

● FM Aurangzeb highlights reforms in key sectors

## PM Calls for Sustainable Growth, Assures Economic Recovery

● “We have inexhaustible natural resources and brilliant human minds,” said Shehbaz

### STAFF REPORTER

KARACHI

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif inaugurated the ceremony at the Pakistan Stock Exchange by ringing the gong, marking his first visit to the country's financial hub's premier exchange.

Addressing attendees, he emphasised that successes are the result of teamwork, stability, and growth for Pakistan's economic future.

The PM highlighted that Pakistan has achieved macroeconomic stability, which now needs to be converted into sustainable economic growth. “Stability is a milestone, but our real goal is economic growth,” he remarked, adding that Pakistan's economy had stood back on its feet.

“We now have to move towards economic growth, which requires the best teamwork and hard work.”

He announced that the recently launched Uran Pakistan Program was aimed at fostering economic development and social prosperity. “The program will lead us on a journey of progress and prosperity, combining Pakistan's talent, natural resources, and hard work,” he said.

Shehbaz further remarked that things will heat up as the country moves towards growth. “We will have to

manage these things,” he added.

Praising Karachi as the commercial, financial, and export hub of Pakistan, PM Shehbaz noted the city's resurgence as a beacon of economic activity. “Once upon a time, the lights of Karachi were dimmed, but now they shine brightly again,” he said, reiterating Karachi's critical role in the nation's economic revival.

“I will invite experts soon and listen to their sweet, sour, and bitter things. Those who say everything is fine live in a fool's paradise,” the PM maintained.

Addressing Pakistan's financial challenges, PM Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed the government's commitment to fulfilling promises made to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, he expressed his aspiration to reduce reliance on the IMF in the future. “We will bid farewell to the IMF when the time comes,” he stated.

He questioned how it was possible to have a begging bowl in one hand and atomic power in the other. “Can fire and water ever become one?” he asked.

Drawing parallels with nations like Germany and Japan, which rose from the ashes of World War II to achieve remarkable progress, PM Shehbaz Sharif underscored the importance of learning from



history. “Pakistan must restore its honour among the nations of the world,” he urged.

“We have inexhaustible treasures and human brain. Pakistan will survive until the end of time, so it has to be strengthened,” Shehbaz insisted.

The PM called for collective effort and realistic planning to achieve economic growth, emphasizing the need to confront both strengths and weaknesses with honesty. “Facts, good or bad, must be acknowledged if we are to move forward,” he said, adding that there were natural resources worth trillions

of dollars.

Investors, he added, are pivotal to Pakistan's development and must be supported through policy consistency and teamwork. “We have inexhaustible treasures and brilliant human minds, and together we will ensure that Pakistan thrives till the end of time,” he concluded.

He said that Shehbaz Sharif led PDM government steered the country out of serious economic challenges and today we are among the rapidly stabilizing economies.

The prime minister always focus on practical approach and implementation of policies and the

country is moving ahead under his able leadership, he said and anticipated that situation will further ameliorate in the coming years.

The federal minister for finance and revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb reflecting on sizable improvements in economic indicators said that government is actively pursuing its agenda of decreasing inflation, supporting export led growth and bringing reforms in tax, energy, public sector entities, pensions, civil service and other important sectors.

The finance minister also spoke on right sizing

initiatives aimed at improving service delivery and cutting down expenditures of federal as well as provincial governments and said that the much needed structural reform were being implemented in a phased manner.

He felicitated the PSX on remarkable performance and underscored the importance of capital and monetary markets in sustainable development of a country. The finance minister also assured to start pre-budget consultation with all the stakeholders in the coming month so that their proposals could be acquired and incorporated in

budget making process.

Chief Executive Officer Pakistan Stock Exchange Farukh Sabzwari, in his welcome address highlighted exceptional performance of PSX, China's strategic investment and partnership, key features and proposals for further growth of the capital market.

Later, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, along with DPM Ishaq Dar, Finance Minister Aurangzeb, CM and Governor Sindh, chairperson and CEO of PSX struck the gong to mark the remarkable performance of PSX.

FM Aurangzeb highlighted the progress made through the IMF agreement, which had provided economic stability, and noted that reforms in struggling public-sector institutions were underway.

He also pointed to the digitalisation efforts at the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the need for reforms in the energy sector, and the introduction of structural reforms to improve the country's infrastructure. FM Aurangzeb emphasized that the federal government's efforts to reduce expenses were also making a difference in improving economic conditions.

In his remarks, the finance minister noted that a reduction in the policy rate had eased the burden of debt and interest payments.

Another accused indicted in GHQ attack case

### STAFF REPORTER

RAWALPINDI

A special anti-terrorism court indicted another accused, Shaheer Sikandar, in the General Headquarters (GHQ) attack case.

The hearing, held at Adiala Jail, was conducted by Judge Amjad Ali Shah. The PTI chairman, also an accused in the case, was presented in court, and attendance of all accused was recorded.

During the proceedings, the defence counsel submitted three applications. Omar Ayub requested access to the case records, while Ajmal Sabir and Malik Ansar filed pleas seeking acquittal.

The court directed the defence to present arguments on these applications at the next hearing and adjourned the case until January 13.

It is noteworthy that charges have now been framed against all 119 accused in the GHQ attack case, with Shaheer Sikandar being the final one to be indicted. Previously, 118 accused had already been indicted.

Hearing was adjourned on lawyers' request for clarification on Omar Ayub's record provision, Ajmal Sabir and Ansar Iqbal's acquittal applications.

Court approved accused Usman Dar's request for permission to travel abroad. Accused Usman Dar had sought permission to travel abroad from January 13 to February 21.

In Usman Dar's absence, Hasnain Iqbal Sumbal was appointed as his pleader.

## Imran Khan's difficulties result of his own making, says Maryam

● CM Punjab urges students not to go against country

### TAHIR CH.

LAHORE

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Wednesday launched a fresh tirade against incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, saying that the difficulties being faced by the former prime minister were the result of “his own doings”.

“How can a person who uses youth as political fuel fall asleep,” the

provincial chief executive said while addressing the Honhaar Scholarship Programme ceremony in Sargodha.

Urging the students not to go against the country “under any circumstances”, she said that someone “who asks you to siege and arson is not your friend”.

“His [Imran] own children were sitting outside [and] he is asking others to vandalise and spread anarchy,” Maryam said, referring to the events of May 9, 2023 and the

“final call protest” on November 26.

Khan, who remains behind the bars in Adiala jail, and several others are facing various allegations in the cases related to the violence following his arrest on May 9.

The vandalism was followed by the PTI founder's arrest on the aforementioned date in 2023 during which party workers protested, taking to the streets across the country and damaging public and private property, including military



installations.

The riots also led to the deaths of at least eight people and injured several others, prompting the authorities to

by the PTI founder's statements, were in jail. “All these events were result of an individual's greed for power,” she added.

Referring to the military court sentence for Hassan Niazi, Maryam regretted that the nephew of the PTI founder “mocked the military's uniform and brought shame to the country”. “He [Niazi] was jailed for ten years... his future has been destroyed,” she added.

Last month, the military courts sentenced 60 more “culprits”, including Hassan Niazi, for their involvement in the May 9 riots, taking the total number of convicts to 85.

The world community, including the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) had expressed concerns over the sentencing of civilians by the military courts, maintaining that the convictions were against the international law.

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Calling out the ousted premier for facing “karma”, Maryam said that she was arrested during the PTI's tenure in front of her father, Nawaz Sharif. “I was in Adiala Jail, when I received news about my mother's death.”

Noting that paths for country's development were opening up, she said that she would not be able to launch scholarship programme if her priority was to “turn off someone's air conditioner or heater”.

## Relief convoy reaches Kurram after 94 days of road closure

● 40 vehicles carrying relief items had been dispatched

### STAFF REPORTER

KURRUM

A convoy of 40 trucks carrying essential relief supplies reached on Wednesday the unrest-hit Kurram district.

The convoy - dispatched by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government - carried food items, medicines, and other essential supplies.

It was divided into two parts, with 10 trucks reaching Bagan and the remaining 30 trucks arriving in Parachinar. The relief operation follows the reopening of key roads that had been closed for 94 days due to violent clashes.

Speaking to the media, Deputy Commissioner Kurram Ashfaq Khan termed the development a major step toward restoring peace and normalcy in the district.

He assured that those responsible for the violence, including the recent attack on former Deputy Commissioner



Javedullah Mehsud, would be held accountable.

Relief efforts amid tight security

The convoy departed under heavy security, with aerial monitoring ensuring its safe passage. Earlier, perishable goods such as vegetables and fruits were sent back to Peshawar due to delays caused by security concerns.

K h y b e r P a k h t u n k h w a ' s Information Advisor, Barrister Muhammad Saif, confirmed that the relief operation had been finalized after successful negotiations with local

protestors. “The Grand Jirga, Kurram Peace Committee, and other local committees played a pivotal role in these talks, allowing us to resume aid efforts,” he said.

He further announced that additional convoys would follow in the coming days to ensure continuous supply of essential commodities to the district.

Region in crisis  
The extended road closures had caused severe shortages of food, medicines, and other basic necessities across Kurram. The situation had escalated following a

series of violent incidents, including the tragic firing on a passenger bus in November that claimed 50 lives and led to widespread clashes. Bagan Bazaar was also set ablaze during the unrest.

The conflict resulted in the closure of roads leading to Parachinar, cutting off the region from vital supplies. Protests and sit-ins led by Shia scholars in Parachinar and Karachi had urged the government to take immediate action to restore access.

The district administration has registered cases against five suspects for the January 4 attack on former Deputy Commissioner Mehsud and other officials. Three of the accused have been arrested thus far.

Despite a peace agreement brokered on January 1 by tribal elders and government representatives, logistical and security challenges delayed the delivery of relief supplies.

### STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Founder Imran Khan has directed party leaders to continue negotiations with the government, emphasizing the need to resolve national issues through dialogue, according to PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar.

Speaking to the media, Barrister Gohar stated that the PTI founder has permitted submitting two key demands in writing to the government's negotiation committee. He suggested a third session of talks with the government for any progress in the negotiations.

“These demands are not for any deal; they are for the country and the nation. We propose forming a commission and securing releases of our political prisoners as part of the process,” he explained, adding that the party's two demands will be submitted to the government in



writing on the instructions of Imran Khan.

Barrister Gohar also highlighted that while communication had been established with the powers that be, the discussions did not progress. “We were not told about any possible release or relocation,” he added, dismissing rumours of PTI leaders negotiating for personal benefits.

When asked by a journalist about Aleema Khan's comment that Ali Amin Gandapur conveyed a message for the PTI founder being moved to his Bani Gala house, Gohar said, “We were not influenced by any offers or promises. We did not sit for

even a day for negotiations.”

Separately, PTI parliamentary leader in the Senate, Barrister Ali Zafar, echoed that the PTI founder has allowed submitting their two demands to the government in writing; however, he clarified that this submission serves as a condition for resuming talks with the government.

In an exclusive interview with Samaa TV, Barrister Ali Zafar emphasized that if negotiations begin, critical issues such as elections, governance, and political reforms will also be brought to the table.

“We will also ask the



# IGP issues over Rs 1.8m for treatment of employees, their families

**STAFF REPORTER**  
LAHORE

Inspector General Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has released over 1.8 million rupees for the treatment of employees and their families suffering from serious illnesses.

According to the details of the fund distribution, 1 million rupees were given to the Head Constable Mohammad Aqeel for a kidney transplant, 200,000 rupees for Driver Head Constable Tariq Ali for surgery, 125,000 rupees for CTD

Constable Amjad Abbas for cancer treatment. Similarly, 100,000 rupees were allocated for Junior Clerk Muhammad Shafique from Lahore for the treatment of his wife and son, while 100,000 rupees each were released for Trainee Sub-Inspector Sanam Farooq for an operation, and retired Sub-Inspector Faiz Ahmad for cancer treatment. Senior Traffic Warden Muhammad Khan was granted 100,000 rupees for the treatment of his wife and son, and Lady Head Constable Faiza Ali was allocated 70,000 rupees for surgery.

