter in all solemnity, and take a call in the best interests of checks and balances that the Constitution has laid out for professional integrity, honesty and impartiality of judges. Article 175A(4) requires the JCP to establish procedures and criteria for assessing and appointing judges, without which it could lead to jeopardising rule of law, democracy and public confidence in the judiciary. It's high time judiciary, the custodian of the Constitution, was freed from politically-motivated appointments that go on to undermine the commitment of judges to the rule of law, by compromising at the hands of a politicised executive.

(Courtesy The Express Tribune)

Quaid-E-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: the indomitable spirit driving Pakistan air force legacy



Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the esteemed architect of Pakistan, stands as an enduring beacon of hope and resolute determination.

As the nation commemorates his birthday on 25 December, it reflects on his bold declaration that Muslims were not merely a minority but a distinct nation deserving of their own homeland. His impactful assertion, "India is not a nation; it is a subcontinent composed of nationalities," illuminated the profound differences among communities and laid the foundation for the Two Nation Theory. Through tireless negotiations with both British authorities and the Indian National Congress, Quaid transformed this theory into a political reality, culminating in the birth of Pakistan on 14 August 1947. Revered for his unwavering commitment to democracy, freedom and social justice, he also recognised the vital importance of military strength in safeguarding the nascent nation. His strong belief, "There is no power on Earth that can undo Pakistan," continues to resonate across generations, inspiring resilience and unity in the face of adversity.

Quaid's ideology and vision are not merely guiding principles; they are a lighthouse of aspiration that lights our path towards becoming a truly great nation. His conviction in unity, faith and discipline reverberates deeply within our hearts, reminding us of the strength we possess when we stand together. In a world fraught with challenges, Quaid astutely recognised the vital role of Air Power in securing the future of our fledgling nation, understanding that it was not just about military might but about safeguarding our very sovereignty. With fierce determination, he championed the establishment of Pakistan Air Force in 1947, a bold testament to his visionary leadership and an indelible mark on our national identity.

Today, Pakistan Air Force stands as a proud embodiment of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision and the indomitable spirit of

PAF towards a transformative journey of self-reliance and indigenisation, in the last three years, empowering its personnel to confront challenges with courage and perseverance. Motivated by Quaid-e-Azam's exhortation that "I charge you to remember that only with discipline and self-reliance can Pakistan Air Force be worthy of Pakistan," the present leadership of PAF has actively catalysed significant advancements in technology and operational capabilities. At the forefront of this visionary initiative is the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP), a ground breaking endeavour that bridges the divide between academia and industry while diminishing reliance on foreign suppliers. NASTP is not just a hub for innovation; it is a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures research and development across vital sectors, including aviation, space, information technology and cyber technologies. By spearheading advancements through its Software Development House and fostering local talent, NASTP empowers start-ups and SMEs to thrive. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in a comprehensive modernisation drive that integrates cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, positioning Pakistan to tackle contemporary challenges head-on. With NASTP facilitating the creation of pioneering products and services, PAF stands poised to transform strategic foresight into unmatched operational prowess, driving forward a vision where innovation and modernisation converge to herald a new era of technological advancement

and sustainable economic growth.

Quaid-e-Azam expressed profound reverence for the martyrs of Pakistan, stating, "The sacrifices of our martyrs are the foundation of our freedom. We must always remember their courage and dedication, for they laid down their lives for our future" emphasising the essential role their courage and dedication played in shaping the nation's identity and progress. This sentiment profoundly reflects the legacies of valiant figures of the 1965 and 1971 wars such as Squadron Leader Sarfaraz Rafiqui, Pilot Officer Rashid Minhas and many more, who displayed extraordinary bravery and selflessness in defending the homeland. Each of PAF heroes epitomized the qualities of unity and devotion that underpin the remarkable achievements of Pakistan Air Force. Quaid urged the nation to honour their legacy by upholding the values for which they fought, reminding us that these martyrs stand as enduring symbols of courage and sacrifice, inspiring generations to safeguard our skies and sovereignty.

Quaid-e-Azam's influence on Pakistan is both profound and enduring. He not only forged the nation from struggle but also instilled values of democracy, equality and justice that resonate today. As the guiding light for future generations, his ideals serve as a moral compass, inspiring the people of Pakistan to honour his legacy and strive for a brighter, more prosperous future. His vision for Pakistan Air Force as a formidable and unparalleled fighting force underscores his understanding of the crucial role Air Power plays in modern warfare and national defence. His foresight in establishing a strong, independent Air Force not only aimed to safeguard Pakistan's sovereignty but also to instill a sense of pride and resilience in its people. By emphasising professionalism, innovation and a commitment to excellence, Quaid-e-Azam laid the foundation for an Air Force that continues to evolve and adapt, ensuring that it remains SECOND to NONE in all aspects.

Education: A Key to Breaking Gender Stereotypes

BY IQRA AFZAL



Why This Matters

When girls are educated, everyone benefits. Studies show that educated women are more likely to join the workforce, delay marriage, and invest in their children's education. This ripple effect boosts economies, improves health outcomes, and fosters social harmony.

The World Bank estimates that achieving gender equality in education could add \$12 trillion to the global economy. In Pakistan, where women make up only 22% of the workforce, empowering girls through education is an untapped opportunity.

The Road Ahead

So, what needs to be done?

Expand Access: Build more schools in rural areas, especially girls-only institutions, and ensure they have proper facilities.

Involve Communities: Engage parents, religious leaders, and local influencers to promote the value of girls' education.

Leverage Technology: Use e-learning platforms to reach remote areas where schools are scarce.

Monitor Progress: Regularly track enrollment and dropout rates to ensure programs are working.

A Vision for the Future

Imagine a Pakistan where every girl has the chance to learn, dream, and achieve. Where classrooms are filled with future scientists, engineers, and leaders, regardless of gender. This vision is within reach—but only if education becomes a priority for all.

