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● AJK Leaders Unite Against Indian Atrocities

No Apology for Jihad: AJK PM

● Kashmiris Will Not Be Intimidated: AJK PM Condemns Indian Human Rights Abuses



MUDASSER CH.

ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq has said that his government has accorded top priority to Kashmiris' ongoing freedom movement, which is in fact the movement for completion of Pakistan.Talking to a talk show hosted by a private news channel, the AJK premier said that there was no need to be apologetic or adopt a policy of appeasement towards jihad. "The basic concept of Jihad is all about your inherent right to defend yourself, your identity, or your country", the PM said adding that when it comes to defending your nation one should not be afraid of the word jihad."Every youth of Azad Kashmir should receive military training and be prepared for it", he remarked. Terming self-defense as a universally accepted right, the PM said that this fundamental right was recognized by many human rights covenants including the international law. "The international law gives us the right to protection/ defense", he maintained ."We have to formulate a policy keeping in view the overall situation in the region", he added.

Referring to India's traditional intransigence and hostile attitude, the PM Haq said, "We have to be vigilant against our eternal enemy that doesn't spare a moment in fomenting trouble in the region". Given the volatile situation in the region, he said that there was a dire need to adopt a comprehensive strategy to counter Indian propaganda. "India is a big country but we must not forget how Israel, which is much smaller in size than its neighbours, was wreaking havoc in the Middle East", he said.Commenting on the worsening political and human rights situation in Indian held territory of Jammu and Kashmir, he said, "Indian forces are involved in the worst human rights violations in IOK".He said that the Indian government's unilateral actions pose a serious threat to peace and stability in the region. In response to a question, he said that the Pakistan Army was making huge sacrifices to defend the territorial sovereignty of the state of Azad Kashmir."The people of Azad Kashmir and Pakistan stand shoulder to shoulder with the Pakistan Army", the PM said. " Development projects going on in the region will change the region's destiny", the PM said, adding that steps were being taken for the welfare of the people.

Meanwhile,

President People's Party Azad Jammu and Kashmir and member legislative assembly Hassan Ibrahim called on the AJK President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry here today.During the meeting the duo discussed in detail the issues of mutual concern and prevailing political and human rights situation in the Indian occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir.Both the leaders agreed to intensify efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue at the global level.Voicing their grave concern over the worsening situation in the held territory, they said that human rights violations have gone up exponentially since the RSS influenced regime led by Narendra Modi abrogated article 370 in 2019.Referring to the Indian government's sledgehammer policies, they said that the continued bloodbath of innocent Kashmiris at the hands of Indian forces amounts to genocide. " Under the given circumstances there is dire need that all the political parties of Azad Kashmir should unite and raise their voices in an aggressive and effective manner to resolve the Kashmir issue and expose the ongoing Indian atrocities in occupied Kashmir", they maintained.On the occasion, the PP leader appreciated the President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry's significant contribution to Kashmir cause and his tireless efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue at the global level.

ECP registers Khaqan Abbasi's Awam Pakistan Party

STAFF REPORTER

LAHORE

The Election Commission of Pakistan has officially registered former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's new political party, 'Awam Pakistan Party'.

The registration announcement was accompanied by a notification confirming Abbasi as the convener and Miftah Ismail as the General Secretary of the party.

The Commission has also approved the intra-party elections of Awam Pakistan, which were held earlier this year. Awam Pakistan submitted the details of these elections to the Election Commission on June 26, 2024.

With the registration of Awam Pakistan Party, the total number of registered political parties in Pakistan now stands at 168.

Earlier, several political figures have joined the Awam Pakistan party in Rawalpindi.

According to sources, a prominent landowner and head of the influential Chaudhary family, Chaudhary Inam Zafar, ended his 40-year association with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

He, along with his family and allies, has joined the Awam Pakistan party under the leadership of former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

The political switch follows an earlier defection of the same sort.

Sources further said the shift has changed Rawalpindi's political landscape.

Additionally, ten female leaders and councillors, previously affiliated with PML-N, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), have also announced their allegiance to the Awam Pakistan party.

Report exposes India's role in orchestrating protests in AJK

● APHC expresses concern over continued atrocities in IIOJK

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD / SRINAGAR



Recent protests in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have drawn attention, but a report has revealed a hidden agenda behind these demonstrations, attributing them to hostile intelligence agencies, particularly India, aiming to create chaos and destabilize Pakistan.

The report released by social media channel, The Nexus, highlights that rogue elements, orchestrated by Indian intelligence agency RAW, are exploiting local grievances to further anti-state narratives. It deplored that these efforts coincide with Pakistan's efforts to recover from economic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and global inflationary pressures.

The economic downturn post-2018, marked by currency devaluation and IMF-imposed austerity measures, saw inflation peak in 2021 and 2022. However, the report noted that 2023 brought signs of economic recovery, including stabilizing currency and improved market performance. As these improvements emerged, external actors ramped up efforts to disrupt Pakistan's stability through propaganda and engineered unrest in AJK.

The report said that certain political entities, ignoring regulations, collaborated with anti-state elements to exploit public discontent over inflation and a presidential ordinance. AJK Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq specifically alleged that the Awami Action Committee received funding from India to fuel dissent.

The report compared Pakistan's right to safeguard its national security with international examples, such as the U.S. banning TikTok and the EU restricting social media platforms, stressing the need for decisive actions to counter external threats.

Meanwhile,

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has expressed grave concern over the systematic atrocities during cordon and search operations, house raids, illegal detentions and attaching properties of Kashmiris at the hands of Indian forces in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

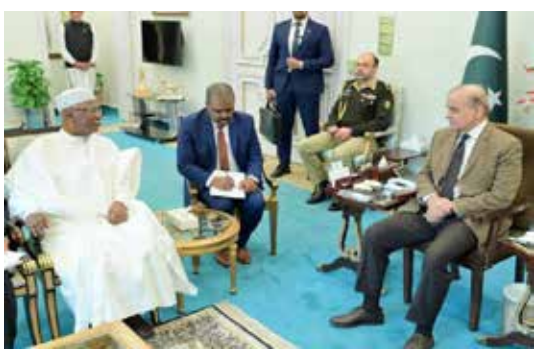
According to Kashmir Media Service, APHC spokesman Abdul Rashid Minhas, talking to Kashmir Media Service in Srinagar, rejected India's 'integral mantra' about the internationally recognised disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. He said New Delhi has been using military might and black laws since 1947 to break the will of the people and suppress their freedom sentiments but have utterly failed in achieving its anti-Kashmir designs.

PM greets nation on record surge in foreign remittances

● Shehbaz appreciates OIC's support for resolution of J&K dispute

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed appreciation for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) principled position and consistent support for the resolution of Jammu and Kashmir dispute, in accordance with its relevant resolutions and those of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister was talking to Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Friday at the Prime Minister's House.

The Prime Minister thanked the OIC Secretary General for his participation in the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities, being organized in Islamabad on 11-12, January 2025. He noted that the initiative was aimed at galvanizing concrete and concerted efforts to further improve quality education and women empowerment in the Muslim World.

Deeply appreciating the Secretary General for his dynamic stewardship of the OIC, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's full support to advancing the Organization's shared priorities and objectives while making it more effective as a collective voice of the Muslim Ummah.

On Palestine issue, while strongly condemning Israel's genocidal campaign, he stressed upon the need to bring an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, ensure unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people and global accountability of Israel for its widely documented war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Secretary General thanked the Prime Minister for the warm hospitality extended by Pakistan to him and his delegation.

Meanwhile,

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday felicitated the nation on record surge in foreign remittances in December 2024, saying the claims of those who had been chanting to halt the country's economy had proven to be baseless.

The foreign remittances during December 2024 increased to US$3.1 billion against November 2024, posting month-on-month growth of 5.6%.