The IG Punjab approved the funds release after scrutiny by the Medical Financial Assistance Committee. He mentioned that, under MOUs with various institutions, modern healthcare facilities are also being provided to employees for treatment.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor is altering the peanuts at Fruit and Vegetables market of Sector I-11 in Federal Capital. — Staff Photo

# KP govt launches Rs 370mln financial assistance program for special persons

**STAFF REPORTER**  
PESHAWAR

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has initiated a financial assistance program worth Rs 370 million to support 37,000 special persons across the province.

Under the programme each beneficiary would receive Rs10,000 under this initiative, it was informed during an inaugural ceremony held here on Wednesday at KP Chief Minister Secretariat.

The event was attended by Social Welfare Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah, mem-

bers of the national and provincial assemblies, special persons, and other dignitaries.

During the ceremony, the CM distributed financial aid cheques to special persons and announced a significant change in official terminology.

He stated that the term “disabled” would no longer be used in official documents and would be replaced with “special persons.”

The CM highlighted the unique talents and abilities of special persons and emphasized the need to provide them with opportunities.

He reiterated the state’s responsibility to support all vulnerable



segments of society, ensuring no one is left without governmental support during his tenure.

He also announced that the government is collecting data on deserving individuals, including special persons, widows, and orphans, to ensure that welfare initiatives become part of the regular budget.

He further said that electric wheelchairs would be provided to government employees with disabilities and students of higher education institutions.

Furthermore the government had enhanced the dowry fund from Rs 25,000 to Rs 200,000.

Similarly, the financial support provided

under Zakat had been doubled, he said adding that a ration card scheme for widows and senior citizens was being introduced.

The CM said that a new program for the welfare of orphans and destitute children was underway while a state-of-the-art old age home with comprehensive facilities would be constructed for senior citizens.

Apart from this a safe haven was being established for transgender persons to ensure they live with dignity.

The CM concluded by reaffirming the government’s commitment to providing care and support to all marginalized groups in the province.

# SALU Signs MoU with vision for Education Foundation to enhance Student Welfare

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
SUKKUR

Shah Abdul Latif University (SALU), Khairpur, and the Vision for Education Foundation (V4E) have formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing cooperation in academic collaboration and student welfare.

The MoU was signed on Wednesday at the Syndicate Hall of SALU, in the presence of distinguished faculty members and university officials.

The agreement was signed by Vice Chancellor (VC), SALU, Dr Yousuf Khushik and Nazim Rajani, the

Founder of V4E.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Prof Dr. Menhoo Khan Laghari and Captain (R) Abrar Hussain.

The MoU, initiated by the Institute of Business Administration in collaboration with the Students Societies Center at SALU, focuses

on conducting comprehensive eye screenings for students, faculty, and non-teaching staff. These screenings will take place in the Auditorium Hall of the Students Societies Centre, benefiting the entire university community.

This partnership between SALU and V4E marks a significant step toward promoting student welfare, academic development, and community engagement, while also enhancing awareness and access to eye care services.

On the occasion, Vice Chancellor Dr. Yousuf Khushik emphasized that the collaboration would pave the way for new academic opportunities for students.



# 15 profiteers held, 23 of them fined in Quetta action against price violators

**STAFF REPORTER**  
QUETTA

District administration arrested 15 shopkeepers for illegal profiteering on the market and sent six of them to jail while fined 23 vendors and issued strict warnings 30 shopkeepers for ensuring implementation of control price on Wednesday.

Under the price control of the district administration in different areas of Quetta, including Kuchlak Bazaar, Baleli, Customs, Samangli Road, Gowalmandi Chowk and Joint Road, teams in the supervision of Assistant Commissioner (AC)



(Kuchlak) Bahadur Khan, AC Sariab Maria Shamoon, Special Magistrate Haseeb Sardar took action against price gougers, illegal profiteers, those who reduced the weight of bread and petrol gauge.

On this occasion, a total of 120 general

stores, tandoors, beef mutton shops and mini petrol pumps were visited. During the operations, the prices of goods, quality, weight of bread on tandoors, prices at butcher shops and gauges at mini petrol pumps were inspected.

They apprehended 15 shopkeepers for illegal profiteering on the mar-

# Pak Embassy Brussels, Commerce Ministry organize TRACES training session

**STAFF REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Embassy in Brussels, in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, has organized a training session on digital portal Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) of the European Union.

Relevant officials from the government regulators and support organizations including Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Animal Quarantine Department (AQD), Marine Fisheries Department and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan participated

in the training, a press release on Wednesday said.

EU experts from the Directorate General of Health and Food Safety (SANTE) of the European Commission sensitized the participants on portal functionalities, emphasizing its role in facilitating transparent and paperless compliance with international food safety standards.

Omar Hameed, Economic Minister at the Pakistan Embassy in

Brussels thanked the officials of DG SANTE and emphasized on the importance of collaboration between Pakistan authorities and the European Commission on TRACES to further facilitate the traders and to ensure compliance with EU regulations.

TRACES is an official online platform for animal and plant health certification required for importation of animals, animal products, food and feed of non-animal origin and plants

into the European Union.

It is an indispensable tool used by about 90 countries with more than 113,000 users worldwide for the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary certificates and official documents required for import.

The main objective of the TRACES system is to streamline the certification process of related entry procedure and to offer a fully digitized and paperless workflow.



KP Food Authority continues operation in DI Khan

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
DERA ISMAIL KHAN

# NUML signs MoU with Hunerkada to foster ‘Arts and Design Education’

**STAFF REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and Hunerkada Wednesday signed MOU to foster ‘Arts and Design Education’ at its main campus.

An MoU was signed by Brigadier Shahzad Munir, Director General NUML, and Syed Jamal Shah, Chairman of Hunerkada Islamabad, at a formal ceremony held at the NUML Main campus.

The collaboration aims to establish ‘Fine Arts’ and ‘Fashion Design’ courses at NUML, which have already been approved by the university’s Academic Council.

Under the agreement, Hunerkada will play a pivotal role in designing and delivering these courses.

This includes developing course outlines that align with NUML’s academic standards and pro-

# ISSI holds guest lecture ‘Japan’s Perspective on Regional Issues

**STAFF REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) on Wednesday hosted a guest lecture on “Japan’s Perspective on Regional Issues,” delivered by Prof Dr Kawashima Shin, from the University of Tokyo.

A m b a s s a d o r Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, also participated in the event, said a press release.

Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcome remarks, highlighted the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Japan.

He underscored the historical and multifaceted ties between the two countries, rooted in mutual respect, shared interests, and commitment to peace and development.

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood also noted Japan’s prominent role as a steadfast partner in Pakistan’s development



journey and stressed growing collaboration in areas such as trade, investment, climate change, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and regional stability. He also stressed the importance of enhanced academic and policy dialogues and think-tank collaboration between Pakistan and Japan.

A m b a s s a d o r Akamatsu Shuichi highlighted the long-standing Pakistan-Japan partnership and expressed hope for continued collaboration to address regional and global challenges. He also appreciated ISSI’s efforts to foster mutual understanding through scholarly exchanges.

Prof Dr Kawashima Shin, in his lecture, focused on Japan’s mod-

ernization and its evolving role in regional geopolitics. Highlighting the transformative journey from the Meiji Restoration to its post-World War II economic resurgence, he underscored Japan’s commitment to peace, democracy, and regional cooperation.

He reflected on the enduring partnership between Japan and Pakistan, noting the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations celebrated last year. Dr Kawashima emphasized Japan’s dedication to fostering economic and cultural ties within the region, reinforcing its role as a proactive contributor to East Asian stability and prosperity.

Dr Kawashima also discussed the challenges and opportunities in

# KMU, DAI Fleming Fund join hands to fight AMR

**STAFF REPORTER**  
PESHAWAR

Khyber Medical University (KMU) and DAI Fleming Fund Country Grant Pakistan on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance Antimicrobial Resistance surveillance capacities in KP.

The agreement was aimed to enhance AMR surveillance capacities that were regarded crucial for effectively managing and mitigating AMR impact in KP province.

It also emphasizes capacity building within KMU providing substantial support in laboratory training for antimicrobial stewardship and establishment and maintenance of a biorepository/biobank with necessary technical assistance and IT software management solutions.

The MoU underscores a shared commitment between the parties to bolster One Health approach to AMR which integrates efforts across human, animal and environmental health sectors.





FAISALABAD: A craftswoman showcases her intricately handmade jewelry to a visitor at her stall during a Craft Exhibition organized by the Faisalabad Arts Council. — Staff Photo

# Railways leases 14,893 acres of land through open competition

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Railways has leased out around 14,893 acres of its land to private individuals and various government departments under an open competition policy to generate revenue.

An official from the Ministry of Railways told APP that the leasing process is being done according to the Pakistan Railway Property & Land Rules-2023, which were approved by the Federal Cabinet.

Out of the total leased land, around 11,074 acres have been allocated to private individuals through open competition for agricultural, commercial, and stacking purposes, while 3,819 acres have been leased to different government departments.

To a question, the official said Pakistan Railways has intensified efforts to reclaim approximately

13,972 acres of land, worth billions of rupees, which is currently under illegal occupation by private individuals and various government departments across the country.

The breakdown of illegally occupied land includes 5,809 acres in Punjab, 1,181 acres in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 5,948 acres in Sindh, and 1,034 acres in Balochistan.

Giving details of the land, the official said that around 769 acres were commercial in all the provinces, 3,309 residential, 5,512 acres agricultural and 4382 were under encroachment of various persons or departments.

To address this issue, Pakistan Railways has decided to intensify its anti-encroachment operations nationwide to recover its land from individuals, groups, and business organizations who have been using it for residential, commercial, or agricultural purposes for decades.

# DIG Islamabad assures swift action on MD APP's complaint during Khuli Kachehri

● Key dacoit from home burglary gang nabbed

MUDASSER CH.  
ISLAMABAD

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza on Wednesday assured swift legal action against the accused who allegedly issued threatened Managing Director Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), during a Khuli Kachehri (open court) session held in Saddar, City, and Rural zones to address public grievances.

A public relations officer told APP that the sessions were attended by the Chief Traffic Officer (CTO), Superintendents of

Police (SPs), Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs), and Station House Officers (SHOs).

He said citizens have actively participated, presenting their grievances, which were addressed on the spot with immediate directives issued for their resolution.

During the session, APP's Director Crime and Courts, Rashid Malik, expressed concerns about the delay in legal action against an individual who had threatened MD APP, Muhammad Asim Khichi, a Grade-20 senior Information Officer. Rashid emphasized

that despite a month passing since the incident, no legal action had been initiated. Director Crime also questioned the safety of ordinary citizens if a senior civil service officer like MD APP is not secure in the capital city.

Responding to the journalist's concerns, DIG Syed Ali Raza assured swift action and immediately directed the registration of a case within two hours. "Delays in justice will not be tolerated, and immediate steps will be taken to address such serious concerns," he stated firmly.

Participants praised DIG Raza for organizing



the Khuli Kachehri, acknowledging it as a step towards ensuring accountability and strengthening trust between the police and

the public.

DIG Raza also encouraged citizens to report issues within police stations without fear, reiterating the depart-

ment's commitment to strict action against malpractice. "Police officers must work with honesty and dedication; only then will they remain

part of the department," he remarked.

DIG further stressed that police offices remain open 24/7 for citizens, assuring that there is no room in the department for corrupt officers or those obstructing public service delivery. Citizens now look forward to seeing whether these commitments materialize into effective action.

Meanwhile, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Lohi Bher team on Wednesday apprehended a key suspect involved in multiple home burglaries on Wednesday.

A public relation

officer told APP that the accused, identified as Muhammad Asif, was found in possession of stolen cash, a motorcycle, a laptop, and ammunition worth approximately Rs. 9.8 million.