By investing in schools, empowering teachers, and engaging communities, Pakistan can break free from the constraints of gender norms and build a brighter, more inclusive future.

grams are beginning to make an impact. The Malala Fund, named after Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, has championed girls' education in areas where conflict and cultural resistance pose significant barriers.

Barriers at Home

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. In many families, educating boys is seen as an investment, while girls are expected to stay home and help with household chores. Parents worry that sending daughters to school might expose them to "modern ideas" that conflict with traditional roles.

Even when families support education, infrastructure is often a hurdle. In rural Pakistan, schools are far away, unsafe, or lack basic facilities like separate bathrooms for girls. Without safe transport, many families are reluctant to let their daughters attend.

The economic burden also weighs heavily. When money is tight, boys' education is prioritized, and girls are left behind.

Sparks of Change

Change, however, is on the horizon. Initiatives like Punjab's Zewar-e-Taleem program, which

offers financial incentives to families sending girls to school, have shown promise. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Peshawar has made it safer for women and girls to travel to schools and colleges.

Community efforts are also making a difference. In Bangladesh, campaigns led by local leaders increased girls' enrollment by 40%.

Similar approaches in parts of Pakistan are beginning to shift mindsets, showing parents the long-term benefits of educating daughters.

A Global Perspective

Pakistan isn't alone in this fight. Around the world, education is being used to challenge gender norms in innovative ways:

In Sweden, children learn about equality through gender-neutral language and activities.

In Kenya, scholarships and mentoring programs for girls have improved school retention rates.

In Finland, inclusive curriculums highlight the achievements of women in history, science, and politics.

These examples prove that with the right policies and community support, education can transform societies.

THE DESTINATION

Editor's Mail

Send your letter for Letter to Editor THE DESTINATION

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Mudasser Iqbal

Chief Editor

Tahir Chudhary

Resident Editor Lahore

Khurram visits PSX; holds talks with PSX top management

BUSINESS

REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Khurram Schehzad, Adviser to Finance Minister, was invited to the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) by CEO, PSX, Farrukh Sabzwari, to discuss strategies for enhancing the depth and performance of the capital market.

During his meeting with the CEO and senior management of PSX, Schehzad received a comprehensive overview of PSX's strategic initiatives aimed at unlocking potential of Pakistan's capital markets, said a press release issued here on Tuesday.

The CEO of PSX emphasized that, despite challenges, Pakistan's capital markets possess immense potential.

He expressed confidence that through a well-



formulated strategy, PSX could realize this potential and significantly contribute to the economy.

Schehzad reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting capital market growth, recognizing its role in stabilizing as well as underpinning growth in the country's economy.

Introduction of new investment products, such as Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs), options markets, and derivatives, to enhance market attractiveness and exploring algorithmic trading and robo-advisory services, drawing insights from successful implementations in countries like China.

mental goals and boost market capitalization.

Furthermore, he recommended rebranding and repositioning the GEM board to function as a platform for venture capital and startup fundraising.

The Key Initiatives planned and discussed include, taking concrete steps for high-value listings to increase market capitalization and attract foreign investment and setting an ambitious target to increase the investor base to 2% of the national population within three years, engaging brokers and mutual funds in the campaign.

Introduction of new investment products, such as Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs), options markets, and derivatives, to enhance market attractiveness and exploring algorithmic trading and robo-advisory services, drawing insights from successful implementations in countries like China.

To achieve this goal, Mr. Schehzad urged the management to formalize recommendations for structural changes and privatization of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), which could advance govern-



MUZAFFARABAD: A trader in a fruit market is decorating orange for sale. — Staff Photo

SRBC not strategic, essential organization, reiterates Cabinet committee

BUSINESS

REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Cabinet Committee on State-Owned Enterprises (CCoSOEs) here on Tuesday reiterated its decision to exclude the Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company Limited (SRBC) from the list of strategic or essential organizations, paving the way for its potential privatization or public-private partnership.

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb chaired the CCoSOEs, according to press release issued by finance ministry.

Among others, the meeting was attended by the Minister for Planning, Development



and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal; Minister for Housing and Works, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada; Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh; Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP); Chairman Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP); Federal Secretaries; and senior officers from the Finance

Division.

According to the statement, the Cabinet Committee deliberated on a summary presented by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB) regarding the privatization and exploration of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for the Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company Limited (SRBC).

During the discussion, the Cabinet Committee reiterated its earlier decision that organizations like SRBC will not be classified as strategic or essential. The MoIB will be required to abide by the Cabinet's earlier decision regarding non-essential and non-strategic SOEs.

In addition, the Committee reviewed the implementation status of decisions previously taken regarding various SOEs under the agendas of the Cabinet Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Petroleum, Ministry of Railways, and Revenue Division.

Minister urges for need of legislation for animal health welfare

BUSINESS

REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Minister for National Food Security and Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain on Tuesday



emphasized the urgent need for federal legislation for animal health and welfare in the country.

A presentation was given highlighting the six cases currently under implementation across these ministries, with two cases pertaining to the Cabinet Division and one each for the others. The review emphasized ensuring timely execution of all decisions.

On the occasion, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized the need for a robust monitoring mechanism for SEZs and urged the implementation of reforms that can transform these zones into engines of economic growth.

Health, Welfare and Veterinary Public Health Bill 2024, approved in principle by the Federal Cabinet, is pivotal for aligning Pakistan's veterinary services with international standards.

He noted that zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 have highlighted the importance of a robust health system, and the lack of comprehensive federal legislation limits Pakistan's ability to address veterinary challenges effectively.

Rana Tanveer said that strengthening the livestock sector would not only bolster food security but also contribute significantly to Pakistan's economic growth.

global market and underscored the importance of provincial cooperation in passing the bill.

He called on provincial assemblies to support this critical legislation, which will enhance inter-provincial coordination and ensure compliance with international animal health standards.