In a press statement issued in Islamabad, Shehbaz Sharif said the remittances witnessed a record growth of 29.3% in December 2024 against the same month (December 2023) of last year. "Record increase in the foreign remittances reflects the strong commitment of the overseas Pakistanis for playing their role in development of the country," he added.

Five terrorists including ring leader killed in DI Khan IBO: ISPR

● Terrorists remained actively involved in terror activities: ISPR

STAFF REPORTER

RAWALPINDI

Security forces have killed five terrorists, including the ring leader, in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Friday.

According to a statement issued by the military's media wing, security forces conducted the operation on the reported presence of terrorists in the general area Maddi of Dera Ismail Khan.

"During the conduct of the operation, our troops effectively engaged khwarij's [terrorists] location, resultantly, five khwarij including ring leader Shafiullah aka Shafi, were sent to hell," the ISPR said.

Furthermore, it said, the security forces also recovered weapons and ammunition from the killed terrorists, who "remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces as well as target killing of innocent civilians".

"Sanitisation operation is being carried out to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," it concluded.

A day earlier, the security forces rescued eight of 17 civilian workers who were abducted at gunpoint by banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Lakki Marwat district.

Sources told Geo News that the militants ambushed a vehicle transporting unarmed civilians, took them hostage, set it on fire, and fled with the captives.

The nation has been reeling under rising violent attacks since the Taliban rulers returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, particularly in the bordering provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.



The year 2024 turned out to be the deadliest for Pakistan's civil and military security forces in a decade with at least 685 fatalities and 444 terror attacks, according to "CRSS Annual Security Report 2024" issued by Centre for Security and Strategic Studies.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel, i.e., 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63% of the total recorded this year, marking 73% more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated, The News reported citing CRSS report.

The overall fatalities recorded the previous year were a record 9-year high and over 66% more than in 2023. On average, nearly seven people lost their lives daily, with November emerging as the deadliest month across all metrics, compared to all other months of the year.

The violence took the heaviest toll on KP which topped in human losses with 1,616 fatalities, followed by Balochistan with 782 fatalities. In 2024, the country suffered 2,546 violence-linked fatalities and 2,267 injuries among civilians, security personnel and outlaws.

This tally of casualties stemmed from 1,166 incidents of terror attacks and counter-terror operations, marking a grim year for the country's security landscape.

It added that in another intelligence based operation conducted in general area Baizai, Mohmand District eight Khwarij were effectively engaged and neutralised by the security forces.

In third engagement in Karak District, the security forces effectively engaged khwarij location as a result of which three khwarij were killed.

"However, during intense fire exchange, three brave sons of soil, Lance Havaldar Abbas Ali (age: 38 years, resident of District Ghizer), Naik Muhammad Nazir (age: 37 years, resident of District Skardu) and Naik Muhammad Usman (age: 37 years, resident of District Attock), having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced Shahadat," the ISPR said.

IG Punjab pays rich tributes to police martyrs of GPO Chowk tragedy

TAHIR CH.

LAHORE



On the 17th anniversary of the GPO Chowk incident, IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar paid rich tribute to the police martyrs.

He said that Punjab Police salutes brave constables who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

He further mentioned that on this very day in 2008, 16 officers and personnel of Punjab Police sacrificed their precious lives. Among the martyrs of the GPO Chowk tragedy were two ASIs and 14 other personnel.

The IG Punjab said that the memory of the martyrs of the GPO Chowk tragedy will always remain fresh in our hearts, and every officer of Lahore Police serves as a frontline force for the protection of the country and nation. He added that the courageous officers and personnel who embraced martyrdom are a valuable asset of Lahore Police.

He also mentioned that jobs have been provided to the families of the martyrs of the GPO Chowk tragedy within the police department and all resources are being utilized for the welfare and well-being of the police martyrs' families.



RAWALPINDI: A driver is parking a new tourist double-decker bus at Allama Iqbal Park after tour of the City. — Staff Photo

Salik highlights education as key to empowering women, shaping future generations

MUDASSER CH.

ISLAMABAD



Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Friday underscored the pivotal role of women in society highlighting that an educated woman serves as the first teacher to her children, instilling values, ethics, and a love for knowledge.

Addressing the global conference on 'Girls' Education in Muslim Societies: Challenges and Opportunities,' he said an educated mother produces leaders of tomorrow by imparting wisdom and principles to her children.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain said women hold a central position in society as mothers, daughters, wives, and professionals. "The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) emphasized the importance of education for women, which is key to nurturing generations and shaping the future of societies," he added.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain emphasized that acquiring knowledge is not only a fundamental religious obligation but also a vital necessity for societal progress and public welfare. "Education empowers women to actively participate in societal development, contribute to economic growth, advocate for their rights, and engage in decision-making processes," he added.

Citing examples from Islamic history, he said, "The legacy of women in Islamic history serves as a beacon of inspiration. Despite Islam's clear guidance, many Muslim societies face challenges to women's education, such as cultural barriers, economic constraints, and security concerns."

"These challenges are not rooted in Islam but are the result of social traditions and the misinterpretation of religious teachings," the minister clarified. He stressed the importance of addressing these barriers through collective wisdom and efforts.

Calling for a collaborative approach, Chaudhry Salik Hussain urged governments, religious scholars, and community leaders to create an environment where girls feel safe and supported in pursuing education. This includes providing scholarships, financial aid, and establishing secure, accessible schools. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of raising awareness about the Islamic perspective on women's education and engaging religious leaders to counter cultural misconceptions.

"In today's era of technology, we have unprecedented opportunities to enhance education," he said, pointing to e-learning platforms, community-based initiatives, and public-private partnerships as key tools to improve girls' education. "We must leverage these tools to ensure that every girl, regardless of her socioeconomic background, has access to quality education," he added.

The minister concluded by affirming that women's education is not just about individual growth but forms the foundation of a prosperous and harmonious society. He said, "Let us commit to empowering girls in Muslim societies through education. Together, we can dispel misconceptions, break down barriers, and pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future where every woman contributes to the development and prosperity of her community."

Meeting held to review preparations about Kashmir Solidarity Day

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD



Coordinator to Prime Minister for Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit-Baltistan Shabir Ahmed Usmani on Friday presided over the meeting and reviewed the preparations regarding February 5, Kashmir Solidarity Day.

Federal Secretary Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit Baltistan Ali Tahir, Additional Secretary Kashmir Affairs & GB Kamran Rehman Khan, Joint Secretary Hamid Khan, Joint Secretary Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council Ali Akbar Khattak and Joint Secretary Gilgit Baltistan Council Sudheer Khattak attended the meeting, said a press release.

The meeting was also attended by Convener All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Ghulam Muhammad Safi.

The meeting discussed and reviewed the comprehensive plan for the upcoming events to be held on February 5 Kashmir Solidarity Day.

Speaking on the occasion, Coordinator to Prime Minister Shabir Ahmed Usmani said that the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and other relevant ministries and departments have started preparations for Kashmir Solidarity Day, to be observed on February 5.

He said that the entire nation will observe Kashmir Solidarity Day with a renewed commitment to support the just struggle of Kashmiris for their inalienable right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The meeting, held in AJ&K Council, brought together senior officials and focal persons from various ministries and departments, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, Interior, Information Technology and Telecom and Aviation. Representatives from Islamabad Police, Capital Development Authority (CDA), Ministry of Education, National Heritage and Culture Division, and the Cantonment Board, along with district managements of Islamabad and Rawalpindi also participated.

DIG Raza leads recovery of over 20mln cash, goods, returning to owners

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD



Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have successfully returned stolen items worth over Rs 20 million, including vehicles, motorcycles, cash, jewelry, and other valuables, to their rightful owners.