He said that during initial investigations, the suspect confessed to committing multiple home burglaries, shedding light on the gang's illicit activities.

DIG Syed Ali Raza commended the police team for their efforts and assured citizens that the Islamabad Police will continue its operations against criminals depriving residents of their valuable assets.

# Islamabad to host Global Summit on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities on Jan 11-12

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training will host the two-day international conference on girls education in Muslims communities here on January 11-12, 2025.

The landmark global summit titled, "International Conference on 'Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities," aims to address the challenges and opportunities in advancing



girls' education across Muslim communities worldwide; foster dialogue; and find actionable solutions to address the challenges, according to a curtain raiser issues by the Foreign Office.

The conference will provide an ideal platform for

high-level discussions and collaborations.

The event will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, who will deliver the keynote address at the opening session and reaffirm the nation's commitment to promoting girls' education and gender equity.

The summit will bring together over 150 international dignitaries, including ministers, ambassadors, scholars and academia from 44 Muslim and friendly countries, representatives from international organizations

including UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank.

The speakers and panelists will share transformative success stories, showcasing innovative approaches to advancing education equity.

The conference will conclude by a formal signing ceremony of the Islamabad Declaration, outlining the shared commitment of Muslim community to empower girls through education, paving way for inclusive and sustainable educational reforms, and a brighter future for generations to come.

# Sayedaal meets Parliamentarians, civil society, media representatives

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Deputy Chairman Senate Sayedaal Khan on Wednesday hold meetings with Senators, Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), civil society representatives, and media personnel at the Parliament House to discuss national development and economic stability.

Welcoming the participants, the Deputy Chairman highlighted the importance of collaboration among Parliament, civil society, and media. He said, "The



involvement of media and civil society in the policy making process is crucial to ensuring societal participation and fostering transparency."

According to a news release, During discussions on the "Uraan Pakistan" project, Sayedaal Khan emphasized its role in enhancing exports and driving national progress. "This initiative is a significant step forward. Creating a

conducive environment for investment and export growth must remain a priority," he remarked.

He also stressed the significance of public welfare initiatives, saying, "Economic stability combined with public welfare projects signals promising development. The efforts of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team in steering the economy in the right direction are commendable."

Calling for unity and a collective approach, the Deputy Chairman said, "We must set aside our differences and work

together for the greater good. Prioritizing national interests over personal gains is imperative for progress."

He further added, "Peace, stability, and political reconciliation are essential to addressing the challenges facing the nation."

Prominent attendees included Senator Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan, Senator Saeed Hashmi, MNA Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, and other representatives from civil society and the media, who engaged in meaningful discussions with the Deputy Chairman Senate.

# Research-based poster's exhibition held at AIOU

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

A research exhibition titled 'Poster Presentations' was organized late Tuesday at the Central Library of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU).

MPhil and PhD students from the Department of Library Science showcased their research work during the event.

A total of 28 research papers were presented, including 10 by PhD students and 18 by MPhil students.

Dean Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Professor Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, examined all the projects, scholars individually gave presentation on their research projects to him.

Commending the efforts of the Department of Library Science, Dr. Sahir emphasized the importance of aligning research with contemporary social and societal needs.

He acknowledged that all the research projects

prepared by the students addressed current demands effectively.

Speaking about the history, significance, and necessity of libraries, Prof. Dr. Abdul Sahir remarked that there was a time when libraries held a central position in society.

However, the younger generation's interest in reading books has declined compared to the past.

He stressed the need to restore the bond with books and rebuild the strong connection that once existed to achieve prominence in society.

This research-based poster presentation was organized by the Department of Library and Information Science.

According to the Chairman of the Department, Dr. Parvez Ahmad, the aim of exhibition was to encourage scholars and highlight the research work of students.

The senior faculty member of the department, Dr. Munazza Jabeen, supervised the research work.

She stated that the

MPhil and PhD students had completed their coursework, and the poster presentation was intended to give scholars the opportunity to create and display posters while discussing their research.

It is worth mentioning that the Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood, has been paying special attention to the quality of education and the promotion of a research culture.

He emphasized the need to bring research papers into the marketplace to support the socio-economic development of the country.

He noted that unfortunately, most research papers in the country's universities remain confined to institutional records.

He stressed the importance of taking research beyond library shelves and into practical application.

A clear indication of the University's focus on education and research is its achievement in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2024.

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, hosted Dr. Javed Sheikh, Chairman of the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI), here on Wednesday.

The meeting marked the beginning of discussions on potential joint ventures and investment opportunities in Islamabad.

During the meeting, Randhawa emphasized the vast investment potential Islamabad offers in commercial projects, calling for collaborative efforts between CDA and EOBI.

He underlined the importance of such partnerships, stating that they could yield mutual benefits for both organizations while contributing to the city's development.

"Revenue generated from these partnerships



will be directed towards the welfare of citizens and the overall growth of the city," he said.

To move forward, it was agreed to form a joint team comprising focal points from both CDA and EOBI.

This team will identify feasible projects and explore investment opportunities for collaboration.

Dr. Javed Sheikh, Chairman of EOBI, expressed enthusiasm about investing in CDA-

led projects and reaffirmed EOBI's commitment to strengthening its partnership with the CDA.

Both parties concluded the meeting with a shared resolve to work closely and ensure the success of future ventures.

Meanwhile, Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Wednesday stressed the need for stringent meas-

ures to regulate private housing societies in Islamabad.

The meeting, attended by senior officials from the Planning Wing, including Member Planning and Member Estate, focused on restructuring the Housing Societies Directorate and addressing violations by private developers.

The Chairman was briefed on the ongoing reforms and actions being taken against non-compliance by housing societies.

Officials reported that notices have already been issued to societies violating approved layout plans.

To enhance monitoring, Chairman Randhawa directed that surveys of all private

housing societies be expedited.

He emphasized the use of satellite imagery and Google-based tools to oversee development activities and identify irregularities.

He also called for strict enforcement against societies failing to comply with approved layouts and reiterated the importance of transferring amenity plots to the CDA.

Stressing the welfare of residents, Randhawa urged societies to ensure the provision of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and sanitation.

In an effort to protect the public from fraud, the Chairman instructed that the list of illegal housing societies be made publicly available on the CDA website.

He also proposed launching awareness campaigns in the media to educate potential buyers about the risks associated with unapproved projects.



# Kashmir struggle

On January 5, 1949, the United Nations adopted a resolution that promised the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) the right to determine their own future through a free and impartial plebiscite. Seventy-six years later, that promise remains unfulfilled, leaving the Kashmiris to endure an unrelenting cycle of violence, occupation, and systemic oppression. As Pakistan observed the Occupied Kashmir's Right to Self-Determination Day on Sunday, the country's leadership, including President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, reaffirmed their unwavering support for the Kashmiri people's struggle for freedom. The plight of the Kashmiris is a tragic reminder of the international community's failure to enforce its own resolutions. India's unilateral revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5, 2019, compounded decades of injustice. By stripping the region of its autonomy and initiating demographic changes, India has sought to suppress the Kashmiri identity. Despite these measures, the resilience and spirit of the Kashmiri people remain unbroken.

The Kashmir dispute is not merely a bilateral issue between Pakistan and India; it is a question of fundamental human rights and international law. Yet, the global response to the suffering of the Kashmiri people has been disturbingly muted. Except for Pakistan, which continues to raise the issue on international platforms, there has been a marked decline in global support for the Kashmiri cause. The international community's apathy emboldens India to continue its oppressive policies, including widespread human rights abuses, mass detentions, curfews, and the use of pellet guns that have blinded children. Pakistan, while grappling with its own economic challenges and complex regional dynamics, cannot abandon its moral and diplomatic responsibility towards Occupied Kashmir. However, resolving this seven-decade-long conflict requires more than Pakistan's solitary efforts. Global powers and regional stakeholders need to recognise that peace in South Asia hinges on resolving the Kashmir dispute.

India, on the other hand, appears unwavering in its stance. Its actions in Occupied Kashmir are not only a violation of international law but also an affront to human dignity. The comparison of Kashmir with other global struggles is apt. They represent the consequences of colonial legacies and the failure of international systems meant to safeguard human rights. Beyond rhetoric, Islamabad must explore innovative ways to garner international support and spotlight India's transgressions. The Kashmiri people deserve the right to determine their own destiny – a right enshrined in the UN Charter and reaffirmed through resolutions and international law. It is incumbent upon all nations that value freedom and justice to support their cause. The struggle for self-determination is not just Kashmir's fight; it is a universal battle against oppression and a call to uphold the dignity and rights of every individual. As Pakistan's leadership reiterated on January 5, the time has come for the world to act. The Kashmiri people have waited long enough for the justice they were promised. The world must not allow another year to pass with unfulfilled commitments and unheeded cries for freedom. Kashmir's struggle for self-determination must not remain a forgotten promise – it must become a global imperative.

(Courtesy The News)

# The road to dialogue

Last year ended with a glimmer of hope for Pakistan's political stability as the government and the PTI set aside their differences to initiate a long-overdue dialogue. This December breakthrough was followed by a second round of talks last week. However, the positive momentum has faltered, with reports of a deadlock ahead of the third round. The impasse has been attributed to two issues: the PTI's insistence on meeting their detained party chairman, Imran Khan, and the party's reluctance to present a written charter of demands. On the surface, the PTI's demand for access to Imran Khan appears reasonable. The party's leaders argue that they need to consult him before finalising their demands, a privilege enjoyed by leaders of other parties. The government's refusal to facilitate this meeting undermines the spirit of dialogue and provides the PTI with a valid excuse for delay. However, the stalemate is not without deeper complexities, and questions arise about the PTI's hesitance to formalise its demands.

The PTI has, on multiple occasions, verbalised its key demands – the release of political prisoners and the formation of judicial commissions to investigate incidents on May 9 and November 26. These demands have been echoed publicly, both in speeches and on social media. If these are indeed the only demands, reducing them to writing should not be an issue. Yet, the party's reluctance to commit to a written document has fueled speculation about their true intentions. Observers suggest that the PTI's real priority is the release of Imran Khan and the quashing of cases against him. The party's refusal to submit a written charter stems from a desire to avoid public acknowledgement of this demand, which could be perceived as seeking the very 'NRO' deals the party has historically condemned. By keeping the primary objective ambiguous, the PTI can maintain its narrative of moral high ground while negotiating behind closed doors. However, this strategy risks eroding the credibility of their public rhetoric.

On the other hand, the government's position is equally precarious. While facilitating a meeting between the PTI's negotiation team and Imran could break the deadlock, the government is wary of appearing to capitulate to the PTI's demands without securing concrete assurances in return. Divisions within the ruling coalition further complicate matters. The PML-N's 'doves' seem committed to the dialogue process, but the party's 'hawks' view these talks with suspicion, fearing they may embolden the PTI without yielding substantial benefits for the government. Both sides need to recognise the high stakes involved. A failure to sustain the dialogue will not only deepen political polarisation but also exacerbate the country's economic and governance crises. For the PTI, presenting a written charter of demands is essential to demonstrate seriousness and transparency in their approach. For the government, allowing the PTI access to Imran Khan could serve as a confidence-building measure. By removing this point of contention, the government can shift the onus onto the PTI to engage constructively. However, the government must also be prepared for the PTI's potential insistence on Khan's release as a non-negotiable demand. In such a scenario, the government can reiterate that legal proceedings, not executive orders, will determine the PTI chief's fate. Ultimately, political dialogue is an exercise in compromise and trust-building.

(Courtesy The News)

# G-B's tourism potential

People involved in Gilgit-Baltistan's tourism industry would certainly have been buoyed by the news that the region was ranked among CNN Travel's list of 25 places worth going to in 2025, alongside other scenic destinations in all sorts of landscapes. The list is heavily focused on natural beauty - only five of the destinations listed are urban areas, and even a few of these are very close to areas of natural beauty. However, G-B stands out for the mountain views and hiking it offers to most tourists, and advanced climbing opportunities for mountaineering enthusiasts, as home to five of the world's 13 tallest mountains, including K-2, which is the second-highest and is widely considered the most difficult to climb.