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Pakistan has potential to double exports to US: President FPCCI

BUSINESS

REPORTER

KARACHI

The President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FPCCI), Atif Ikram Sheikh, Tuesday, apprised that Pakistan-US trade volume that crossed \$7 billion mark in 2023 has continued the increase in 2024 as it has crossed \$6.3 billion in the first 10 months, January to October 2024.

The U.S. is one of the few countries in the world with which Pakistan enjoys a bilateral trade surplus, the FPCCI president said, in a statement issued on Tuesday.

He said, "the business community believes this volume can potentially be doubled within a short span of few years – given the demand of Pakistani products in the U.S.; surging information technology exports and anticipated diversification



of Pakistani exports basket for the U.S."

He informed that Ambassador of Pakistan in the U.S. Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, has started a consultative process with FPCCI aimed at exploring ways and means to achieve exponential growth in exports to the U.S.

Atif Ikram Sheikh maintained that the U.S. GSP Program may be renewed and expanded and Pakistani exporters should remain agile and committed to make full use of the opportunities the enormous export market of the U.S. has to offer to Pakistan. He maintained that 55 percent Pakistani exports to the U.S. comprise of textiles; however, other sectors are catching up as IT exports to the U.S. have crossed the \$1 billion psychological mark.

The SVP FPCCI, Saqib Fayyaz Magoor, emphasized that

Pakistan, apart from textiles, should focus on

export of IT, pharma, jewelry and human resource to the U.S. and Pakistani exporters need to maintain quality, standards and compliance of their exports. Pakistani government needs to ensure regionally competitive cost of doing business specifically, vis-à-vis access to finance and electricity tariffs, he added.

Ambassador of Pakistan in the U.S. Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, stressed the fact that Pakistan has a very large and influential diaspora of 1 million Pakistani-Americans in the U.S.A. Pakistan is the largest importer of American cotton in the

world while the U.S. continues to be one of the top countries from where Pakistan receives foreign remittances.

He also highlighted the U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership in the war against terror and strong bilateral defense ties and informed that 40,000 Pakistani doctors are working in America, 5,000 Pakistani nursing staff will soon be exported to the U.S. and pharmacists are expected to follow.

Ambassador Sheikh emphasized that the economies of California and Texas are ranked as the 4th and 6th largest in the world, respectively. This highlights the significance of economic, trade, industrial, investment, and B2B relations with the United States, he added.

He noted that while certain aspects of political diplomacy may seem impossible, significant achievements can be made through economic diplomacy, and that is where our focus lies.

Planning Minister reviews progress of CPEC SEZs

BUSINESS

REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, chaired a high-level meeting here on Tuesday to review the progress of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

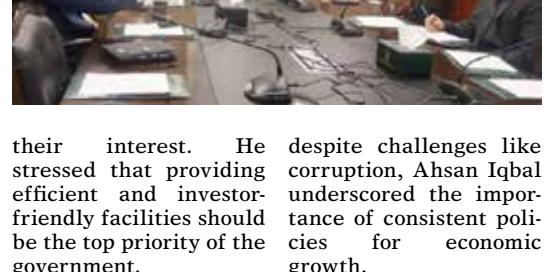
Among others, the meeting was attended by senior officials from the

Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the Board of Investment (BOI) and the Ministry of Planning.

According to press release, officials from the SIFC briefed the participants on the latest updates regarding the infrastructure and operational status of SEZs across the country.

The Minister emphasized the importance of

ensuring investor facilitation, noting that imposing excessive costs on investors could deter



their interest. He stressed that providing efficient and investor-friendly facilities should be the top priority of the government.

He highlighted that Pakistan's development trajectory has faced hurdles over the past 77 years, the press release added.

Drawing lessons from

countries such as China, South Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia, he identified political stability, peace, policy continuity, and reforms as the four key elements for sustainable development.

despite challenges like corruption, Ahsan Iqbal underscored the importance of consistent policies for economic growth.

He expressed concern about the disparity in economic performance between Pakistan and its regional counterparts, urging a long-term commitment to economic reforms.

"If, by 2047, the per capita income of Indian Muslims surpasses ours, what will we tell our future generations?" he remarked and termed the next 23 years as critical for Pakistan to compete in the global development race.

The Minister empha-

sized the need to prioritize the operationalization of existing SEZs over establishing new ones. He directed the concerned authorities to ensure the provision of basic infrastructure, including electricity and water, in all SEZs and to align the rules of technology zones with those of economic zones for enhanced synergy.

Additionally, he stressed learning from Vietnam's SEZ model and adopting their best practices to improve the performance of Pakistan's industrial zones.

To address the energy challenges in Gilgit-Baltistan, Ahsan Iqbal instructed relevant authorities to facilitate Chinese solar companies in initiating solar energy projects in the region.

He also called for the development of an action plan and monitoring matrix to accelerate the population of industrial zones, with all ministries and provinces playing a proactive role in this effort.

Poultry chicken prices rise once again up to Rs 333 in twin cities

BUSINESS

REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

In the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, poultry prices have decreased for the past six weeks to 260 but have started to rise again up to Rs 333.

The Poultry consumers, chicken and eggs prices have been reduced for the past few weeks, and are once again out of reach of the public.

The prices of poultry items have increased by 25 percent in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the last two weeks, which has created huge volatility in the market.

According to the market



survey conducted by APP here Tuesday, during past two weeks in the twin cities, a 25 percent increase was witnessed in the price of chicken, while a same 30 percent increase in the price of poultry eggs in the last six weeks.

According to the survey, the price of live chicken in the twin cities was between Rs 333 and 340 per kg from the last week of December. Similarly, chicken meat is sold at Rs 485 to 500 per kg in the market of both cities.

He said that the increase in poultry business inputs and cost of doing business was seen across the country due to which the market was in crisis.

Meanwhile, talking to APP, the farmer chairman Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA)

Chaudhry, Muhammad Ashraf said the increase in the current prices of poultry items is due to demand and supply issues.