The recovered items were handed over during a ceremony at the Police Lines Headquarters on Friday.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Police, Syed Ali Raza, while addressing a press conference, shared details of a three-month crackdown against criminal elements.

DIG Raza said that the operation led to the recovery of 37 vehicles, 159 motorcycles, Rs 22.9 million in cash, jewelry worth over Rs 1.6 million, and 91 mobile phones. A significant quantity of narcotics and firearms with ammunition was also seized.

During the ceremony, DIG Raza, accompanied by SSP Operations/ Investigation Arsalan Shahzeb, zonal SPs, and SHOs, handed over the recovered vehicles, motorcycles, jewelry, and other stolen items to their rightful owners.

The event was attended by citizens who expressed their gratitude and praised the police's efforts.

Islamabad resident Faisal Satti expressed his happiness to APP, saying that the return of his Rs10 lakh was an astonishing act, and that Islamabad Police returned his money with respect.

Similarly, another Islamabad resident, Muhammad Yousuf, whose house was burgled and suffered a loss of Rs2.7 million, had the full amount returned.

Yousuf said that this might be a historic moment in Islamabad's history, as such a large sum of Rs2.7 million was returned, and he salutes DIG Ali Raza and Islamabad Police for this remarkable act

DIG Raza highlighted that under the directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, actions against habitual offenders and fugitives are being intensified. He added, "We are committed to making Islamabad crime-free by 2025 through rigorous policing and meticulous investigations."

Two criminal gangs busted, looted valuables recovered

STAFF REPORTER

DERA GHAZI KHAN

Sadar police have busted two notorious criminal gangs and recovered looted valuables from their possession during a special crackdown launched on Friday.

In line with special directives of District Police Officer (DPO) Syed Ali, Sadar police under the supervision of SP City Irfan Akbar, launched a crackdown against criminals involved in depriving citizens of valuables. The police busted notorious Sohail alias Suheli and Mehran Dasti gangs.

The police have also recovered looted valuables from the possession of arrested criminals including nine motorcycles, mobile phones and cash Rs 275,000 by tracing various cases. Further investigations were underway and more recoveries were expected from the criminals, police sources added.

ISSI signs MoU with Center for International Strategic Studies, Azad Jammu and Kashmir

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Center for International Strategic Studies, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (CISS AJK), based in Muzaffarabad.

The signing formalizes the institutional partnership aimed at enhancing collaboration in research, policy development, awareness, and advocacy-related to the Kashmir dispute as well as regional and international strategic issues. The MoU was signed by Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General, ISSI and Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja, Executive Director, CISS AJK, said a press release issued here on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood emphasized the importance of this partnership in highlighting issues of national importance and promoting national discourse on the Kashmir cause and its just solution. He lauded CISS AJK for their excellence in research and acknowledged their active engagement on key subjects of national security. While CISS AJK and ISSI have been actively engaged, "This MoU marks a new chapter in our collaboration," stated Ambassador Mahmood. He also underscored the importance of research and academic work on India's conduct, including its internal and external drivers, both for enhanced public understanding and awareness as well as informed policy-formulation. The partnership between the two think-tanks envisages pooling resources to present Pakistan's policies and actions in the right perspective to the regional and international audiences.

Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja warmly welcomed the prospects of enhanced collaboration with ISSI within the framework of the MoU. She introduced several publications by CISS AJK and emphasised areas of mutual research interest between the two institutes, including emerging technologies and Jammu and Kashmir dispute. She underscored the importance of joint academic research on issues impacting national security. She emphasised that it is pertinent to include the indigenous voices of Kashmiris, particularly the Kashmiri youth. In this regard, she opined that collaboration between ISSI and CISS AJK can be impactful in reaching the decision-makers and concluded by underscoring the importance of unified efforts in addressing the pressing challenges.

Earlier, Dr Khurram Abbas, Director India Study Centre at ISSI, briefed the participants regarding the ISSI and its five Centres. Ms. Tayaba Khurshid, Research Officer, outlined CISS AJK's mission, outreach, publications, and capacity-building efforts.

The event concluded with a series of recommendations by both teams, and a commitment to

paving the way for informed policy-making and enhanced public engagement and awareness of the Kashmiri perspective on the Kashmir cause.

Sevendays frozen fairy tale festival to start in GB on January 15

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GILGIT

The Sevendays Frozen Fairy Tale Festival is coming to Gilgit-Baltistan from January 15 to January 25, 2025. This exciting winter event will take place in all districts of the region and is expected to attract both locals and visitors.

The festival is being organized by the Tourism and Culture Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, along with local communities and other partners. It will offer a variety of fun activities for everyone to enjoy. Visitors can take part in winter sports like skiing, snowboarding, and ice skating.

The festival will also include cultural shows that highlight the traditions and heritage of Gilgit-Baltistan. A special ice sculpture exhibition will feature beautiful artwork made from ice, adding to the magic of the event.

Food lovers will get to enjoy local dishes, while traditional games will provide fun and entertainment for all ages.

The festival is a great opportunity to experience the beauty of Gilgit-Baltistan in winter and enjoy its culture, food, and traditions.





RAWALPINDI: Workers in decorating the vehicle for marriage ceremony outside a shop in Bani area of the City. — Staff Photo

ICT Police bust dacoit gang, arrest two members; recover looted goods

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Shahzad Town station team successfully arrested two members of a notorious dacoit gang involved in multiple snatching incidents across the twin cities. The team recovered cash, mobile phones, valuables and a motorbike from their possession, on Friday.

A police spokesperson told APP that the Shahzad Town police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending two wanted members of the snatcher gang.

He said the gang was involved in numerous snatching activities in various areas of twin cities. Police team also recovered cash, mobile phone, and motorbike from their possession.

The accused were identified as Sadheer Khan and Adil Nisar. Cases were registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway, he added.

DIG Syed Ali Raza also directed officers for an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to take all possible measures to protect the life and property of the citizens.

DIG further said that no criminal element will be allowed to disturb the peace of the people.



CDA chairman reviews progress on Blue Area parking plaza

● Underpasses on Srinagar Highway to be opened for traffic later this month

MUDASSER CH.

ISLAMABAD

Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Friday review progress on the Blue Area Parking Plaza and Capital Street (Art & Craft Village) projects.

The authority chairman in a meeting discussed the various proposals regarding the design and operationalization of Capital Street.

Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed that development work on the road infrastructure of Capital Street be initiated promptly.

He further directed that the development of the already auctioned plots be expedited to hand over possession to allot-tees within the current month.

He emphasized enhancing the design and planning of Capital Street to ensure it meets the highest standards. During the briefing, it was apprised that Capital Street (Art & Craft Village) will feature facilities such as an expo hall, tourism hubs, art and craft stalls, an amphitheater, a cinema, and more.

Chairman CDA instructed that all remaining construction work on the project be completed on a priority basis.

The meeting was also briefed on the plans for Blue Area Parking Plaza. The proposals were presented regarding the use of various segments of the parking plaza and strategies to generate revenue.

Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa stressed the need for an effective plan to optimize the use of the parking plaza space to enhance revenue generation.

He directed that finishing touches, including elevator installations and electrical work, be completed at the earliest.

During the meeting, it was informed that the parking plaza will have a capacity for approximately 1,000 vehicles and will consist of two basements, a ground floor, and five additional floors.

Additionally, the plaza will include around 64 shops. It was also shared that, in the first phase, half of the shops in the Blue Area



Parking Plaza will be offered for auction.

The rooftop of the plaza has a spacious place which will feature an open-air restaurant and café, along with facilities such as a paddle court, a cinema, and other indoor recreational amenities.

Parking options will be provided to citizens on hourly, daily, and monthly bases, ensuring convenience for all.

The meeting was attended by CDA members and senior officers from the relevant wings.