G-B was once a very popular area for foreign tourists, especially people taking the overland 'Hippie Trail' from Europe to India, but due to wars, political instability and other security issues along the route, most foreign tourists today are only professional mountaineers. Lack of world-class facilities also cost G-B, as people generally opt for places where the scenery may only be half as good, but the facilities and security are ten times better.

However, a bit of investment and some easily-instituted policy reforms could reopen the region to tourists from all over the world. At the bare minimum, the government needs to ensure that air and road connections with G-B are safe and reliable - road connections have been attacked by terrorists and other criminals in the past, while flights to G-B are regularly cancelled due to inclement weather. But beyond getting there safely, other infrastructure improvements need to be balanced with over-commercialisation concerns, lest the work turns into an environmental disaster that actually scares away tourists. After all, it is the rugged allure of the area and the rich heritage and diverse traditions of local communities that should be the top draws.

(Courtesy The Express Tribune)

# Youth and the Army: Building a Lasting Partnership for National Security

BY ABDUL BASIT ALVI



One of the most direct and impactful ways in which Pakistani youth contribute to national security is through service in the armed forces. Each year, thousands of young men and women enlist in the Pakistan Army, Navy, and Air Force, driven by a strong sense of duty and patriotism. The Pakistan Army, in particular, has long depended on the bravery and professionalism of its young soldiers to defend the nation's borders and address both external and internal security threats. A notable example of youth contribution to Pakistan's defense is their active participation in the wars of 1965 and 1971, as well as in more recent engagements against insurgencies and terrorism. In these conflicts, young soldiers exhibited exceptional courage and resilience in the face of adversity.

In more recent years, young recruits have played a critical role in Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, particularly in Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017). These operations, aimed at eliminating terrorist networks and stabilizing the country's borders, saw young soldiers make significant contributions to defeating militancy and ensuring the safety of Pakistan's civilian population. Institutions like the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) continue to attract young talent, training them to become skilled leaders and warriors. These programs instill values of patriotism, discipline, and commitment, ensuring a steady stream of dedicated individuals ready to serve the nation.

Beyond military service, many young Pakistanis are also making vital contributions to national security through law enforcement and intelligence agencies. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan became a key player in the global fight against terrorism, facing numerous internal security challenges posed by terrorist groups, insurgents, and extremist factions. Young Pakistanis have not only volunteered to serve in security agencies but have risen to leadership roles in organizations such as the Pakistan Rangers, Frontier Corps, Anti-Terrorism Force (ATF), and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

A noteworthy example of

youth involvement in counterterrorism efforts is the role of the Pakistan Rangers in Karachi and other volatile regions, where young officers have worked tirelessly to combat urban terrorism, protect civilians, and maintain law and order. During the Karachi Operation, launched in 2013 to address terrorism, extremism, and organized crime, young law enforcement officers played critical roles in reclaiming the city from militant groups and ensuring long-term peace. Additionally, young officers in the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) have been instrumental in intelligence gathering, counterinsurgency operations, and community outreach to counter extremist ideologies, further strengthening Pakistan's security apparatus. Youth-led organizations in Pakistan, such as the Shaheen Force (volunteer national guard units), have emerged as key contributors to enhancing domestic security by involving young people in local defense efforts, particularly in border regions and areas facing insurgent threats. In the 21st century, national security extends beyond physical borders. The digital era has introduced new security challenges, and Pakistani youth have proven essential in protecting the nation's digital infrastructure. With an increase in cyberattacks from both state and non-state actors targeting everything from government systems to critical industries and institutions, youth have become indispensable in defending Pakistan's cyberspace. One notable example of youth involvement in cybersecurity is the Pakistan Cyber Emergency Response Team (PakCERT), which works diligently to protect the country's digital assets from evolving threats. Many young cybersecurity experts,

often with backgrounds in computer science and engineering, have taken on leadership roles in protecting Pakistan's critical infrastructure from cyber threats. These young professionals are collaborating with government agencies, private sector companies, and educational institutions to strengthen the nation's cyber resilience. Additionally, youth-led initiatives, such as Cyber Security Awareness Programs in universities and high schools, are educating young people about the risks of cyber threats and how to defend against them. Ethical hackers and cybersecurity enthusiasts are becoming vital contributors by identifying vulnerabilities in systems and helping protect Pakistan from cyber espionage, hacking, and data breaches. The involvement of youth in cybersecurity also extends to global competitions like Capture the Flag (CTF), where Pakistan's young tech experts have earned recognition for their skills in ethical hacking and digital defense. These efforts are crucial as Pakistan modernizes its military and national security infrastructure, increasingly relying on technological solutions to address new and emerging threats.

Beyond traditional roles in the military and intelligence sectors, many young Pakistanis are contributing to national security by advocating for peace, social stability, and conflict resolution. Organizations such as Peace Foundation Pakistan and the Youth Parliament of Pakistan have played a central role in fostering dialogue and promoting national unity, particularly in regions impacted by terrorism, sectarian violence, and ethnic divisions. Youth-led programs focused on countering violent extremism have proven essential in

communities vulnerable to radicalization. Young activists and social workers, often collaborating with law enforcement and community leaders, have facilitated interfaith and interethnic dialogue to resolve local conflicts and promote peace. A notable example is the Youth Against Terrorism (YAT) movement, which brings together young Pakistani students, activists, and professionals to raise awareness about the dangers of extremism and the importance of social harmony. Through awareness campaigns, workshops, and public discussions, this initiative empowers youth to become agents of change in their communities, diminishing the appeal of militant ideologies.

Pakistani youth also contribute significantly to national security through volunteerism, particularly in disaster response, humanitarian aid, and community resilience efforts. Whether responding to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, or engaging in local security initiatives, young volunteers are often on the frontlines of national stability. For instance, during the 2010 floods, young volunteers played a crucial role in providing immediate relief, distributing food, offering medical assistance, and helping affected communities rebuild. During the COVID-19 pandemic, young volunteers were vital in spreading information, supporting frontline workers, and ensuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable populations. This spirit of volunteerism is also evident in youth-led organizations like The Citizens Foundation (TCF) and Indus Hospital, where young people are making significant contributions to enhancing public health, education, and social infrastructure—key pillars of national stability and security.

Pakistani youth and the Pakistan Army stand united, working in harmony for the nation's security. The bond between these two vital components of national defense is strong and unbreakable. Any malicious attempts by our enemies to sow divisions between our youth and armed forces will ultimately fail, as the entire nation continues to support and collaborate with our courageous military to safeguard the security of Pakistan.

# Transforming Pakistan

BY AHSAN IQBAL

In an era of rapid globalisation and technological transformation, nations are redefining their strategies to secure a competitive edge in the global economy. Pakistan stands at a pivotal crossroads, ready to embrace a transformative vision for economic growth and social progress.

The Uraan Pakistan initiative, launched by the Ministry for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, is not just a plan – it is a call to action. It offers a roadmap to turn challenges into opportunities, transforming aspirations into achievements.

Rooted in the comprehensive 5Es framework – Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment, Energy & Infrastructure, and Equity, Ethics & Empowerment – the initiative aims to position Pakistan as a resilient and prosperous nation. Its ambitious target: achieving a \$1 trillion economy by 2035 and a \$3 trillion economy by 2047. These goals are not distant dreams but tangible benchmarks built upon actionable strategies and Pakistan's untapped potential.

An ambitious vision, grounded in reality: Ambition is often met with skepticism. Some may view Uraan Pakistan's vision of a \$3 trillion economy by 2047 as overly optimistic. Yet, this initiative stands apart because it is rooted in actionable strategies aligned with the nation's economic realities.

Exports: With targeted reforms in IT, manufacturing, agriculture, minerals, manpower, creative industries, and the blue economy, achieving \$60 billion in annual exports is feasible. Market diversification, enhanced productivity, and a focus on quality underpin these reforms.

E-Pakistan: Expanding Pakistan's ICT freelancing industry to \$5 billion,

fostering startups, and producing 200,000 IT graduates annually aligns with the country's evolving digital ecosystem.

Environment: Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent and promoting reforestation reflect the nation's urgent need for climate resilience.

These are not wishful aspirations; they are practical, measurable objectives designed to build a stable and dynamic economy.

Balancing immediate needs with long-term vision: For decades, Pakistan has been trapped in a cycle of short-term fixes – IMF bailouts, import restrictions, and ad hoc policies. While such measures address immediate crises, they fail to resolve underlying structural issues. Uraan Pakistan breaks this cycle by balancing short-term gains with a sustained long-term vision.

Key priorities include: Quick Wins: Boosting IT exports, promoting SMEs, and empowering youth through entrepreneurship; Foundational Reforms: Stabilising the rupee, enhancing tax collection, and improving productivity to address systemic challenges; and Strategic Partnerships: Collaborating with the private sector, development organisations, and academia to foster innovation and trust.

This dual approach ensures that while pressing challenges are addressed, the nation remains firmly on a path toward enduring prosperity.

Driving momentum – exports and digital innovation: Exports are positioned as the engine of economic growth. By prioritising industries with high export potential – IT, agriculture, creative industries, minerals, and manpower – the initiative aims to stabilise the rupee, reduce import

dependence, and unlock Pakistan's economic potential. Achieving \$60 billion in exports annually is not merely aspirational; it is an achievable target given focused reforms.

Similarly, the e-Pakistan component envisions a digital revolution. By nurturing a robust startup ecosystem, producing 200,000 IT graduates annually, and aiming for Pakistan's first tech unicorn, the initiative seeks to establish Pakistan as a global technology hub, creating jobs and empowering its youth. Sustainability and infrastructure – building for the future: Climate change is an existential threat, and Uraan Pakistan responds with bold environmental goals. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent, expanding water storage by 10 million acre-feet, and increasing cultivable land by 20.3 million acres are transformative measures to ensure food and water security for generations.

Simultaneously, modern energy and transport infrastructure are critical for growth. Increasing renewable energy's share to 10 per cent, enhancing railway transport to 15 per cent of passenger travel, and fostering regional connectivity are strategic steps toward economic integration and efficiency. Equity and empowerment: a just society: Economic growth must go hand in hand with social development. Uraan Pakistan prioritises human development by: raising universal health coverage by 12 per cent; increasing literacy rates by 10 per cent; and enhancing women's labour force participation by 17 per cent.

These measures reflect a commitment to fostering a cohesive and inclusive society, ensuring that prosperity benefits every citizen.

Learning from history, charting the future:

Pakistan's past is replete with ambitious plans, from Vision 2010 to Vision 2025. However, political instability and policy discontinuity often undermined their success. The lessons are clear: peace, stability, and unwavering commitment to reforms are prerequisites for sustainable development. The Five-Year National Economic Transformation Plan (2024-2029), the first step of Uraan Pakistan, incorporates these lessons. It prioritises inclusivity, collaboration, and continuity to build a \$1 trillion economy by 2035. Strategic alliances between the government, private sector, academia, and civil society will be vital in achieving this vision.

Together, towards a \$3 trillion economy by 2047: Uraan Pakistan is more than a policy framework; it is a vision for a thriving, modern, and progressive nation. It calls upon every Pakistani – leaders, citizens, institutions, and the diaspora – to rise above divisions, embrace innovation, and commit to collective progress.

At this critical juncture, Pakistan's future depends on unity. Differences – whether political, regional, or ideological – must be set aside for the greater goal of national prosperity. Our collective strength lies in collaboration, mutual respect, and shared determination.

As Allama Iqbal so eloquently reminds us: “Tu Shaheen hai, parwaz hai kaam tera,/ Teray samne asman aur bhi hain.”

The challenges may be daunting, but together, we can soar towards new horizons. We can transform Pakistan into a beacon of resilience and prosperity by embracing unity, innovation, and hard work.