He said that the increase in poultry business inputs and cost of doing business was seen across the country due to which the market was in crisis.

He said that many people related to the chicken business in the country were affected by the cur-

rent crisis and especially small businesses and poultry farms were closed, adding the poultry business in the four provinces including Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is suffering from the current economic crisis.

Chaudhry Ashraf said that the country's economic conditions are also an important issue and the poultry feed ingredients

imported from foreign countries are very expensive, in which soybean is important.

He said that many soybean ships have stopped at Karachi port, which has an inevitable impact on poultry prices.



Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA) has also called for a further increase in the prices of chicken and there was an increase observed in the prices of poultry items in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

On this occasion, poultry feed industrialist and Senior Vice President of Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hamza Sarosh said that soybean is included in the soybean ingredients of poultry feed.

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of Pakistan Business Forum France Sardar Zahoor Iqbal is calling on French Ambassador Nicholas Gillie. — Staff Photo

12 dead in blast at Turkey explosives plant

● PM expresses deep grief, condolence over loss of lives in Turkiye mishap

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD/ANKARA

A powerful blast on Tuesday ripped through an explosives plant in northwest Turkey killing 13 people and injuring four others, officials said.

Footage showed shards of glass and metal scattered outside the plant, where ambulances stood by.

"According to initial reports, 12 employees died and four were taken to hospital with injuries as a result of the explosion," local governor Ismail Ustaoglu said.

"I wish God's mercy upon our deceased citizens and a speedy recovery to our wounded," he added.

Officials said the wounded were not in a serious condition.

The blast took place at 8:25 am (0525 GMT) at a section of the plant which local officials said collapsed by the

force of the explosion. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said the cause was not immediately known and authorities ruled out sabotage.

"We are trying to find out what caused it," he said.

Prosecutors have launched a thorough investigation.

The plant, located in the north of Balikesir, makes munitions and explosives and flares for the domestic and international markets.

Turkey has become a major defence exporter, particularly for drones, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a major supporter of the industry.

Meanwhile,

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday expressed his deep grief over the loss of 12 precious lives at an explosive production facility



in Balikesir province of Turkiye.

On his X handle, the prime minister expressed his heartfelt condolences to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the

Turkish brethren over the incident.

"While expressing our solidarity with the people of Turkiye, we pray for the bereaved families and swift recovery of the injured,"

he further posted.

An explosion at an explosives production facility in Turkiye's western Balikesir province had left 12 people dead and several others injured, Turkish media

quoted the authorities.

Turkish Health Minister Kemal Memisoglu informed that five people were also injured in the blast, which occurred in the Karesi district.

Prince William Silent Amid Accusations Against King Charles of 'Ruining Lives'

WEB DESK

LONDON

Prince William and Step-Siblings Reunite for Christmas Amid Reports of Past Tension

Prince William, the Prince of Wales, is set to spend Christmas at Sandringham with his family, joined by his step-siblings Laura Lopes and Tom Parker Bowles. This comes amid resurfaced reports of past tensions between the two families following King Charles' marriage to Queen Camilla in 2005.

Laura Lopes, 46, and Tom Parker Bowles are Queen Camilla's children from her previous marriage to Andrew Parker Bowles. Despite early disagreements, particularly between William and Laura, the family now appears to have found common ground.

Royal expert Katie Nicholl shed light on their past dynamics in

her 2010 book Harry and William. She wrote about the heated arguments between William and Laura during their younger years, as they dealt with the complexities of their blended family.

However, the upcoming Sandringham celebrations suggest that time has healed many wounds. Laura and Tom's presence at this cherished family gathering signals a commitment to unity within the Royal Family.

As the family prepares to celebrate Christmas together, the focus is now on the joy of the season and the bonds they continue to strengthen. Royal watchers will undoubtedly be heartened to see signs of reconciliation and harmony within the family.

Chahar Institute, IPRI jointly hold seminar in Chengdu, China

WEB DESK

BEIJING

Chahar Institute and Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) jointly held a seminar on "CPEC and China-Pak Socio-cultural Connectivity" in Chengdu, China.

A four-member delegation led by Amb Dr Raza Muhammad, President IPRI, as well as a seven-member team led by Prof. Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow, Chahar Institute, delivered their speeches at the seminar.

Prof. Cheng Xizhong said that today's world is full of turbulence and profound changes unprecedented in a century are accelerating.

China-Pakistan relations possess strategic significance. China and Pakistan have maintained multi-level, wide-ranging and high-quality relations. China reiterates that China-Pakistan relations are a priority in China's diplomacy, while Pakistan emphasizes that Pakistan-China relations form the cornerstone of its foreign policy.

Currently, both sides are continuously deepening cooperation across various sectors and accelerating the establishment of a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future, actively contributing their wisdom and strength to the peace, stability, development and prosperity in the world and the region.

Both the Chahar Institute and the Islamabad Policy Research Institute are

non-governmental think tanks that play a pivotal role in public diplomacy. They can significantly contribute to strengthening high-level political mutual trust between the two countries, deepening high-level practical cooperation and enhancing high-level international collaboration.

With their respective advantages, they can serve the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the China-Pakistan community with a shared future, actively contributing their wisdom and strength to the peace, stability, development and prosperity in the world and the region.

Amb Dr Raza Muhammad, President IPRI said that today's

event lays foundation of long term, mutually beneficial cooperation between Islamabad Policy Research Institute and the Chahar Institute.

Pakistan-China friendship has strengthened over the years. This bond of love and respect binds two nations and its people together. The vision of President Xi Jinping,

through BRI, rising China is being portrayed as a challenger to the prevalent global security, economic, technological and financial order".

Consequently, we are

witnessing a heightened competition, trade and tariff war, denial of markets, barring of technology and creation of multiple security and economic alliances in Asia-Pacific and Middle east to contain China.

This dynamic geostrategic and geo-economic milieu warrants very close and multifaceted cooperation between China and Pakistan.