Meanwhile,

Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, was informed on Friday that both underpasses on the Srinagar Highway would be opened for traffic later this month.

The CDA chairman along with senior officers, visited key development projects, including Constitution Avenue, Margalla Avenue, and the Serena Chowk Interchange.

He also reviewed the progress of construction on the Margalla Road section from the Secretariat to Bari Imam.

Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed the MPO Directorate to expedite and complete construction work at the earliest.

He emphasized the development of green belts and median strips with flower plantations and attractive landscaping along the roads.

Additionally, he instructed the installation of modern lane markings and aesthetically pleasing lights on the Margalla Road from Secretariat to Bari Imam.

During his visit to Constitution Avenue, Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa issued directives to prioritize its beautification and uplift.

He called for the accelerated installation of decorative lights on a permanent basis, emphasizing that this would not only eliminate rental costs but also enhance CDA's assets on permanent basis while reducing operational expenses.

Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa inspected the ongoing beautification and horticulture work in the surrounding areas and commended the progress.

Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa also reviewed construction activities at the Jinnah Avenue Interchange project.

He was briefed that the structural work on the flyover is nearing completion.

Chairman CDA directed the preparation of a high-quality landscaping design for the surrounding area and emphasized its timely completion.

Randhawa instructed consultants and resident engineers to ensure strict adherence to quality standards and to maintain a fast pace of construction activities at all project sites.

RDA evaluates performance of various directorates

STAFF REPORTER

RAWALPINDI

Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), performance review meeting on the directives of Director General (DG) RDA, Kinza Murtaza here on Friday evaluated the recovery progress of various directorates of the RDA.



The meeting was chaired by the Additional Director General RDA, Awais Manzoor Tarar. Representatives from the Engineering Directorate, Chief Engineer Muhammad Anwar Baran, Director Estate Management Shahzad Gondal, Deputy Director Finance Muhammad Junaid Taj Bhatti, Superintendent Building Control Raja Arslan and others attended the meeting.

The meeting focused on evaluating the performance and identifying areas for the improvement in the recovery process of the respective directorates.

The heads of each directorate provided detailed updates on their ongoing efforts and discussed strategies to enhance recovery efficiency moving forward.

The review meeting demonstrated RDA's commitment to improving operational efficiency and ensuring effective management across all the departments.

The DG RDA, Kinza Murtaza has been emphasizing the importance of maintaining transparency and improving recovery mechanisms to support the authority's development goals.

During the meeting, it was decided that further steps and actions will be taken to ensure smooth functioning of RDA's operations.

IBCC revamping examination system to boost students' capacity

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Executive Director of the Inter-Boards Coordination Committee (IBCC), Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah, on Friday, announced that the IBCC was working on a plan to introduce the conceptual base examination to enhance the student's learning capacity.

He made the announcement following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between IBCC and the National Press Club here at the NPC.



Talking to the media in Meet the Press, he said that the attestation of certificates was a time-consuming process that had been addressed with initiatives like express courier service and multiple shifts.

"We are generating new ideas on a daily basis for the betterment of the students and education," he remarked.

He also mentioned that execution or implementation of the policies was a big challenge for the organizations, but we were focusing on it to bring development to the education system.

The grading and education system was going to be changed in the country, and IBCC would organize seminars and workshops for awareness and understanding, he said.

The signing of the MoU with NPC would pave the way for the children of journalists to avail them of the scholarship opportunity, he asserted.

Maldives high level delegation visits IIUI

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

A high-level delegation from the Republic of Maldives, led by H.E. Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, Minister of Islamic Affairs, Maldives, paid a courtesy visit to the President of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed.



The delegation included Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs, Maldives Mr. Ali Ahusan, First Secretary Ms. Aminath Zuhudha, and Second Secretary Mr. Ismail Mufeed.

The delegates are participating in an international conference hosted by the Ministry of Education and Professional Training Islamabad in collaboration with the Muslim World League, titled the International Conference: "Girls' Education in Muslim Countries: Challenges and Opportunities".

During their visit, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed warmly welcomed the delegation from the Maldives, briefed them about the salient features of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), and highlighted IIUI's commitment to fostering international academic collaborations and addressing global educational challenges.

The meeting included discussions on mutual academic interests, potential collaborations, and strategies to overcome obstacles in promoting girls' education in Muslim countries.

The delegation expressed their appreciation for the warm reception and commended IIUI's role in advancing education and fostering dialogue among Muslim nations.

Later, the delegates were given a comprehensive briefing about the university's vision and achievements.

They also participated in an interaction with IIUI officials, including Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahman, Vice President (A&F); Prof. Dr. Amna Mehmood, In-Charge Female Campus; and senior officials and faculty members.

During the interaction, a Maldivian student who had studied at IIUI shared his experiences and reminisced about his time at the institution.

The visit concluded with a shared commitment to advancing educational partnerships and fostering excellence in the Muslim world.

SSP operations stresses crime control and serving citizens

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations/ Investigation Muhammad Arsalan Shahzaib chaired a crucial crime control meeting on Friday at his office, where zonal SPs and investigation officers reviewed their performance.



An official told APP that during the meeting Shahzaib emphasized the primary duty of the police to serve citizens and called for stricter measures to prevent robberies, dacoities, and thefts, ensuring the effective arrest of absconders and criminals.

SSP further instructed officers to expedite investigations and improve the quality of patrols and operations.

Shahzaib emphasized the importance of ensuring the arrest of absconders, proclaimed offenders, and court absconders. Patrolling should be made more targeted and effective.

SSP said that separate meetings would be held for each zone to improve performance. He instructed officers to ensure the prevention of vehicle and motorcycle theft and the arrest of those involved in these crimes.

Shahzaib emphasized the urgent need to apprehend the accused involved in dacoity and other criminal cases. In addition, SSP directed officers to identify criminal elements and implement measures to prevent them.

Effective actions should be taken against those involved in immoral activities, and they must be arrested. All officers were directed to apprehend professional beggars and their facilitators and to register cases against them.

Investigations of pending cases should be expedited, and challans should be submitted to the relevant courts on a priority basis.

SSP Shahzaib also stressed that the quality of investigations should be improved. Patrols by the Dolphin Squad and police stations should be made more effective and purposeful.

Serving the citizens is the primary duty of the police, and any negligence in this regard will not be tolerated. Those who disrupt the peace of the city and deprive citizens of their valuable assets should be placed in custody or jail, he added.

AIOU holds a seminar on 'Modern Trends in Islamic Research'

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has hosted a faculty seminar on the topic of 'Modern Trends in Islamic Research' the other day.

The event featured Dr Mustafeez Ahmad Alvi, a prominent scholar from the Department of Islamic Thought and Culture, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, as the keynote speaker.

The session was presided over by Prof. Dr Shah Mohayyuddin Hashmi, Dean, Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies, AIOU.

In his keynote address, Dr Mustafeez Ahmad Alvi emphasized the importance of looking beyond the past in research.

He stated, "Our research often draws lessons from the past, which is not entirely appropriate. We should take guidance from the past but not let it dominate our work.

Tinderbox truce

The restive Kurram district, a region long plagued by violence, sectarian strife and neglect, teeters on the edge once again – the recent arrest of three tribal elders for refusing to sign a newly brokered peace agreement just the latest example of the precarious nature of the fragile truce reached earlier this year. While the peace deal, struck on January 1 after a gruelling 50-day negotiation process, was a welcome development, the events that followed cast doubt on its durability and the state's commitment to addressing the underlying issues in Kurram. The agreement had outlined 14 points aimed at de-escalating tensions between the warring factions. Among these were the surrender of private weapons to the government and the dismantling of bunkers. However, the subsequent firing incident that injured Deputy Commissioner (DC) Javedullah Mehsud and others is an alarming sign of the fragile security environment in the region. DC Mehsud, a pivotal figure in restoring peace, became a target just days after the peace deal.