Let us seize this moment and build a future that fulfills our aspirations and inspires the world.

Pakistan Zindabad! (Courtesy The News)

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## SECP seeks feedback on improvements in takeover regulations

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has issued a consultation paper to seek feedback on areas of improvement in the Listed Companies (Acquisition of Voting Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2017.

Through these modification SECP aims to strengthen the regulatory framework governing takeover transactions of listed companies by enhancing transparency and introducing measures for safeguarding rights of minority shareholders.

The key areas of improvement include proposals for streamlining public announcement timelines, revising price determination criteria for frequently and not

frequently traded shares, and enhancing disclosure requirements for acquirers and listed companies.

Provisions for voluntary offers, obligations of Manager to the Offer (MTO) and mechanisms for handling indirect or chain acquisitions have also been floated for further deliberations.

The proposals have been developed following an initial round of consultations with various stakeholders including market experts, MTOs, law firms, chartered accountants and listed companies. The scope of consultations is now being expanded to ensure wider participation in finalizing proposed amendment areas so any amendments can effectively address the evolving needs of the market and its stakeholders.

The consultation paper including rationale for each suggested area of improvement is uploaded on the SECP website.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors are buying Oranges from wholesale dealers at Fruit and Vegetables market at Sector I-11 in Federal Capital. — Staff Photo

## New govt initiative aims to boost SEZs

- 35 SEZ survey completed to aid data-driven decisions

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

The government has introduced an 18-point action plan to enhance operations and attract investment in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as revealed during a meeting of the Board of Investment's (BoI) Approval Committee in the federal capital on Tuesday.

The comprehensive plan aims to resolve longstanding issues in SEZs and upgrade infrastructure to meet international standards.

The meeting, chaired by Federal Minister for Investment and Privatisation Abdul Aleem Khan, included provincial representatives, including those from Gilgit-Baltistan.

Key decisions included the approval of a new Land Lease Policy and amendments to the SEZ Act, reducing the notice period for meetings from 21 days to seven. These measures are expected to accelerate decision-making processes and spur economic growth.

A comprehensive survey of the 35 SEZs has been finalised, enabling



data-driven decisions for their management and development.

The investment and privatization minister emphasised that the survey report, now digitised, is a shared resource that provincial governments and relevant departments must utilise to resolve challenges efficiently.

The BoI secretary and provinces' representatives provided updates and shared insights on the current status of the zones. Key aspects of the plan include fostering inter-provincial collaboration, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and enhancing infrastructure development to unlock the full potential of SEZs.

Aleem Khan, said that the completion of the survey of 35 industrial Zones across the country, identification and resolution of their prob-

lems is a great progress and an important achievement that would have a positive impact on the country's economy.

He added that the upgradation of SEZs has been done in the shortest possible time and important steps have been taken to ensure better quality in this regard.

"This digital data is a mutual asset that all stakeholders must leverage. Regular and timely meetings of the Approval Committee are crucial for addressing issues swiftly. The next session has already been scheduled for February," he added.

The minister highlighted the government's focus on simplifying processes to attract investments. "We are removing unnecessary complications to create an investor-friendly

environment. Encouraging diverse industries in these zones will help boost foreign exchange inflows and drive rapid economic development," he said.

With these initiatives, the government aims to make SEZs the backbone of Pakistan's industrial growth and economic stability.

Investment-friendly policies and digital innovation are expected to play a pivotal role in transforming SEZs into hubs of economic activity.

Meanwhile, Minister for Board of Investment & Communications Abdul Aleem Khan Wednesday said that Business Facilitation Center will be completed and made functional during current month, which will have an effective monitoring system and facilities

ties will be provided to the investors under one roof.

The minister visited the center and said that the construction of such a magnificent and quality Business Facilitation Center in four months is commendable, where relevant officers will provide services at various counters for the convenience of investors.

We have to provide maximum facilities to our investors in the shortest possible time and making it possible to provide facilities to investors faster on the model of modern and developed countries, he added.

After visiting the center, Aleem Khan also chaired a high-level meeting and directed that work should also be started for the online provision of various facilities in this center and to ensure that the business community visiting here does not have to go around the departments later to resolve their problems.

The minister was briefed that this project cost Rs490 million on 12,000 square feet and is nearing completion in collaboration with the Capital Development Authority and the Board of Investment.

## Claims of plastic rice, dog, frog meat sales in Pakistan shock Senate panel

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

Raising concerns over the poor state of regulations, Senator Aimal Wali Khan on Wednesday made some startling allegations during a high-level meeting on food security, leaving participants shocked.

These disturbing revelations came to the fore during a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security, chaired by Senator Syed Masroor Hassan, to address challenges in the country's basmati rice exports to the European Union (EU).

During the session, the Awami National Party (ANP) senator claimed that plastic rice and meat from donkeys, dogs and frogs were being sold in Pakistan, lamenting the absence of effective food quality checks.

The senator also cited a report claiming that only 22% of the milk sold in the country was genuine, while the remaining 78% was chemically produced and fake. The Senate body formed a sub-committee tasked with drafting a comprehensive food safety policy.



Officials from the Ministry of National Food Security & Research (MNFS&R) revealed that 107 consignments of rice sent to the EU had faced objections, with 10,300 shipments exported until 2024.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has registered 17 FIRs against officials and employees over alleged mismanagement in rice exports. Of these, 11 suspects are in custody, two are absconding, and four are on bail, according to MNFS&R officials.

Senator Aimal criticised food security officials for failing to prevent consignment rejections. "Why does fungus develop on shipments cleared for export?" questioned Aimal, slamming the inefficiencies in the export process.

Another committee member, Senator Dinesh Kumar, raised alarms over the absence of a

comprehensive food safety policy, a concern echoed by the Secretary of National Food Security.

The committee also deliberated on the recovery of cotton cess, with Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain reporting that Rs3.2 billion in cess remained unpaid since 2016.

"The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) claims they lack funds to pay the cess," said the minister, adding that a policy for recovery would be proposed after consultations with the prime minister.

Officials noted that "pressure from the committee has resulted in monthly cess collections of Rs30 million." However, they called for non-payment of cotton cess to be classified as a non-bailable offence.

The committee has summoned APTMA representatives for the next meeting to resolve the issue.

## PSX stays bearish, loses 1,904 points

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 1,904.23 points, a negative change of 1.64 percent, closing at 114,148.46 points as compared to 116,052.68 points on the last trading day.

A total of 116,052.68 shares were traded during the day as compared to 792,770,655 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs.32.466 billion against Rs.39.694 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 464 companies transacted their



shares in the stock market, 118 of them recorded gains and 293 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 53 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 520,199,852 shares at Rs.1.79 per share, Energycico PK with 41,301,063 shares at Rs.7.00 per share and Fauji Foods Limited with 34,830,810 shares at Rs.17.64 per share.

JDW Sugar Mills

Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.82.27 per share price, closing at Rs.904.95, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs.67.77 rise in its per share price to Rs.8,954.94.

Hallmark Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.68.23 per share closing at Rs.789.61 followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs.61.85 decline to close at Rs.7,282.23.

## Rs3.15b loan okayed for Pakistan Refinery upgradation

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
KARACHI

Pakistan Refinery Limited (PRL) Board of Directors (BoD) has approved obtaining a Rs3.15 billion loan for upgradation of the refinery. The upgradation plan involves completion of front and engineering designing of the refinery.

Pakistan Refinery Limited had already written a letter to the management of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) in this regard. The loan will be returned to the Pakistan State Oil (PSO) after turning it into an equity. Official sources said that this loan will play a pivotal role for the upgradation of the energy sector.

## No relief for electricity consumers: IMF rejects govt's proposal to cut sales tax

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

The claim of the government to reduce electricity tariff received a rude shock as the global lender IMF (International Monetary Fund) rejected Islamabad's proposal to cut sales tax.

The Ministry of Energy had suggested the government a cut in sales tax. And the government sent a request to the IMF which turned it down.

The IMF said that exemption from new taxes cannot be given under its loan programme. It will not be possible to achieve tax collection targets if sales tax is reduced, added the



IMF.

It may be noted that a consumer is charged GST twice in electricity bills – once 18 percent tax is levied on the total amount of the bill, while the second time sales tax is levied on fuel cost adjustment.

**OTHER LEVIES ON POWER BILLS**

The government collects Rs954 billion annually from taxes levied on electricity bills. Of this amount, the federal gov-

ernment receives Rs391 billion, while the provinces get Rs563 billion.

According to a document released by the government in August 2024, a consumer is slapped with income tax, advance tax, additional tax, extra sales tax, retailers' sales tax, electricity duty, and PTV fee.

The breakdown of the taxes is as follows:

**Electricity Duty:** It is a provincial levy ranging from 1% to 1.5% of vari-

able charges, applicable to all consumers.

**PTV License Fee:** An additional charge of Rs35 for domestic consumers and Rs60 for commercial consumers is added to the bills.

**Financing Cost Surcharge:** Imposed at a rate of Rs0.43 per kWh, affecting all consumer categories except lifeline domestic consumers.

**Fuel Price Adjustment (FPA):** A variable component reflecting the discrepancy between actual and reference fuel charges.

**Extra Tax:** Industrial and commercial consumers, not registered in the active taxpayer list of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), are subject to a tax rate of 5% to 17%, depending on different bill amount slabs.

## Ahsan directs development of marketing templates, packages for Gwadar Port's cost-effective trade routes

**BUSINESS  
REPORTER**  
ISLAMABAD

Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday directed the quarters concerned to prepare marketing templates and packages, showcasing Gwadar Deep Seaport's cost-effective trade routes

and potential incentives for international businesses.

"These materials will be distributed through Pakistan's embassies and missions worldwide to promote Gwadar Port on a global scale," he said while chairing a high-level meeting on the operationalization of Gwadar Port here, a news release said.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from the Planning

Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Petroleum, and other relevant departments. Representatives from embassies participated in the discussion via video link.

During the meeting, the minister emphasized Gwadar Port's strategic significance as one of



Pakistan's most valuable assets.

He highlighted that Gwadar provided the shortest trade route to Gulf and Central Asian countries, including

Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and has immense potential to serve as a key regional trans-shipment hub.

The minister noted the lack of commercial analysis and a comprehensive operational plan for Gwadar Port, calling for immediate efforts to unlock its potential.

He stressed the need for a robust action plan within six months to generate trade traffic

through the port. "This initiative aims to create job opportunities for local residents and boost the regional economy."

The minister urged the Balochistan Mining Department to develop proposals for exporting finished white marble instead of raw materials, emphasizing the importance of value addition to enhance Pakistan's mineral exports.

To ensure Gwadar remains competitive in

the region, Ahsan Iqbal instructed the National Logistics Cell (NLC) to conduct a detailed cost analysis for trans-shipment routes.

He highlighted the need for competitive pricing and viable logistics solutions to attract international trade.

The minister also called for focused efforts to facilitate trade between Gulf countries and China through Gwadar, presenting it as

the most economical and efficient route for imports and exports.

He reiterated that the port offered the cheapest shipping options and must be marketed aggressively to the international community.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment to making Gwadar a thriving regional trade hub, with all stakeholders directed to work collaboratively toward this goal.



# India Extends Sheikh Hasina’s Visa Amid Bangladesh’s Extradition Request

WEB DESK

MUMBAI

India has extended the visa of Bangladesh’s former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled the country last year amidst political turmoil. Hasina, who left Dhaka on August 5, 2024, after violent student-led protests resulted in over 500 deaths, has been residing in New Delhi under tight security. Despite speculations surrounding her potential asylum, Indian authorities have firmly denied such claims, stating that the visa extension is merely a technical measure to facilitate her stay.

The visa extension coincides with a formal extradition request from Bangladesh’s interim



government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, submitted on December 23. The Bangladeshi government accuses Hasina of being involved in the violence and enforced disappearances during the protests of 2024.