BRI and CPEC, projects of colossal economic dimensions, are proving beneficial for member countries.

Poverty percentages:

boost social welfare by fostering economic growth, job creation, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation. It also affords a more convenient and cost-effective connection to China through Gwadar deep seaport Gwadar will also help China to avoid Malacca Dilemma.

Pakistan and China need each other, more than ever now. Hence, they should develop joint strategy to navigate through the challenges being faced.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two sides to enhance mutual understanding, cooperation, and the sharing of knowledge through academic and research collaboration.



event the BRI and CPEC, have augmented this relationship.

Despite multiple hurdles created by our common enemies, these are progressing well. Inclusion of other countries in it can multiply the dividends.

"China a civilisational state has no history of annexation. Using soft power and win-win economic collaboration

India 20-25%, Pakistan 24-30%, and Afghanistan 70-80% make a convincing argument that these countries should join hands with China to fight poverty and attain societal emancipation.

BRI, a reincarnation of Old Silk Road and CPEC are massive development projects. Despite opposition, BRI flourishes with over 140 members countries, 60% of world's population, 40%-45% of global GDP, 3000 plus projects, investments of \$4.5 trillion and potential for annual trade of over \$2.5 trillion.

BRI aims to enhance connectivity, energy production, trade and industrialization.

CPEC is an unprecedented opportunity to

Armed groups in Syria agree to disband: Authorities report

Mauritius holding out on Chagos deal despite US pressure

WEB DESK

NEW YORK

Mauritius is still holding out on a deal to regain control of the strategic Chagos Islands from Britain, despite pressure from the United States which has a key military base there.

After decades of negotiations, Britain agreed in October to hand back the Indian Ocean islands to Mauritius, a former colony, on condition that a UK-US military base can remain on the largest, Diego Garcia.

But a new government took power in Mauritius last month and has reopened the talks -- reportedly seeking greater financial compensation.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on

the phone with the newly appointed Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, pushing him to finalise the treaty with Britain.

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Australia's Purcell takes voluntary provisional doping suspension

WEB DESK

AUSTRALIA

Australia's two-times Grand Slam doubles champion Max Purcell has elected to take a voluntary provisional suspension under the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) said.

The ITIA said Purcell, the world's 12th ranked doubles player, had admitted to a breach of rules relating to the use of a "prohibited method" and requested to enter into a provisional suspension on Dec. 10, which came into effect two days later.

"Time served under provisional suspension will be credited against any future sanction," the ITIA said in a statement, without giving further details.

Tennis Australia said



the ITIA confirmed the breach related to the use of a prohibited method rather than the presence of a prohibited substance.

"As the matter is currently under investigation, it is inappropriate to comment further at this time," it added.

The 26-year-old, who won the 2022 Wimbledon doubles title and the U.S. Open doubles title this year, is prohibited from playing in, coaching at, or attending any event authorised by the governing bodies of the sport or national associations.

Purcell is the latest Grand Slam champion to have a case opened by the ITIA, an independent organisation established by the governing bodies of the sport to safeguard its integrity.

The agency said last month that French Open champion Iga Swiatek had accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine following contamination of her sleep medication.



FAISALABAD: A thrilling hockey match between Parades Hockey Club and Shahbaz Senior Hockey Club during the 2nd Chief of Army Staff Inter Club National Hockey Championship 2024, District Level Round 1 at Hockey Stadium Faisalabad. — Staff Photo

ABL Stallions, UMT Markhors set to lock horns in Champions T20 Cup final

MUDASSER CH.

ISLAMABAD

Top-notch ABL Stallions and UMT Markhors are set to affirm Pakistan's inclination to adopt fiery and robust style of T20 cricket as they face off in the final of the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup final in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has devised the idea of the Champions Cup to not only find new talent but also groom those who have been excelling at the domestic level but are yet to reach the international standards.

The first of such events was successfully held in the 50-over format in Faisalabad in September this year.

The Bahria Town

Champions T20 Cup targeted a new and aggressive style of T20 cricket which the top teams have adopted and it also kick-started Pakistan's preparation for the upcoming white-ball mega events including the ICC Champions Trophy and the ICC T20 World Cup in 2026.

Stallions captain Mohammad Haris described the campaign as a "topsy-turvy one."

"Overall the team's journey has been good with its ups and down," said Haris on the eve of the final, who will vie for the Trophy and a prize pot of PKR 25 million.

Both the finalists won six of their eight matches with two defeats each but ABL Stallions cruised into the final with a better net run-rate of 0.805 to UMT Markhors' 0.606. Misbah-ul-Haq mentored UMT Markhors beat Nurpur Lions in the Qualifiers. The two teams



shared a match each in the double league phase, with Stallions winning the first by 29 runs and losing the next by three runs. That sets both the teams intriguingly placed for the final.

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will play and to feed aggressive players to the Pakistan team.

"We have overcome challenges and have tried to adopt new styles of T20 cricket which are prevalent at the international level and that was told to us by our mentor Misbah-ul-Haq," said Iftikhar.

Rival skipper Iftikhar Ahmed said the aim was to improve the style of

"We have several good performances with Akif Javed bowling exceptionally well. Khawaja Mohammad Nafay is a new and exciting talent with Saad Masood also impressive with his skills. "Credit to Misbah and the staff for helping us and this has been a good

tournament, long enough to give maximum opportunities to young players."

Some powerful striking has been seen in the event with Abdul Samad (strike-rate 169.11), Haider Ali (161.53), Hussain Talat (156.56), Mohammad Haris

(153.08) and Khushdil Shah (151.72) — a marked improvement in the powerful batting, so much needed at the international level.

All-rounder Hussain Talat has anchored Stallions's batting with a hundred in his aggregate of 310 at an impressive strike rate of 156 while experienced Fakhar Zaman topped the chart for Markhors with 283 runs coming at a strike rate of 138.73.