Kurram has a long and troubled history of violence, much of it rooted in sectarian tensions that date back to the Afghan jihad. The ambush on police-escorted convoys last November, which sparked the latest wave of violence, claimed over 130 lives and injured more than 180. Yet, this is not merely a story of two rival factions. It is a tale of systemic neglect, inadequate governance, and a lack of political will to address the root causes of the unrest. The humanitarian crisis that has unfolded as a result of the road closures is a damning indictment of the state's failure to protect its citizens. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has been slow to respond to the crisis. It was only after widespread criticism and an All-Parties Conference (APC) in December that serious attention was paid to the deteriorating situation in Kurram. But even the APC and the eventual peace deal appear to be stopgap measures rather than a comprehensive strategy for lasting peace.

Experts have rightly warned that the recent agreement is akin to a tinderbox – ready to ignite at the slightest provocation. The decades-old land disputes in Kurram, compounded by deeply entrenched sectarian divides, require far more than ad-hoc peace deals. A meaningful and sustainable resolution demands that the state engage with all stakeholders in a manner that addresses the root causes of the conflict, ensures equitable resource allocation, and fosters trust among the communities. The KP government's negligence in the initial stages of the conflict has already cost over a hundred lives; both the provincial and the federal governments now have to take proactive steps to prevent the resurgence of violence. This includes enforcing the peace agreement's terms in a manner that is inclusive and fair, avoiding the alienation of any group, and ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches the beleaguered residents of Kurram without delay. The state must also address the ongoing healthcare and food crises in the district. The delayed dispatch of relief goods speaks to a broader failure of governance. The fact is that peace in Kurram cannot be achieved through coercion or temporary truces alone. It requires a sustained effort to dismantle the sectarian divide, address economic grievances, and ensure that rule of law prevails. The KP government must act decisively to not only enforce the current peace deal but also work towards a long-term plan that includes development, education, and inter-community dialogue. The cost of failure is too high. Should this peace deal collapse, the region risks descending into another cycle of bloodshed, with ripple effects that will be felt across the country. The state cannot afford to treat Kurram as a peripheral issue any longer.

(Courtesy The News)

Meds for the people

Over the last few weeks, all we have been watching on the news is how well economic indicators have performed throughout the year. While this does call for celebrations, there is also an urgent need to understand how the economic turnaround has affected ordinary Pakistanis. A few days back, a report by the IQVIA, a leading global provider of advanced analytics, technology solutions and clinical research services to the life sciences industry, highlighted growth in Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector. The industry grew by an impressive 21.79 per cent in the third quarter of 2024 compared to the same period last year, reaching a market value of Rs962.5 billion, the monitoring firm said. This was largely driven by a deregulatory policy announced by the Anwaarul Haq Kakar-led caretaker government in 2023, allowing pharmaceutical companies to independently raise prices for non-essential drugs excluded from the National Essential Medicines List (NEML). But this has led to a drop in sales. Experts say that the sector's growth is largely fuelled by price adjustments the companies were allowed to make instead of an increase in sales volume. What is even worse is the fact that this price increase has affected people's ability to buy medicines.

Medicines have long enjoyed inelastic demand, with price adjustments not affecting sales. But perhaps those responsible for this classification were not aware to what extent a pandemic, an unexpected war and domestic political instability could affect a developing country's economic conditions.

We have reached a point where, according to pharmacy owners, people are cutting down on their medicines to meet their budgets. For years, inflationary pressures were less pronounced mostly because many people rely on charities and other welfare organisations to get medicines either for free or at discounted rates. Then, most private institutions also provided medical facilities to their employees. As the economy suffered, private companies removed perks and other benefits. According to several doctors, some medicines have seen a 100 per cent price hike; one brand of antispasmodic medicine has gone up by 218 per cent, while other medicines have also witnessed a significant increase in their prices.

Nutritional supplements, essential for the elderly, have also become quite expensive. People should not be brought to a point where they have to ration their medicines or beg doctors to tweak their prescriptions according to their budget.

The government has to come up with a way where both businesses and people are satisfied. People's purchasing power will increase if they have enough job opportunities to increase their income. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the country has been in the grip of an economic crunch. The gig economy that thrived pre-Covid is also fading away. The spark and optimism needed for a country's growth is deeply missing. If the government does not act today, it will be too late.

(Courtesy The News)

Need to dump deadwood

The decision to slash the size of the government is on the spot and appreciated. It is a foregone conclusion that Pakistan has a most unproductive bureaucracy entailing an annual expense of around Rs8 trillion, along with pensions and perks. Thus, the abolition and relocation of 65 departments is a first step in the right direction, and the good point is that this time around the beleaguered dispensation has taken the ministries of defence and judiciary by the horns to put them in their rights-size. The decision to abolish 40 entities - of which 28 will be privatised or transferred as provincial subjects - must see to it that deadwood is not retained under any circumstances and a considerate reprisal is conducted to undo any misgivings.

While the strategy is an outcome of sustained calculations and input from several stakeholders, especially reviews from 10 ministries and, of course, under the pressure of the IMF, it should ensure that structural reforms are introduced in the long run. Likewise, the decision to abolish 150,000 vacant posts and outsourcing of gardening and janitor services must be followed with betterment in quality of service and not just cost-cutting. It is roughly estimated that a Rs800 billion per annum cut will be seen if these decisions are implemented. Last but not least, as gazetted officers from grade 17 to 22 come under the spotlight, the government must make sure that duplication of roles is done away with, and the legislation to amend the Civil Servants Act distinguishes the wheat from the chaff. Pakistan is home to more than 1.92 million federal employees, apart from less than a million provincial recruits. There are several portfolios and autonomous bodies that are good for nothing and they too need to be skimmed. The austerity drive has always been taken with a pinch of salt as people are right in questioning the stashing away of billions by cabinet ministers and parliamentarians in their auxiliary chores. In order to ensure rightful reforms, digitisation of government machinery - free from political wrangling - is indispensable.

(Courtesy The Express Tribune)

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Why Pakistan faltered

BY AMEENAH BABAR

As a child, I often wondered why Pakistan was so different from the developed world. On trips abroad, I was struck by how vastly different our country seemed from the orderly, prosperous societies we visited. Later as a student of Pakistan's history, this innocent curiosity gave way to a deeper question: Why did Pakistan initially perform so well economically, only to falter in later decades?

The first question led me towards a book last year by British American economists Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. A couple of months ago, they also won the 2024 Nobel Prize for this work. But more recently, I stumbled upon a book by Dr Ishrat Husain, a renowned Pakistani economist, that answered my second question as well. Both works, while distinct in approach, point to the same answer: the quality of institutions is the decisive factor in determining whether and when nations succeed or fail.

In their influential book 'Why Nations Fail', Acemoglu and Robinson argue that the difference between prosperity and poverty in nations is rooted in the quality of their institutions. They focus on the distinction between inclusive and extractive institutions. Inclusive institutions encourage meritocracy, innovation, and broad participation in economic and political life. They empower citizens, create fair competition, and ensure rule of law. Extractive institutions, on the other hand, concentrate power and resources in the hands of a few, stifling progress and exacerbating inequality.

The Nobel laureates' work is grounded in powerful case studies. They compare countries like North and South Korea, which share the same geography, culture, and history but are economic opposites. In 2023, South Korea's GDP stood at $2,401 trillion, while North Korea's was a paltry $40.2 trillion. Similarly, they highlight the disparities between Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Mexico – two regions geographically contiguous and culturally similar yet starkly different in their standards of living. In both cases, the difference lies in the institutions governing these regions. South Korea and Arizona built inclusive institutions, while their counterparts did not.