In a further escalation, Bangladesh’s immigration authorities revoked the passports of 97 individuals, including Hasina, on Tuesday. According to Yunus’ spokesperson, Abul Kalam Azad Majumder, Hasina and others are

implicated in the forced disappearances and killings during the protests. While 22 individuals had their passports revoked for their role in the disappearances, the remaining 75, including Hasina, were accused of involvement in the kill-

ings of July 2024.

Read More:

However, many critics argue that these charges against Hasina are politically motivated, viewing them as part of the interim government’s efforts to consolidate power ahead of Bangladesh’s general elections.

India now faces a diplomatic challenge, with the extension of Hasina’s visa potentially complicating its relations with Bangladesh. While granting the extension is unlikely to have an immediate impact on bilateral ties, the extradition request has added a layer of complexity. Analysts note that India’s decision to extend the visa, rather than address the extradition demands, reflects the political sensitivity of the situation.

# Trump asks the Supreme Court to block sentencing in his hush money case in New York

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump is asking the Supreme Court to call off Friday’s sentencing in his hush money case in New York.

Trump’s lawyers turned to the nation’s highest court Wednesday after New York courts refused to postpone the sentencing by Juan M. Merchan, the judge who presided over Trump’s trial and conviction last May on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

Trump’s attorneys asked for an immediate stay of Friday’s sentencing “to prevent grave injustice and harm to



the institution of the Presidency and the operations of the federal government.”

The Supreme Court asked for a response from New York prosecutors by Thursday.

Merchan has indicated he will not impose jail time, fines or probation.

Trump’s attorneys have pointed to the Supreme Court’s ruling

giving him broad immunity from criminal prosecution as they tried to have his New York conviction tossed out.

While that opinion came in a different case, Trump’s lawyers say it means some of the evidence used against him in his hush money trial should have been shielded by presidential immunity. Merchan has disagreed.

# Indian railways spends over 22 billion-dollar on modernisation

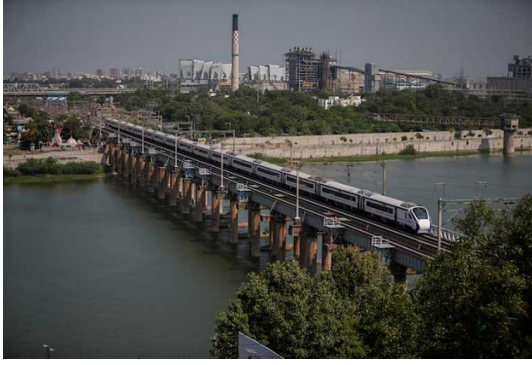
WEB DESK

NEW DELHI

State-run Indian Railways has spent more than \$22 billion so far in the current fiscal year, focusing on projects to expand capacity and deliver faster and safer travel to passengers, the government said on Wednesday.

The government is pushing to open new lines and expand electrification as part of efforts to achieve net zero carbon emissions on the railways by 2030.

By Jan. 5, the railways had spent 1.92 trillion rupees (\$22.37 billion) of its 2.65 trillion rupees overall budget for the fiscal year, which runs from April to March. This included 344.12 billion rupees (\$4 billion) spent on safety-related



works and 403.67 billion rupees (\$4.7 billion) on rolling stock, the government said in a statement.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who will present her annual budget for 2025/26 early next month, is expected to announce an increase in allocation for railways from the 2.52 trillion rupees allocated for the current fiscal year.

The railway, which

operates a network of over 68,000 km (42,000 miles), is projected to earn 2.8 trillion rupees in 2024/25 from passenger and freight traffic, an 8% increase from the previous fiscal year. It is targeting 2.76 trillion rupees in operational spending.

“The fruits of consistent capital expenditure over the past decade are evident in the form of 136 Vande Bharat trains, 97% electrification of

broad-gauge lines, and major upgrades to infrastructure, including new lines, gauge conversion, and track doubling,” the statement said.

The Vande Bharat sleeper trains, currently undergoing speed and safety certification, are expected to come into service this year, improving long-distance rail travel.

Indian Railways transports an average of 23 million passengers daily, aiming to build a “future-ready” system for India’s 1.4 billion population, the railway ministry said.

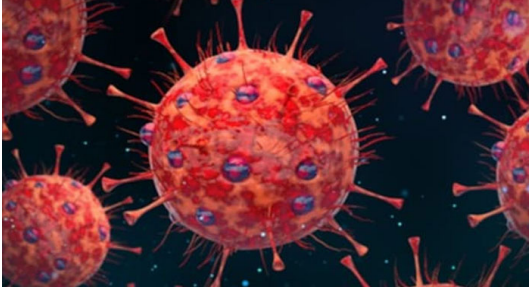
Critics say the railways face many challenges, including competition from an expanding road network and growing air traffic coupled with issues like slow train speeds and overcrowding.

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Hospitals across China are currently overwhelmed as a surge in H u m a n Metapneumovirus (HMPV) infections sweeps through the country, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like children and the elderly. As winter peaks, the virus, which causes flu-like symptoms, has led to overcrowded medical facilities and sparked concerns of a new health crisis.

While viral videos showing packed hospitals have fueled alarm on social media, Chinese health officials have downplayed the situation, attributing it to a seasonal winter trend. The World Health Organization (WHO) has not declared a global health emergency, but rising cases



have prompted local authorities to strengthen monitoring efforts.

What is HMPV?

H u m a n Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is a respiratory virus first identified in 2001. It spreads through respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing or by touching contaminated surfaces. Although it typically causes mild symptoms resembling the common cold, it can lead to more severe respiratory issues, particularly in infants, the elderly, and

individuals with weakened immune systems.

Symptoms of HMPV

The virus shares symptoms with other respiratory infections, including:

- Cough
- Runny or blocked nose
- Sore throat
- Fever

In severe cases, HMPV can lead to:

- Wheezing
- Breathing difficulties
- Pneumonia
- Severe asthma, particularly in adults

Young children under

the age of five, elderly individuals, and those with compromised immune systems are at the highest risk of severe illness.

Treatment and Precautions

Currently, there is no vaccine or antiviral treatment available for HMPV. Treatment is mostly supportive, focusing on symptom management such as:

- S t a y i n g hydrated
- Resting
- Taking fever-reducing medications as advised by a doctor

Health experts recommend several preventive measures, especially for those at higher risk, including:

- Washing hands regularly
- A v o i d i n g touching the face
- Wearing masks in crowded areas
- Staying home if feeling unwell

# Hundreds rally for South Korea’s Yoon as new arrest bid beckons

WEB DESK

SOUTH KOREA

Hundreds of supporters of South Korea’s impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol rallied outside his residence Wednesday as investigators prepared a fresh attempt to arrest him.

Yoon has refused questioning and resisted arrest since his bungled December 3 martial law decree plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

Investigators secured a new arrest warrant Tuesday after an initial seven-day order expired. Several hundred members of his base rushed to the presidential residence in cen-

tral Seoul in response, braving sub-zero temperatures.

“A large number of people are coming out to join us. Despite the cold weather, many stayed up all night last night, braving the chill,” Lee Hye-sook, a 57-year-old Yoon supporter, told AFP outside the residence.

“Witnessing their resilience against the wind and cold, I am confident that President Yoon Suk Yeol will return, and we will prevail.”

Some supporters left flowers outside and ribbons with the Trump-style slogan “Make Korea Great Again”, while others waved American flags at the gates of the compound

from where the suspended leader has resisted arrest.

Despite a cold weather warning set for 9 pm (1200 GMT), the suspended president’s supporters were defiant, shouting “impeachment is invalid”.

Rival protesters calling for Yoon to be punished waved glowsticks -- commonly seen at K-pop concerts -- and held placards that read, “Detain, arrest insurrectionist Yoon Suk Yeol”.

Yoon’s legal team said on Wednesday he remains inside the residential compound, after investigators cast doubt a day earlier on his whereabouts.

“Last night, I personally visited the official



residence, met the president there, and left,” said his lawyer Yoon Kap-keun, who is unrelated.

The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO), which is leading the probe into the president, has kept secret the duration of the new warrant.

Yoon would become

the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested if investigators are able to detain him.

- Barbed wire, barricades -

An AFP journalist saw Yoon’s guards walking behind rows of buses and locked entrance gates covered in barbed wire at the residential compound on

Wednesday.

CIO chief Oh Dong-woon said on Tuesday the force would “prepare thoroughly” to make sure their second arrest attempt was successful.

Acting president Choi Sang-mok warned against violence in the event of another standoff.

“Under no circumstances should there be any injuries to citizens or conflicts among government agencies. Please ensure every precaution is taken,” Choi said in a meeting with officials.

South Korea’s Constitutional Court has slated January 14 for the start of Yoon’s impeachment trial, which would proceed in his absence if he does not attend.

His legal team said he planned to attend the trial at some stage and lawyer Yoon Kap-keun told reporters on Wednesday “the President’s position... remains unchanged”.

“Of course, issues related to security and safety must be resolved in advance,” he said.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik wrote on X it was distressing to watch Yoon mobilise force to stop his arrest because the “whole world” was watching.

Investigators are trying to work out how to tackle an expected wall of security after being stopped by hundreds of Presidential Security Service (PSS) guards last week.

“The number of PSS personnel cannot be disclosed as it is confidential information,” a service spokesperson told AFP.

On Wednesday the country’s parliament voted down two bills to investigate Yoon and his wife for different charges, failing to get the two-thirds majority they needed.

The impeached Yoon is being investigated on charges of “insurrection” and, if formally arrested and convicted, faces prison or, at worst, the death penalty.

The Constitutional Court has up to 180 days from December 14, when it received the case, to determine whether to dismiss Yoon or restore his presidential powers.

# Biden administration set to announce ‘substantial’ final weapons package for Ukraine

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is set to announce a massive, final weapons aid package for Ukraine as part of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s visit to Germany on Thursday to meet with representatives of about 50 partner nations who have come to Ukraine’s defense since Russia invaded nearly three years ago, two senior defense officials said.

The officials did not provide an exact dollar amount but said the package was expected to

be “substantial,” although it would not include all of the roughly \$4 billion left in the congressionally authorized funding for Ukraine. There likely would be “more than a couple of billion dollars” remaining for the incoming Trump defense team to provide to Ukraine if it chose to do so, the officials said Tuesday in briefing reporters traveling with Austin.

Ukraine is in the midst of launching a second offensive in Russia’s Kursk region and is facing a barrage of long-range missiles and ongoing advances from Russia as both sides seek to put



themselves in the strongest negotiating point possible before President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan. 20.

Biden defense officials working on Ukraine have been in contact with Trump’s transition team to discuss “all the

issues that we believe are important,” one of the officials said.

Austin’s trip to Ramstein Air Base will be his final meeting with the group he organized to come to Ukraine’s defense after Russia’s invasion in February

2022. Together those nations have provided more than \$126 billion in weapons and military training and assistance. Those packages have included millions of rounds of ammunition, advanced fighter jets, air defense systems, counter-UAV systems and even tanks.

The U.S. has provided \$66 billion of that total.

The package to be announced on Thursday will be drawn from existing stockpiles with a goal of getting most of the weapons pledged to Ukraine by the time Trump is sworn in., one of the defense officials said.

# Philippines authorities detain 400 foreign nationals in scam center raid

WEB DESK

MANILA

Around 400 foreign nationals were arrested on Wednesday in a “large-scale” raid on a suspected online scam farm in Manila, the national immigration agency said.

Authorities raided a building and found workers allegedly engaged in online scam operations targeting victims abroad.

International concern has grown in recent years over similar scam operations in Asia which are often staffed by trafficking victims who were tricked or coerced into promoting bogus c r y p t o c u r r e n c y investments and other cons.

“Their operations were found to violate immigration laws and posed significant risks to the public,” Fortunato Manahan, the Bureau of Immigration intelligence division chief, said in a statement describing the latest raid.

President Ferdinand



Marcos in July announced a ban by the end of 2024 on Philippine online gaming operators (POGO) that Manila says have been used as cover by organized crime groups for human trafficking, money laundering, online fraud, kidnappings and even murder.