Stallions boast of fast bowler Mohammad Ali who is top on the bowlers' list with 19 wickets in eight matches while Nisar Ahmed of Markhors is third on the list with 15 wickets in nine matches. The two teams have enough firepower in all three departments, promising a mouth-watering final.

ABL Stallions road to

final:
7 Dec – beat Panthers by 35 runs
8 Dec – beat Lions by 12 runs

12 Dec – lost to Markhors by three runs
13 Dec – beat Dolphins by five runs
15 Dec – beat Panthers by six wickets
17 Dec – lost to Lions by three wickets
20 Dec – beat Markhors by 29 runs
21 Dec – beat Dolphins by six wickets

UMT Markhors road to final:
7 Dec – beat Lions by four wickets
10 Dec – beat Dolphins by two wickets
12 Dec – beat Stallions by three runs
13 Dec – lost to Panthers by six wickets
15 Dec – beat Lions by three wickets
18 Dec – beat Dolphins by eight wickets

Lindsey Vonn thinks her new titanium knee could start a trend in skiing. And pro sports in general

WEB DESK

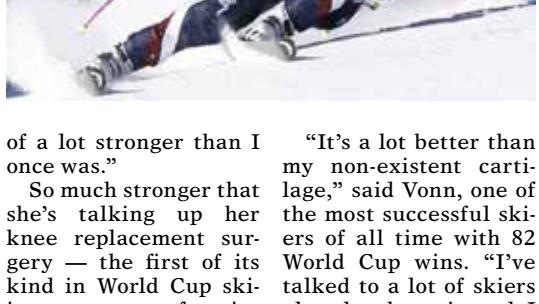
ST. MORITZ

When Lindsey Vonn last raced on the World Cup circuit nearly six years ago, the constant pain in her knee left her in tears and led to retirement.

Flash forward to Vonn's comeback race on a titanium knee at age 40 last weekend, and the American skiing standout couldn't have felt more different.

No more pain. No more swelling. No more tears.

"The last few years of my career were so much different than they are right now. I'm skiing without thinking about my knee, which I really haven't done since I first tore my ACL in 2013. So it's been a long time that I felt this good," Vonn said Saturday after placing 14th in a super-G in St. Moritz. "I'm a little bit older, but honestly I'm a hell



of a lot stronger than I once was."

So much stronger that she's talking up her knee replacement surgery — the first of its kind in World Cup skiing — as a new frontier for the sport.

In April, Vonn had a robot-assisted replacement performed by Martin Roche, a South Florida-based orthopedist specializing in complex knee disorders. Part of the bone in her right knee was cut off and replaced by two titanium pieces. A month later, she was planning her comeback.

"I feel amazing. I mean, obviously not everyone responds the same way to surgeries. For some reason, I bounce back pretty well from surgery. But I think it's something to seriously consider for athletes that have a lot of knee problems."

Cowboys beat Tampa Bay 26-24 as Baker Mayfield and the Bucs lose control of their playoff fate

WEB DESK

ARLINGTON

Baker Mayfield came home to Texas looking to keep his Tampa Bay Buccaneers on track for the playoffs.

Instead, they'll need some help.

Cooper Rush threw a touchdown pass and Brandon Aubrey kicked two 58-yarders among four field goals Sunday night, boosting the Dallas Cowboys to a 26-24 victory that cost the Bucs control of their playoff fate.

The end of a four-game winning streak left Tampa Bay (8-7) even with Atlanta atop the NFC South with two games remaining. The Falcons have the tie-breaker because they won both meetings with the Bucs, who are on a

four-year playoff run.

"We lost, we fell back in the pack," coach Todd Bowles said. "We've got to eat it, can't spend too much time on it. We had our chances. We've got to take care of us and let everything else take care of itself."

A three-year playoff streak for the Cowboys (7-8) ended when they were eliminated from postseason contention before the prime-time kickoff. Still, Dallas won for the fourth time in five games since a five-game losing streak that put those playoff hopes in peril.



Saima Mengal secures 2 Golds for Balochistan in Quaid-e-Azam Games

SPORTS REPORTER

RAWALPINDI

Saima Mengal, representing the Balochistan Karate Team in the Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games has secured two gold medals to become the only dual gold medalist champion from her province.

She was decorated with the medals in the Karate game in two categories; one medal each in a 45Kg competition and in the team fight.

The 16 years young Saima participated in the Quaid-e-Azam Games for the first time and has emerged as a star Karate player in her maiden inter-provincial games.

Expressing her rejoicing moments with APP, Saima informed that she

is studying in Quetta and has greater interest in karate games.

"The credit of my success goes to my family who encouraged me for games and the coaches who have polished my skills to perform well",



confidence and courage", said the young karate champ who belongs to Golden Brother Marshal Arts Academy.

The third Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games were held in Islamabad from December 13 to 19, 2024, in which thousands of male and female athletes from Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir participated.

"I will bring the honour for my beloved Pakistan in future fights at international level games. Agha Muhammad Mengal, my team coach and Fakhar un Nisa my coach in the academy collectively trained me to fight the games with

confidence and courage", said the young karate champ who belongs to Golden Brother Marshal Arts Academy.

The third Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games were held in Islamabad from December 13 to 19, 2024, in which thousands of male and female athletes from Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir participated.

Earlier, Government Girls College Al-Noor, Govt. College for Women Nazimabad and Abdullah Govt College secured the first, second, and third positions, respectively. The Fair Play Trophy was awarded to the Nishtar Government College for Women team. The referee duties in the tournament were performed by Aurangzeb Ahmed and Shahroz Alvi.

Abdullah Govt College hosts first Intercollegiate Kho Kho Championship

Chief guest, DG Colleges Sindh Dr. Naveed Rab Siddiqui, distributed the prizes

SPORTS REPORTER

KARACHI

Government Girls College Al-Noor emerged victorious in the inaugural Abdullah College Intercollegiate Kho Kho Championship, defeating Government College for Women, Nazimabad, by 9-3 points in a thrilling final. Organized by Abdullah Government College for Women, Nazimabad, in collaboration with the Sindh Kho Kho Association.