Acemoglu and Robinson's findings challenge simplistic explanations for development, such as geography or culture. Their groundbreaking research uses natural experiments to identify causation, with a particular focus on the colonial past. For example, they show that colonies where European settlers established inclusive institutions, such as the US or Australia, thrived. In contrast, colonies where extractive institutions were set up to exploit resources and labour, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia, remained underdeveloped. This empirical approach helps isolate institutional quality as the driving force behind a nation's success.

Dr Ishrat Husain's 2018 book 'Governing the Ungovernable' applies a similar institutional lens to Pakistan's development. However, his methodology differs significantly. While the Nobel laureates use natural experiments that happened at some point in history to prove causation, Husain adopts a process of elimination, systematically disproving alternative explanations for Pakistan's initial economic successes and later struggles. From 1947 to 1990, Pakistan achieved an impressive average annual growth rate of 6.0 per cent. Husain attributes this success to strong governance structures and a competent civil service that operated with a degree of meritocracy and professionalism.

However, this institutional strength was not sustained. Husain argues that the decay began in the 1970s, during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's tenure when the civil service was politicised and meritocracy was replaced with nepotism and cronyism. This erosion of governance structures coincided with a decline in economic performance. Husain meticulously evaluates other explanations for Pakistan's economic struggles – such as overreliance on foreign aid, military dominance, and geographical challenges – and finds them lacking. By disproving these hypotheses one by one, he concludes that institutional decay is the root cause of Pakistan's challenges.

One of the most striking aspects of Husain's work is his rejection of popular but flawed explanations for Pakistan's struggles. For example, he challenges the notion that Pakistan's prosperity is linked to receiving foreign aid. While aid has played a role in certain periods, such as during the 2009 Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, its absence during critical moments like the 1965 war did not prevent the country from achieving growth.

Husain also dismantles the argument that military dominance has stifled economic progress. He points out that periods of high defence spending, such as from 1950 to 1990, coincided with robust economic growth. By contrast, when defence spending declined to 2.7 per cent of GDP in 2017, the economy experienced a significant slowdown. These examples reinforce his central thesis: The root of Pakistan's challenges lies not in external factors but in the internal decay of its governance structures, he argues.

The way forward, as Husain argues, is to prioritise institutional reform. This includes strengthening the civil service, ensuring transparency in governance, and creating a system that operates independently of political interests. He emphasises the need for a depoliticised and meritocratic bureaucracy that can function effectively regardless of who is in power.

While both Husain and the Nobel laureates highlight the importance of institutions, a key difference lies in how they view democracy's role. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that inclusive institutions are synonymous with democratic governance, weaving a strong political message into their findings. This framing aligns with Western liberal values, likely resonating with entities like the Nobel Committee. However, this linkage is not universal. China, for instance, has achieved stunning economic success under an authoritarian regime. Conversely, India's long-standing democratic processes did little to promote economic development in the first four decades after independence. In both these cases, market-based economics seems to be a more powerful driver than democracy.

Husain, on the other hand, does not frame his arguments within the context of democracy. His findings suggest that the functionality of institutions matters more than the form of governance. The subtle message in Husain's work is that institutional meritocracy can thrive under any system – democratic or authoritarian. A subtle message that he gives is that the military establishment could also benefit directly if it allowed institutions to function on the basis of merit, as a growing economy would enable the government to allocate greater resources to all sectors, including defence. Basically, as long as the institutions are working properly everybody wins, well at least economically.

The insights of Acemoglu, Robinson, and Husain converge on a simple yet powerful truth: The quality of institutions determines the fate of nations. By learning from its past and committing to institutional reform, Pakistan can reclaim its potential and chart a path toward sustained prosperity. The journey will not be easy, but it is the only way forward.

(Courtesy The News)

The hydro heritage of Swat

BY ZUBAIR TORWALI

The Swat Valley, nestled in the northern mountains of Pakistan, is not merely a geographical marvel; it is a cradle of cultural, emotional, and natural heritage that flows through its lifeblood – water.

Springs, streams, rivers, glaciers, canals, waterfalls, and lakes are not just reservoirs of water but sources of what is now called 'hydro-heritage'. These water bodies are deeply embedded in Swat's identity, carrying with them the culture, emotions, poetry, music, and timeless stories of love, longing, and community.

The very name 'Swat' is derived from its river. Swat is not a town, village, or city; it is the name of the river that originates from glaciers and lakes high up in the mountains. Flowing through the valley, this river nourishes Swat's culture, shapes its history, and gives life to its natural beauty before merging with the Kabul River. It is this river and its tributaries – springs, canals, and streams – that breathe life into the valley's literature, music, and folklore. Without them, the Pashto, Torwali, Gujri, and Gawri poetry of Swat would lose its rhythm, and the folk tales that define its people would remain incomplete.

In Torwali, the term 'Guthur', and in Pashto 'Godar', refers to springs and gathering spots. These were not merely utilitarian spaces for fetching water but vibrant cultural and social hubs. Women gathered here with their earthen pots – mangai, matka, and bheden – not just to collect water but to share stories, songs, and laughter. The clay pots were often brimming with the joys and exuberance of youth, reflecting the unbridled vitality of the women who carried them.

These springs, like the water that gushed forth from rocky crevices, were places where restrained emotions burst forth, defying the constraints of tradition. Women found moments of freedom here, as these springs doubled as spaces of leisure and recreation. In the evenings, when women dressed in vibrant shawls gathered around the mountain springs, the scene was like an artwork – a kaleidoscope of colour and life, resembling golden birds gathered around a rocky stream.

The folk poetry of Swat captures these moments of beauty. For instance, this Torwali couplet: "theye kaan o bhardan gheeni Mahmad Zahir Shah/ bash guthur kay bi bi lakman si bheden phara" ["If Muhammad Zahir Shah were alive, I'd hand him a slingshot,/ And he'd break the clay pot of that beauty at the mountain spring."]

And this Pashto couplet: "che mazigar patey khaisata kegi/ mangay naray warta wahi godar la zeena" ["As the evening sets in, the clay pot calls out to her, inviting her to the spring. Thus, the evening becomes beautiful"].

And this Torwali couplet brings forth the metaphor of mountain spring for the human yearning so beautifully. "aa sey uus thu nukhodu tey kisjan paheema/ chi misaal tisjael si yede pu engola" ["I am like the spring that springs from black ice./ O friend, come to me and quench your thirst."]

Or this one: "guup nhigaado ghen nhed taliye waed kashmala/ mae hisaab ki qawar mi chi tilen hi pura" ["When Sirius rose, River Swat reduced to its bed/ I counted and one year passed since you died my love!"]

With the arrival of 'Pakistani modernity', a harsh, unfeeling form of development swept across Swat. This modernity prioritised concrete and cement over culture, beauty and history. It dismantled Swat's hydro-heritage, reducing vibrant and soulful spaces to mere utilities. The poetry, emotions, and delicate balance between nature and human life were sacrificed at the altar of 'progress'.

First came conflict, as the Taliban insurgency ravaged the valley, uprooting its cultural and social fabric. Then came state-led reconstruction, marked by a militarised form of development. Infrastructure projects – roads, pipelines, and modern water systems – were introduced under the guise of progress. Traditional springs were dried up, and springs were diverted into plastic pipes.

The social fabric of the villages was transformed. Access to water became politicised, with pipes distributed as political favours. Those who secured pipes from councillors or MPs became influential figures in the village, while those who could not were left marginalised. Community bonds, once strengthened by shared spaces like springs, began to fracture.

The springs of Swat were particularly significant for women. These were spaces where they could gather, socialise, and enjoy moments of leisure. But modernisation, coupled with increasing societal restrictions, has severely curtailed women's access to these spaces.