The Bureau of Immigration had been monitoring the “POGO-like activities” of the raided company “for some time”, the statement said.

The foreign nationals, many of whom were Chinese, were undergoing booking procedures, immigration bureau spokeswoman Dana Sandoval

told AFP.

They will be temporarily detained while awaiting deportation, the bureau said.

The Washington-based think-tank United States Institute of Peace said in a May 2024 report that online scammers target millions of victims around the world and rake in annual revenues of \$64 billion.

It estimates the industry employs half a million workers, including 15,000 in the Philippines, who were recruited mainly via social media and were then forced to carry out scams, facing torture if they failed to meet quotas.

# Presidential election in Poland scheduled for May 18

WEB DESK

POLAND

Poland will hold a presidential election on May 18, the parliamentary speaker said Wednesday, with the governing pro-EU coalition hoping its candidate will succeed outgoing conservative Andrzej Duda.

Relations between Duda -- who is close to

the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) opposition party -- and the government have been difficult since Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s coalition swept to power in 2023.

Duda has since vetoed most of the government’s legislative initiatives and helped prolong the judicial chaos introduced under the previous PiS administration.

“The ballot to select the next president of

Poland will take place on May 18 of this year,” parliamentary speaker Szymon Holownia told reporters, adding that if necessary, a run-off would be held on June 1.

A second round will take place if no candidate wins more than 50 percent of votes in the first round.

“Needless to say, it is an important moment. We are choosing the

commander of the armed forces, we are choosing someone who will lead the state in these very difficult times over the next five years,” Holownia added.

The PiS led the government from 2015 until 2023 when it lost power to Tusk’s coalition, which includes his Civic Coalition as well as the smaller Third Way and Left parties.

But the PiS remains the largest party in parliament.

Duda will leave office in August after the maximum two presidential terms allowed.

The current election frontrunner is Warsaw mayor and Civic Coalition candidate Rafal Trzaskowski, who would receive around 36 percent of votes according to opinion polls.



# PCB Shifts Tri-Series Against NZ, SA from Multan to Karachi, Lahore

## SPORTS REPORTER

KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has announced the relocation of the upcoming tri-series between Pakistan, New Zealand, and South Africa from Multan to Karachi and Lahore. Originally scheduled to be held in Multan, the tri-series will now take place in the second week of February at the National Stadium in Karachi and Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

The tri-nation ODI series was originally scheduled to be held in Multan in February, however, it has been relocated to the upgraded Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and National Bank Stadium in Karachi. This decision reflects the PCB's confidence in the readiness of these upgraded venues and their ability to deliver a world-class experience for players, officials, and fans alike. Further details regarding the series will be shared in due course.

The cricket board further provided an update regarding the aforementioned stadium, with Gaddafi Stadium's being increased to 35,000 and new chairs installed throughout the venue. Additionally, 480

state-of-the-art LED lights have been installed to enhance broadcast LUX levels, ensuring superior viewing quality for fans worldwide. To further elevate the spectator experience, two giant digital replay screens – measuring 80 feet x 30 feet and 22 feet x 35 feet – will be installed next week.

The stadium is set to be inaugurated in the last week of January.

A brand-new players' and officials' hospitality enclosure has also been created, which will be operational by 25 January. The iconic stadium is set to provide an unparalleled experience for all stakeholders.

At the National Bank Stadium, significant enhancements have been made, including the creation of a new players' and officials' hospitality enclosure at the University End.

To improve broadcast coverage, 350 LED lights have been installed, ensuring optimal visibility for global audiences. Two digital replay screens have already been fixed, and 5,000 new chairs have been installed to enhance spectator comfort.

Meanwhile, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium is undergoing minor touch-ups, focusing on the installation of



10,000 new chairs, upgrades to hospitality boxes and the installation of two digital replay screens.

These improvements are designed to ensure the stadium exceeds international standards for upcoming events.

Upgrades at Gaddafi Stadium

The spectator capacity at Gaddafi Stadium has been increased to 35,000, with new chairs installed throughout the venue.

Additionally, 480 state-of-the-art LED lights have been installed to enhance

broadcast LUX levels, ensuring superior viewing quality for fans worldwide.

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Upgrades at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

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ing surfaces

Throughout the upgradation process, PCB curators, under the supervision of Tony Hemming, have diligently maintained the outfield and playing surfaces to keep them protected, healthy and fresh. To prioritise these efforts, no competitive cricket has been played in Lahore and Karachi since the commencement of the upgrades, while Rawalpindi last hosted a match late last year.

Commitment to Excellence

The PCB is fully committed to ensuring that all venues are ready to host the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 and other international matches. With over 250 workers laboring day and night to meet the 25 January deadline, the PCB is confident that the upgrades will elevate the fan experience and uphold Pakistan's reputation as a premier cricketing destination.

Schedule of Tri-series (Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa)

8 February 2025, Pakistan vs New Zealand

10 February 2025, South Africa vs New Zealand

12 February 2025, South Africa vs Pakistan  
14 February 2025, Final

## PCB appoints Rafia Haider as Head of Women's Cricket

## SPORTS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Former Deputy Commissioner Lahore Rafia Haider has been appointed as Head of Women's Cricket.

According to sources, Rafia Haider has joined Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) as Head of Women's Cricket.

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi approved Rafia Haider's appointment as Head of Women's Cricket. Rafia Haider joined the PCB on deputation.

The post of Head of Women's Cricket was vacant after Tania Malik's resignation.

Rafia Haider has previously been appointed as Deputy Commissioner Lahore.

Rafia Haider has started regular work after taking charge.



## Last-gasp Abraham goal wins Super Cup for Milan in 3-2 victory over Inter

## WEB DESK

RIYADH

A goal in added time from Tammy Abraham completed a stunning comeback for AC Milan who won the Italian Super Cup with a dramatic 3-2 victory over city rivals Inter Milan in Monday's final in Riyadh after going two goals down early in the game.

The win denied Inter what would have been an unprecedented fourth consecutive Super Cup trophy, and allowed Milan to equal Inter's haul of eight wins in the competition, with new manager Serge Conceicao lifting a trophy in his second game in charge.

The game was preceded by a spectacular light show at the King Saud University Stadium but the match only really sparked into life in the final seconds of the opening half.

Mehdi Taremi teed up Lautaro Martinez with a pass across the box and the forward used some neat footwork to deceive Malick Thiaw before firing a low shot through the legs of Theo Hernandez which beat Mike Maignan at his near post.

Two minutes after the interval Inter continued where they had left off. Stefan de Vrij played a long ball over the top which Taremi controlled beautifully and he drilled his shot into the bottom corner to double their advantage.

Milan responded by sending on Rafael Leao, who immediately won a free kick just outside the area which Hernandez curled low around the wall and the ball crept just inside the post to re-open the tie.

A rejuvenated Milan pushed for an equaliser. Tijjani Reijnders had a shot blocked by the face of Alessandro Bastoni and Inter keeper Yann Sommer pulled off a fine save from an Alvaro Morata header.

Inter then had a chance to restore their two-goal advantage, but Carlos Augusto's header from close range came off the upright and into the arms of Maignan on the goal-line, but Milan found the equaliser with 10 minutes remaining.

Christian Pulisic, surrounded by three Inter players, controlled a cross from Hernandez and steered his shot into the far corner and it looked like the tie would be decided by a shootout, but Milan found the equaliser with 10 minutes remaining.

## President's Trophy Grade-I to begin from Wednesday

## SPORTS REPORTER

KARACHI

Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) will begin their title defence in the President's Trophy Grade-I on Wednesday as they take on Pakistan Television (PTV) at the HPC Oval Ground, Karachi.

The nine-team tournament comprises of 37 first-class matches including the final, which is slated to take place from 8-12 April.

The single-league round matches will end on 28 February with all



teams having played eight games each, all in Karachi.

The top two teams will qualify for the final while the bottom two teams will be relegated to the President's Trophy Grade-II. A prize pot of PKR eight million will also be up for the grabs.

In the other opening round matches, Oil and

Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) will take on State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) at SBP Sports Complex, Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) will lock horns with Water and Power Development Authority at NBP Sports Complex and Higher Education Commission will be up against Eshaal Associates at the National Bank Stadium.

Ghani Glass will play their opening match in the second round of the tournament against HEC.

## Abbottabad Table Tennis team achieves silver in national championship

## SPORTS REPORTER

ABBOTTABAD

The Abbottabad Table Tennis Club has brought pride to the city as its boys' and girls' teams secured second place in the All Pakistan Inter-Board Championship, earning silver medals. The achievement is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the young players and their coaching staff.



Ziauddin and Syed Imad expressed their delight, stating, "The players put in tremendous effort, and their dedication paid off. This success reflects their commitment and determination." The coaches also

emphasized the importance of consistent training and support to further nurture these young athletes.

Senior players Zahid Khan and Sajid Rafiq Mughal praised the outstanding performance of the team. They announced plans to organize a dedicated training camp aimed at refining the players' skills and boosting their confidence for future competitions. "The training camp will pro-

vide them with the necessary techniques to improve their game and represent the region even more effectively," they added.

However, they highlighted the need for greater support from the sports department. "If the sports department steps forward to sponsor these players and provides essential equipment such as rackets and balls, the results could be even more impressive," Zahid Khan said.

## Pakistan's squad for Physical Disability Champions Trophy announced

## SPORTS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Physical Disability Cricket Association (PPDCA) on Wednesday announced its 16-member squad for the Physical Disability Champions Trophy 2025, scheduled to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from January 12 to 21.

The announcement was made by PPDCA General Secretary Amiruddin Ansari on Wednesday after the approval of PPDCA President Imran Balwani.

The team will depart for Sri Lanka on Thursday and will face arch-rivals India in their opening match on January 12.

The squad will be led by Abdullah Ijaz as captain with Ghulam Muhammad serving as vice-captain.

Ansari in a statement highlighted the rigorous selection process, stating that the inclusion of nine new players alongside seven retained from the 2019 Physical Disability Series reflected the abundance of talent in Pakistan's disability cricket.

"The selection was challenging due to the exceptional performances of new players at the domestic level," Ansari said.

The team was finalized after a comprehensive training and fitness camp, which was supervised by head coach Sabih Azhar and supported by selection committee members Rafey Hashmi and Rao Javid.

Expressing confidence in the team, Sabih Azhar described said it was a balanced side capable of winning the trophy.

Squad: Abdullah Ijaz (Captain), Muhammad

Arsalan, Matloob, Saifullah, Qureshi, Khan, Huzaifa, Noman, Muhammad, Watto, Shahid, Muhammad, Shahzad, Ghulam, Muhammad (Vice-Captain), Hamza, Hameed, Abdul Khaliq, Zubair, Saleem, Mominullah, Abdul Basit, Hammad Shoukat, Waqif Shah Team Officials: Amiruddin Ansari (Head of the Mission), Sabih Azhar (Head Coach), Rafey Hashmi (Assistant Coach), Rao Javid (Fielding Coach), Shakir Khilji (Video Analyst), Muhammad Nizam (Team Manager).

## Imam-ul-Haq Likely to Replace Injured Saim Ayub for Test Series Against West Indies

## SPORTS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's national cricket team is set to make changes ahead of their upcoming home Test series against the West Indies, with Imam-ul-Haq likely to replace the injured Saim Ayub.

Sources have confirmed that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will announce the final squad for the series next week, following a key meeting of the selection committee. The meeting will take place after Aqib Javed returns to Pakistan, along with the national team, on



Thursday.

Imam-ul-Haq, who has been out of the squad recently, is expected to make his comeback in place of the injured Saim Ayub. The team may also include off-spinner

Sajid Khan in the squad, with the possibility of Shaheen Afridi's inclusion as well. However, there are reports suggesting that Abdullah Shafique might be dropped from the squad.