Tournament Director DPE Batoor Kazim said that eight teams from District central participated in the tournament, including Sir Syed Government Girls College.



the efforts of the Sindh Kho Kho Association in promoting the game of Kho Kho, organizing tournaments, providing training opportunities and the college. She said that

but you have also preserved the cultural heritage associated with this beautiful game.

Professor Dr. Naveed Rab Siddiqui, Director General Colleges Sindh,

along with Zohab Memon graced the occasion as the chief guest, expressing his admiration for the girls' exceptional skills and emphasizing the potential for

Pakistan to excel internationally in Kho Kho with proper support. He announced plans to expand sports activities, including the upcoming Sindh Games.

Prof. Dr. Naveed Rab Siddiqui appreciated the efforts of Director Physical Education Batoor Kazim for her excellent services. Prof. Dr. Naveed Rab Siddiqui distributed trophies, certificates and shields to the winning teams and encouraged them for their excellent performance in the tournament.

Principal Prof. Syeda Tasneem Fatima Rizvi presented a bouquet and shield on behalf of the college and thanked DG Colleges Sindh for his presence. He also thanked Sindh Kho Kho Association President Dr. Arif Hafeez for his full cooperation in organizing the tournament.

On this occasion,



MULTAN: A nomad woman displaying handmade 'Ghigo Ghode' (colorful horses) at her stall for selling to attract the customer during a cultural festival organized by the District Government. — Staff Photo

NADRA's New Advisory Warns Against Photocopying Official Documents

- NADRA Warns Against Unnecessary Photocopies to Prevent Security Risk

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The federal government on Monday issued a schedule of public and optional holidays for 2025. You need to think twice before making unwanted copies of ID Card and other key documents as NADRA's new rule could save you from security risks.

National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) issued public advisory urging citizens to avoid making unnecessary photocopies of official documents, stressing security risks linked with such practices.

The official clarified that for most services at its offices, only original documents or their asso-



ciated NADRA-issued numbers are required. Photocopies are only necessary in specific cases where NADRA cannot access the documents online.

In fresh advisory, the authority particularly warned against photocopying important documents like national identity cards (CNICs), family registration certificates, and other NADRA-issued paperwork.

NADRA also pointed out that unnecessary photocopies could be misused by unauthorized individuals, posing potential security threats.

Masses have been urged to report any concerns or complaints through NADRA's dedicated complaint portal to ensure better security practices and prevent misuse of personal documents.

Pakistan's Internet Speed Set for major boost with new Cable Link with Africa

- Pakistan to Improve Internet Speeds with Modern Cable Installation

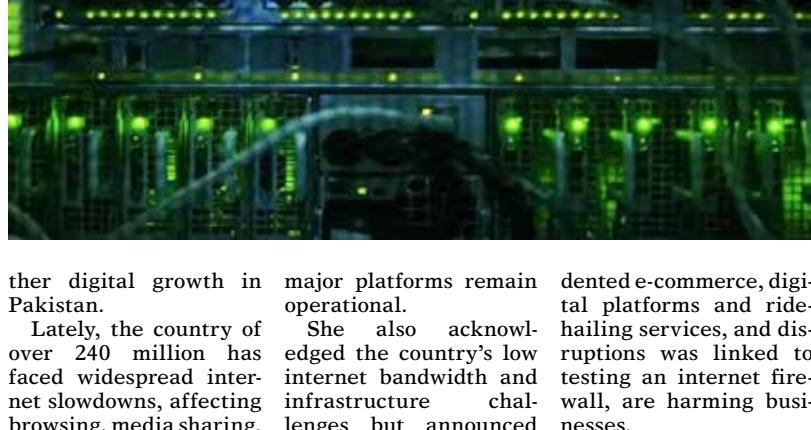
STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan is making efforts to improve Internet Speeds, and a new cable will be connected with Africa to boost internet speed significantly.

R45,000-kilometer-long modern internet cable will link South Asian nation with Africa and the cable has a capacity of 180 terabits per second Tbps, which will improve not only social media apps' performance but also overall internet speed.

Minister of State for I.T., Shazia Fatima, a c k n o w l e d g e d Islamabad's internet speed is not at the level it should be. With the installation of modern cable, a significant improvement in internet speed is expected, which will pave the way for fur-



ther digital growth in major platforms remain Pakistan.

Lately, the country of over 240 million has faced widespread internet slowdowns, affecting browsing, media sharing, and services like WhatsApp in cities. The government officials attributed issues to security measures, noting that while X (formerly Twitter) is restricted for security reasons, other

dented e-commerce, digital platforms and ride-hailing services, and disruptions was linked to testing an internet firewall, are harming businesses.

Meanwhile, digital rights activists criticized the government's lack of transparency, pointing out the economic impact and the spread of misinformation due to the ongoing uncertainty.

As internet slowdowns

Chief of Romanian Naval Forces Visits Newly Commissioned PNS Yamama

- Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi Meets Romanian Naval Chief to Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

MUDASSER CH.

ISLAMABAD

The Chief of the Romanian Naval Forces, Vice Admiral Mihai Panait, visited the newly commissioned Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) Yamama at Constanta Port in Romania. During the visit, Vice Admiral Panait was provided with a comprehensive briefing on the ship's advanced capabilities and its role in enhancing the operational readiness of the Pakistan Navy.

PNS Yamama is the fourth and final Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) built for the Pakistan Navy by DAMEN Shipyards, Galati, Romania. These



state-of-the-art vessels are designed to operate in contested maritime environments and serve as platforms for deterrence across various domains of warfare. With its commissioning

on 17 December 2024, PNS Yamama embarked on its maiden Passage Exercise with a Romanian Navy ship, marking the start of its operational duties at sea.