Religious spaces built directly over or near springs have created barriers. These spaces are male-dominated, and their presence has alienated women from their traditional gathering spots. Springs, once vibrant with the chatter and laughter of women, are now silent. For many women, these changes symbolise not just the loss of access to water but the loss of freedom and social connection.

This alienation is poignantly reflected in the words of a local woman: "I used to feel my heart open when I visited the spring with my friends. Now, I'm told, 'You will not go there'. The spring, and the joy it brought, is gone."

Adding to this loss is the impact of hydropower projects. Under the banner of 'clean and renewable energy', these projects have disrupted Swat's delicate ecosystem. One hydropower project, for instance, has dried up dozens of springs and erased traditional gathering spots. Massive projects along the Swat River, from Madyan to Kalam and Gabral, are diverting water through tunnels, threatening not just the river but also the springs that depend on its flow.

What were once vibrant spaces of hydro-heritage – sites of healing, sociability, and cultural expression – have been reduced to mere water sources. Springs, once intertwined with local myths, spirituality, and cultural practices, have been stripped of their emotional and historical significance. This shift symbolises a broader erosion of Swat's identity, as traditions tied to water fade into memory.

The loss of Swat's hydro-heritage is not just physical; it is a cultural, emotional, and spiritual tragedy. Springs that once united communities and symbolised the valley's soul have been replaced by lifeless infrastructure. The joyous gatherings, poetic expressions, and cultural rituals that revolved around water are now echoes of a distant past.

To heal Swat, its hydro-heritage must be reclaimed. Springs and water bodies must be restored as vibrant cultural spaces beyond utilitarian value. Only by reconnecting with this heritage can Swat revive its lost essence and rediscover the soul that once flowed through its rivers, streams, and springs.

(Courtesy The News)

Inflow of workers' remittance records 32.8% growth in H1FY25

BUSINESS REPORTER

KARACHI

Workers' remittances from overseas to Pakistan rise 32.8 percent during the first half of fiscal year 2024-25 with inflows of US$ 17.845 billion from July to December 2024 while remittances recorded a monthly inflow of US$ 3.1 billion during December 2024.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Friday, stated "Cumulatively, with an inflow of US$ 17.8 billion, workers' remittances increased by 32.8 percent during H1FY25 compared to US$ 13.4 billion received during H1FY24."

Workers' remittances recorded an inflow of US$ 3.1 billion during December 2024 which depicts a growth of 29.3% as compared to December 2023 and 5.6% increase in comparison to November 2024, it added.

The remittances inflow was recorded as $2.91 billion during November 2024 and $2.38 billion in December 2023, the report mentioned.

Remittances inflows during December 2024 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia ($770.6 million), United Arab Emirates ($631.5 million), United Kingdom ($456.9 million) and United States of America ($284.3 million), the SBP reported.

The contribution of expatriates in remittances from other GCC countries during December 2024 recorded as $310 million, from European Union countries $360.3 million, from Australia $68.8 million, Malaysia $ 15.8 million and Norway $9.6 million, the report depicted.



ISLAMABAD: Laborers are busy in carpeting of the Suhrawardy Road as Serena Chowk Interchange is about to complete very soon in Federal Capital. — Staff Photo

Rana Tanveer for ensuring phytosanitary compliance to enhance food exports

BUSINESS REPORTER

KARACHI

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain, underscoring the significance of enhancing exports for sustainable economic growth on Friday said that government will extend every possible assistance to exporters for increasing export volume.

The federal minister, in separate meetings with exporters of rice and spices and herbs here at Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, urged the exporters to adopt modern technology and ensure strict compliance of phytosanitary regulations and other standards set by the importing countries.

The NFSR minister, in the meeting with delegation of Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP), appreciated the services of business and trade community for economic development of the country and said that business community was an asset of Pakistan and they had been playing notable role in economic growth and prosperity of the country.

"For sustainable economic stability and growth, we have to focus on enhancing the volume of exports as well as production of agricultural products," he said adding that Pakistan was an agrarian economy while demand of agricultural products was very high in the global markets.

"We should leverage from the prevailing demand in world markets and take tangible steps to capture and sustain new markets for Pakistani products through adoption of modern technology and strict compliance of international food quality standards and phyto-sanitary regulations," he emphasized.



The European Union, USA and some other countries have stringent regulation pertaining to food quality and a minor distraction might cause interceptions and rejection of export consignments, he pointed out adding that such violations may result into ban on exports of relevant products from Pakistan.

"Government is taking multifaceted measures to enhance agricultural productivity, facilitate exports and manufacturing and bring reforms in public entities to address the challenges," he said and stressed on business community to align their businesses with the national and international regulations and requirements.

The minister directed Department of Plant Protection to make its Lahore office operational to facilitate exporters and resolve the issues being faced by rice exporters in consultation with the stakeholders.

The Director General DPP informed the minister that discussions with REAP were underway for resolving various issues and significant progress has been made so far. He informed that REAP has expressed their reservation regarding some rules and the issue was expected to be resolved by end of January.

Representing REAP, Mahesh Talreja, Raza Amjad and other members briefed the meeting that export of rice from Pakistan had surged to $4 billion in previous fiscal year due to efforts of rice exporters while ratio of regulatory compliance by REAP members was 99 percent.

They suggested to grant industry status to rice processing and export sector, fast tracking of phytosanitary certification and inspection processes, spreading awareness on regulatory frameworks and requirements, and revising the rules to further develop the sector and enhance the exports of rice.

The delegation of exporters of spices, herbs, processed food and other edible items led by Mushkbar Zehra, discussed ways and means to increase export from the Pakistan. They suggested ensuring provision of the quality seeds to farmers, controlling the sale of pesticides banned in EU, US and other international markets, and promoting pesticide control at farm level to ensure compliance of international standards.

Seminar on Sustainability of Indonesian Palm held

BUSINESS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Indonesian-Pakistan Seminar on Palm Oil 2025, titled "Strengthening Sustainable Palm for the World," was organized by the Indonesian Consulate General in Karachi, jointly hosted by the Indonesian Palm Oil Association (IPOA) and the Palm Oil Supplier Association of Pakistan (POSAP).

The seminar was held at a prominent hotel in Karachi and featured insightful addresses from renowned international speakers, including Dr. Mohammad Fadhil Hasan, Head of Foreign Relations GAPKI-IPOA; Mr. Sohail Bhatti, Senior Vice President of POSAP; and Dr.



Hammad Hassan, Associate Professor of Regenerative Medicine at Aga Khan University, said a press release issued here on Friday.

The event commenced with opening remarks by Mr. Teguh Wiweko, Acting Consul General of the Indonesian Consulate.

This was followed by an address from Mr. Naveed Gilani, Chairman of POSAP Mr. Eddy Martono, Chairman of GAPKI-IPOA, then highlighted the significance of palm oil trade between Indonesia and Pakistan.

Dr. Rizal A. Lukman, Secretary General of the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries (CPOPC), also delivered an engaging presentation on sustainable palm oil practices and global trade.

He also invited the Thailand government to join the CPOPC, being the 4th biggest producer of Palm Oil in the world.

The seminar was moderated by Mr. Ahmed Syofian, Economic Counsellor at the Indonesian Consulate General.

Distinguished dignitaries graced the event, including Mr. Surashete Boontinand, Consul General of Thailand in Karachi; Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh, President of FPCCI and former Chairman of PCMA and Mr. Irfan Soomro, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan.

The event brought together owners of the edible oil industry, diplomats from various countries, and other stakeholders, creating an enriching platform for knowledge sharing and networking.

The evening concluded with a sumptuous dinner, allowing participants to engage further in discussions and forge meaningful connections.

FBR Seeks Tax Proposals for Budget 2025-26

● Removal of tax distortions, procedural lapses and anomalies

BUSINESS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has sought income tax, sales tax and federal excise duty budget proposals (2025-26) from Inland Revenue field formations as well as business and trade bodies for removal of tax distortions, procedural lapses and anomalies.