## Babar Azam, Rizwan move up, Saud Shakeel suffers decline in ICC Test Rankings

## WEB DESK

DUBAI

Pakistan batters Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan made significant gains, while Saud Shakeel suffered a steep decline in the latest ICC Test Batting Rankings released on Wednesday.

Pakistan were white-washed in the two-match series against South Africa after suffering a ten-wicket defeat in the second Test on Monday.

Saud Shakeel, who scored a gutsy 84 in the second innings of the first Test, failed to make his mark in the recently concluded second match. He bagged a duck in the first innings, followed by 23 runs in the second innings.

Consequently, he dropped five places to 11th



spot in the ICC Test Batting Rankings with 724 rating points.

Meanwhile, Babar Azam, who broke his half-century drought in the opening Test, continued his good form and scored half-centuries in both innings of the Cape Town Test.

He returned with scores of 58 and 81 while opening the innings in place of injured Saim Ayub, which

resulted in him making a five-place jump to 12th.

Similarly, Mohammad Rizwan played gutsy knocks of 46 and 41, which helped him gain two places to reach 19th.

Meanwhile, Pakistan skipper Shan Masood made a 12-place jump to 45 with 550 rating points courtesy of his valiant 145-run knock in the second innings.

## SPORTS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Explosive top-order batter Fakhar Zaman has expressed his eagerness to return to the Pakistan cricket team for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

Currently, Fakhar is in the United Arab Emirates, where he is playing for the Desert Vipers in the International League T20 (ILT20).

While he is actively participating in domestic and franchise cricket, he has not represented Pakistan since the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in 2024.

However, he has been in the news since November due to a social media post expressing his disappointment over the exclusion of Babar



Azam from the last two Tests during the home series against England.

In response to the post, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) issued a show-cause notice to Fakhar Zaman and subsequently left him out of the central contracts. He was also not considered for the tours of Australia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Recently, Fakhar revealed that he had

been sidelined due to health issues following the T20 World Cup 2024. He is now focusing on making a strong comeback for the Champions Trophy 2025.

"I have recovered 100% and you will see me in the next international series which Pakistan plays," he said. "Actually, many people do not know this, but after the T20 World Cup, I got sick and due to my

medical condition, I was not fit, so I was not part of the team."

"My plan has been around the Champions Trophy. I did not play in Australia or in South Africa, as my whole plan was to play in the Champions Trophy to make myself available and to be fully fit for the tournament."

Fakhar Zaman also shared that although he prefers to open the innings, he is ready to play at any position in the batting order according to the requirements of the team.

"In Pakistan, we have three of the best players in the world in Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan and Saim Ayub, so sometimes I feel lucky to be in the team even if I am not able to make my place as an opener," he said.





MULTAN: A farmer sprays pesticide on his wheat crop to protect it from harmful pests and ensure a healthy harvest on outskirts area in the city. — Staff Photo

## Ahsan for effective implementation of ‘Quality Assurance Framework’ to improve higher education standards

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday stressed the need for the effective implementation of the ‘Quality Assurance Framework,’ developed in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the British Council in 2023, to improve the standards of higher education in the country.

He expressed these views during a meeting with Pakistani-American Professor Mudassar Wyne, who called on him and discussed matters related to quality assurance and the improvement of education standards, according to a news release.



Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, the Director of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), and the Member of the Planning Commission for Science & Technology also attended the meeting.

Professor Mudassar Wyne, a quality assurance expert in California who holds a PhD in Computer Science, highlighted the principles of quality assurance recognized by the American

Board of Engineering and Technology.

Ahsan Iqbal appreciated the contribution of Pakistani experts residing abroad to national development under the “Uraan Pakistan” program.

He proposed forming a “Premier League Group” consisting of the top 10 universities to transform Pakistani universities in line with global standards, which would establish linkages with leading universities worldwide.

The Planning minister said the Quality Assurance Framework, developed for Pakistani universities in collaboration with HEC and the British Council in 2023, was not only ideal for improving educational standards but also catered to the unique needs of the country’s education system.

## PM’s aide Romina Khurshid inaugurates Pakistan’s first green road initiative

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister’s Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam launched first green road initiative at the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) on Wednesday.

In her address, Khurshid reaffirmed the government’s commitment to combating climate change under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif’s leadership.

She highlighted the country’s focus on both short-term and long-term solutions, including renewable energy projects and the development of climate-resilient infrastructure.

She commended the climate initiatives spearheaded by Punjab Chief

Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, emphasizing their significance within Pakistan’s broader climate strategy. “These initiatives are key to reducing our carbon footprint,” she said.

Khurshid stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors to build a more sustainable future. She described the green road as a symbol of Pakistan’s unwavering commitment to environmental preservation and climate action.

“This marks a major step forward in creating cities that are not only economically prosperous but also environmentally responsible,” she stated.

The green road, she explained, serves as an example of how green technologies and practices can be seamlessly integrated into urban



infrastructure. It offers solutions to urgent environmental issues while enhancing the quality of life for citizens.

Ms. Khurshid outlined how this initiative aligns with Pakistan’s broader climate goals, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding renewable energy use, and promoting sustainable urban development.

She also recognized

the role of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry in launching the project, noting the business community’s vital contribution to fostering a green economy. “The private sector’s participation in sustainability efforts is essential to driving the economic transformation we need,” she emphasized. “I encourage businesses of all sizes to adopt green practices,

invest in clean technologies, and help build a more sustainable and resilient economy.”

Ms. Romina noted this pioneering green road project, designed to address climate change and promote eco-friendly practices, showcases innovative solutions to urban environmental challenges.

“The initiative aims to create an eco-conscious, energy-efficient, and sustainable model for roads and urban spaces, setting an example that can be replicated nationwide,” she added.

The event, attended by distinguished diplomats, environmental experts, and business leaders, marked a significant milestone in city’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainable infrastructure development.

## ATC Declares KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur a Proclaimed Offender

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

The Anti-Terrorism Court in Islamabad has declared Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur a proclaimed offender in connection with a case related to protests over the disqualification of PTI founder Imran Khan.

During the hearing of the case, the court also declared PTI leaders Umar Tanveer Butt and Aamir Kiani as proclaimed offenders. Additionally, the court initiated proceedings to declare PTI leader Faisal Javed as a proclaimed offender, following a request to drop terrorism charges against him.

The court issued arrest warrants for the absconding accused and sought arguments on the pending petitions. The hearing of the case was adjourned until January 15.

The case against the accused was filed in 2022 at the I-9 police station, with charges related to terrorism and inciting violence during the protests.



STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

Today, The Initiative launched its survey report on Tobacco and Nicotine use among adolescents of Pakistan-2024, for the project named, Tobacco Control Policies and the health of adolescents in Pakistan.

This survey was conducted from December 2023 to May 2024, and revealed the current trends in tobacco and nicotine use among adolescents across Pakistan. It provided important insights into both in-school and out-of-school adolescents, who make up about 40% of all youth. This inclusive approach fills a critical gap in existing



data and highlights the urgent need for effective tobacco control strategies. It addresses the gap by including out-of-school adolescents, a group often overlooked despite being vulnerable to tobacco marketing. Dr. Kamran Siddiqi (Principal Investigator

of the TAP Study) emphasized the importance of this inclusive approach, saying, “Our survey aims to provide information about current trends of tobacco and nicotine use among adolescents in Pakistan, also including out-of-school adolescent group, a population

often overlooked. The results reflect that adolescents prefer nicotine pouches and e-cigarettes more as compared to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.”

Dr. Amina Khan from The Initiative, mentioned that “We have observed an increase in the presence of valid tax stamps on cigarettes from 2023 to 2024. This shows that there is an improvement in the efforts to regulate cigarettes packs in Pakistan.”

The TAP project is sponsored by the University of York, UK and funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), grant reference MR/X004228/1.

## Minister vows provision of quality medicines, improved health system

STAFF REPORTER  
LAHORE

Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare Khawaja Imran Nazir emphasized the provincial government’s commitment to providing quality medicines to the people, stating that it aligns with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

Presiding over the 287th meeting of the Provincial Quality Control Board (PQCB) on Wednesday, the minister reiterated that artificial shortages of medicines across the province would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Khawaja Imran Nazir stressed that all pharmaceutical units must comply with inspections under the Good Manufacturing Practice

(GMP) standards as part of the drug control regime. He warned that strict legal action would be taken against units resisting GMP inspections. To enhance transparency and ensure the availability of authentic medicines, a new track-and-trace system has been introduced in the market. The minister underscored that the availability of quality medicines in markets and hospitals is a fundamental right of Punjab’s 120 million citizens.

He directed the Drug Control Wing to ensure a sufficient stock of medicines in hospitals and markets, with a particular focus on life-saving drugs. The supply chain of medicines will be closely monitored, starting from the inventory of pharmaceutical companies, to prevent any disruptions.

## Resilient internet key to realizing Pakistan’s vision for boosting IT exports: Experts

STAFF REPORTER  
ISLAMABAD

The experts on Wednesday at the public-private dialogue on information technology and telecommunication underscored that the country’s vision to boost its IT exports to significant level would be unachievable without resilient internet, as alternative connectivity options based on modern technology and terrestrial routes are the way forward.

The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)’s 69th Study Group on Information technology (IT) and Telecommunication hosted the Public-Private Dialogue on Preserving the lifeline of our

Modern World: Strengthening the Internet Resilience in Pakistan, said a press release.

Chaired by Brigadier (R) Mohammad Yasin, Senior Advisor Emeritus at SDPI, the public-private dialogue brought together experts to address mounting issues plaguing the nation’s internet connectivity and its implications for economic and social life.

In his welcome remarks, Brigadier (R) Yasin opened the discussion by stressing that the indefinite performance issues of Pakistan’s internet infrastructure are unacceptable.

“Sluggish speeds and frequent disruptions are taking a toll on businesses, education, healthcare, and governance,” he said.



Pakistan ranked a dismal 100th out of 111 nations for mobile internet speed and 141st out of 158 for broadband in a recent OKLA Internet Speed Test report.

Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director of SDPI called for a comprehensive strategy to regulate internet technology without disrupting connectivity. “We must

learn from countries like China, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, which balance security risks with seamless internet access,” he said.

Jahanzeb Rahim, Member (Telecom), Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication while chairing the panel highlighted the critical dependence of Pakistan’s telecom sector on subma-

rine cables and emphasized the need for diversification of terrestrial links to ensure robust connectivity.

Rahim proposed the adoption of orbital satellites as a complementary measure to enhance connectivity. He stressed the importance of collaboration between industry, policymakers, and academia to achieve sustainable growth. “The

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) can play a pivotal role by leading a charter of business practices that remain independent of political changes,” he suggested.

Citing the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Rahim noted a 14% increase in ITU services and coverage, calling it a “slight improvement in ICT infrastructure.”

The Telecom Operators Association shared significant progress in fiber optic deployment, reporting the installation of 23,000 km of fiber optic cables and connecting four million households last year. Despite this achievement, Rahim pointed out that Pakistan’s 120,000 km optical fiber cable

manufacturing capacity remains underutilized. “We need to scale up this capacity to meet future demands,” he urged.

Pakistan has also acquired a web trust audit for its key public sector infrastructure, becoming one of the few among 137 countries to do so. Rahim underscored this achievement as a step towards ensuring quality and secure services for end-users.

“Our vision is to provide quality service to end-users, and with a market size of 20-22 million households, we aim to connect 10 million households next year,” he added.

Rahim highlighted Pakistan’s strategic geographic position, describing it as “the cusp of the highest population center” and likened its

potential to becoming “the next Suez Canal or digital corridor of the world.” He also emphasized the need to boost the telecom sector’s contribution to the national GDP, which currently stands at a mere 1%.

Dr. Muhammad Mukarram Khan, Director General of Cyber Vigilance at the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), pointed out that cyber-attacks and sabotage are exacerbating the challenges in Pakistan.

“Internet disruptions should be a last resort, as they compromise the trust of citizens and businesses,” he warned, urging that the government to remain focused on readiness and modernized infrastructure.