Earlier, Vice Admiral

Muhammad Faisal Abbasi, Commander Karachi, paid a visit to Bucharest, where he met with Vice Admiral Mihai Panait. During the meeting, both naval leaders discussed mat-

ters of mutual interest, including enhancing Navy-to-Navy engagements and cooperation in maritime security. The two senior officers expressed their satisfaction with the growing relationship between the Romanian and Pakistan Navies, and both reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening cooperation in operational and training activities.

The successful commissioning of PNS Yamama and the visit of the Romanian naval chief are seen as significant milestones in the continued partnership between the two nations, enhancing maritime security and operational collaboration.

Azerbaijan Defence Delegation Visits PAF to Boost Military Ties

- Azerbaijani Delegation Praises PAF's Professionalism, Proposes Expanded Training Cooperation

STAFF REPORTER

RAWALPINDI

A high-level defence delegation from Azerbaijan, led by Deputy Minister of Defence and Director General Mr. Agil Gurbanov, along with Lieutenant General Namig Islamzade, Deputy Minister of Defence and Commander of the Azerbaijan Air Force, visited the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Headquarters in Islamabad. The delegation met with Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff of the Pakistan Air Force.

During the meeting, the Air Chief highlighted the recent achievements of the Pakistan Air Force, showcasing its commit-



ment to operational excellence in modern warfare. He reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to further strengthen bilateral military ties, particularly in operational and training cooperation. Notably, over 50% of the training objectives have been successfully achieved for a large contingent of Azerbaijani air and ground crew currently undergoing training at a PAF operational base. This training program, scheduled to con-

clude within a month, aims to enhance the operational capabilities of the Azerbaijan Air Force.

The Azerbaijani delegation praised the professionalism of PAF personnel and commended the rapid development of Pakistan's domestic aviation industry.

They expressed satisfaction with the ongoing training of 70 aircravt and technicians and called for deeper Air Force-to-Air Force collaboration.

between the two countries. Furthermore, the Azerbaijani officials proposed expanding training programs to include advanced areas such as disruptive technologies, cyber warfare, and electronic warfare, in line with the evolving nature of modern military operations.

The delegation also visited the PAF Cyber Command at Air Headquarters, where they were briefed on the operational capabilities of the Azerbaijan Air Force.

The Azerbaijani delegation praised the professionalism of PAF personnel and commended the rapid development of Pakistan's domestic aviation industry.

This visit underscores the strong military partnership between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, reflecting both nations' commitment to furthering collaboration and enhancing their defence relations.

Adhering to Quaid's principles key to prosperity: NA Speaker

- NA Speaker commends Christian community's role in national development

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Paying tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his 148th birth anniversary, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said on Tuesday that following Jinnah's guiding principles—Faith, Unity, and Discipline—can lead the country toward progress and prosperity.

In his message on the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he stated that Jinnah is amongst one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. He further remarked that leaders like Quaid-e-Azam are born in centuries.

Quaid-e-Azam

Muhammad Ali Jinnah's charismatic personality

played a pivotal role in inspiring the Muslims of the subcontinent to strive for freedom and unity. His exceptional leadership qualities helped ignite a sense of nationhood among Muslims, who were previously fragmented and disenfranchised¹.

He described Quaid-e-Azam as a principled, dignified, talented, patient, pragmatic, and resilient leader who neither compromised on his principles, nor did he attempt to impose his decisions upon others.

He expressed these thoughts in his message on the occasion of Quaid-e-Azam's 148th birth anniversary, which is celebrated with national zeal and utmost respect on

December 25 each year.

The Speaker further emphasized that there is an even greater need for establishing unity within our ranks to confront the challenges currently being faced by the country. All political forces to set aside their differences and strive for unity in the collective effort of nation-building.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq also added that the best way to pay homage to Quaid-e-Azam is to follow his guiding principles in order to truly transform the country into an Islamic welfare state, as envisioned by the founders of Pakistan. He noted that Quaid-e-Azam's birth anniversary serves as a day of reaffirming our commitment to unite our ranks and work together to fulfill his

mission, thereby making this country a great nation.

On this occasion, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Syed Mir Ghulam Mustafa Shah, stated that we must unite in our efforts to transform Pakistan into Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan.

He highlighted that the Muslims of the subcontinent rendered matchless sacrifices

under the exemplary leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah for a separate homeland.

He remarked that Quaid-e-Azam is one of the greatest leaders of the Muslim Ummah. He concluded by stressing the need to promote the rule of law, social justice, and national unity in order to implement Quaid-e-Azam's principles to make Pakistan a

prosperous and developed country.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, on Tuesday commended the Christian community's role in Pakistan's development and prosperity, highlighting their invaluable contributions in various sectors, especially in education and health-care.

Extending warm felicitations to the Christian community on the eve of Christmas, he remarked that the Christian community is an integral part of Pakistan's diverse society, and their role in the nation's progress is

praise-worthy. He said that Hazrat Isa (AS) is an exalted & revered Prophet of Allah, and his birth anniversary is a source of happiness and blessing for all. He further emphasized that Hazrat Isa (AS) taught the values of peace, tolerance, brotherhood, and service to humanity.

He added that Christmas teaches us lessons of unity, tolerance, and fraternity, which are essential for the development and stability of society. He further stated that by following the teachings of Hazrat Isa (AS), we can promote interfaith harmony.

Ayaz Sadiq asserted that the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the protection of the rights of all citizens, regardless of their creed, religion, or ethnicity, and provides them with the freedom to live according to their beliefs and practices.

He also mentioned that the Parliament is committed to ensuring the protection of citizens' rights and providing equal opportunities in all sectors of life through effective legislation.

Deputy Speaker National Assembly, Syed Mir Ghulam Mustafa Shah, also extended Christmas greetings to the Christian community. He affirmed that the Parliament is resolutely committed to enacting effective legislation for the protection of minority rights and their betterment. He noted that citizens from all religious backgrounds are playing an admirable role in the nation's development and progress.