The FBR's instructions to the field formations on Wednesday stated that the FBR has invited budget proposals for the upcoming budget for 2025-26 relating to Income Tax, Sales Tax, Federal Excise Duty and ICT (Tax on Services) Ordinance, 2001.

FBR said that in order to enhance the budget



formulation process and to reduce backend procedural burdens, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) plans to commence its budget process earlier this year. As a plan, the FBR has started developing proposals for the Finance Bill, 2025. In pursuit of leveraging the collective expertise and insights of all stakeholders to refine tax policies, the FBR has invited proposals for the forthcoming Budget for the Fiscal Year 2025-26.

The FBR is seeking suggestions in the following policy areas:

(i) Broadening of tax base for a wider participation in revenue generation efforts.

(ii) Policy suggestions for bringing entire value chain of all businesses in GST regime.

(iii) Promoting progressive taxation by introducing various measures where incidence of tax is higher on affluent classes.

(iv) Phasing out of tax concessions and exemptions under all tax laws.

(v) Facilitation of taxpayers and ease of doing business by removal of redundancy and simplification of tax laws.

(vi) Measures to reduce tax arbitrage opportunities and infuse efficiency in economy by following neutrality principle in taxation.

(vii) Removal of tax distortions, procedural lapses and anomalies.

The areas identified above are just illustrative and not exhaustive. The proposals are expected to be clear, meaningful and implementable though addition, deletion, or further amendments to the tax laws, FBR said. FBR has asked to submit the proposals by January 31, 2025.

CCP stresses for level playing field for business at RCCI

BUSINESS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) organized an advocacy session on Competition Law for members of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), highlighting the need for fair competition to drive economic efficiency.

Saeed Ahmad Nawaz, Member of the CCP, emphasized the importance of a level playing field for businesses across all sectors. The session was attended by a significant number of businessmen and corporate lawyers, said a press releases issued here on Friday.

Saeed, stressing the need for greater awareness and understanding of the law, elaborated on CCP's proactive enforcement measures, including its Market Intelligence Unit (MIU), which uses advanced data analysis to identify abnormal pricing trends and take enforcement actions when necessary.

He further explained that the CCP's role extends beyond enforcement, as it actively engages with government ministries and regulatory bodies to recommend policy changes that promote fair competition.

The session featured a detailed presentation by Ahmed Qadir, Director General of MIU, who explained the core components of the Competition Act, 2010. Qadir provided insights on issues arising from abuse of dominant position, prohibited agreements, deceptive marketing practices, and mergers and acquisitions. He highlighted why avoiding anti-competitive practices important for businesses and encouraged businesses to consult the Commission's Guidance on Competition Compliance (GCC) booklet for self-regulation.

RCCI President, Usman Shaukat, acknowledged the crucial role of the CCP in fostering fair competition and creating an equitable business environment. He expressed concern over the dominance of large businesses, which often marginalize small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Shaukat emphasized the need for continued support and a conducive environment for the growth of SMEs in the country.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Khalid Farooq, Senior Vice President RCCI, who expressed gratitude to the CCP for its ongoing efforts to support businesses and ensure a fair and competitive market in the country.

Advanced transportation provides robust foundation for global, regional trade: CEO DP World Group

BUSINESS REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Group Chairman and CEO of DP World Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem has said that advanced transportation is not just a network but a robust foundation for global and regional trade as well as inclusive development.

Addressing at a seminar on the theme "Regional Trade and Emerging Opportunities on the Horizon" organized by Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) with the collaboration of National Logistics Corporation (NLC) here, he highlighted the importance of investing in infrastructure and leveraging modern digital technologies to ensure seamless trade.



The Chairman DP World said that an integrated and digitally standardized global supply chain network is the only path to progress. Investments in trade logistics systems can enhance the region's competitive standing, he added.

The objective of the seminar was to strengthen regional connectivity and promote mutual cooperation to unlock opportunities for overall economic development, said a statement issued here Friday. Minister for Petroleum, Dr. Musadik Malik, was the chief guest, while Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Group Chairman and CEO of DP World, participated as a distinguished guest.

Ambassadors from regional countries discussed efforts to improve connectivity within their respective nations. They emphasized the importance of harmonized policies, infrastructure development, and the removal of trade barriers to sustainably integrate regional markets, it further said.

The participants discussed trade in industrial and agricultural products, energy cooperation, and the promotion of tourism in the region. They highlighted Pakistan's geographical position as a vital asset, serving as a gateway to Central Asia. They agreed that strong connectivity is essential for regional development.

The speakers expressed hope that the recommendations presented during the seminar would pave the way for future strategies to transform regional challenges into opportunities, ushering in a new era of economic growth.

A panel discussion was also held during the seminar, in which topics like inadequate transport infrastructure, regulatory complexities, security concerns, and geographical challenges came under discussion.

They speakers underscored the need to use modern technologies to streamline customs processes, facilitate the movement of goods, and simplify cross-border trade.

Children now freezing to death in war-shattered Gaza: UN

WEB DESK

UNITED NATIONS



The horrors in Gaza show no signs of abating, the United Nations said Thursday, noting that the enclave's Ministry of Health reports that over 46,000 Palestinians have been killed there since October 2023, most of them women and children.

Tragically in the last month alone, eight newborns have died of hypothermia and 74 children have already died amid the brutal conditions of winter in 2025.

"We enter this New Year carrying the same horrors as the last – there's been no progress and no solace. Children are now freezing to death," Louise Wateridge from the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, told UN News, a media website.

Meanwhile, hostilities continue with relentless operations by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) causing mass casualties and widespread destruction.

"The Secretary-General again strongly condemns the widespread killing of – and injury to – civilians in this conflict" said his Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric in a briefing on Thursday.

UN's humanitarian partners have reported that the hunger crisis across the Gaza Strip continues to worsen, amid critical supply shortages, severe access restrictions and violent armed looting.

In Central and Southern Gaza, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) disclosed that as of Sunday, UN humanitarian partners had exhausted all supplies in their warehouses.

This comes at a time when Israeli authorities continue to deny most requests to bring food assistance from the Erez West crossing to areas south of Wadi Gaza.

About 120,000 metric tonnes of food assistance, which is enough to provide rations for the entire population for more than three months, remains stranded outside of the Strip.

UN partners have warned that if additional supplies are not received, the distribution of food parcels to hungry families will remain extremely limited.

"More than 50 community kitchens providing over 200,000 meals a day to people in central and southern Gaza would also be at risk of shutting down in the coming days," Dujarric reported.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), as of Monday, only five of 20 bakeries supported by the agency are still operational across the Gaza Strip – all of them within Gaza governorate.

In order to be able to stay up and running, these bakeries rely on continued fuel deliveries by partners from southern Gaza.

However, humanitarian partners have now warned that the lack of fuel to power generators is crippling Gaza's health system, putting the lives of patients at risk and leaving aid workers with impossible choices to make.

The conditions are particularly alarming in besieged North Gaza where the movement of humanitarian personnel is heavily restricted.

Ongoing attacks and hostilities in the area have severely disrupted healthcare services for survivors who remain there.

Access to Al Awda Hospital in Jabalya – the only hospital in North Gaza still partially functioning – is extremely limited.

OCHA reports that Israeli authorities continue to deny UN-led efforts, including the most recent attempt on Wednesday to reach the region.

Across the Strip, the Israeli authorities facilitated only five missions out of 15, with four impeded, three denied and another three canceled due to security or logistical challenges.

"In Gaza, parents and children remain missing beneath rubble, separated or detained – their fates unanswered. Hope is silenced, and the brutal war rages on," Ms. Wateridge said.

Despite ongoing difficulties, the UN and its partners are working towards reaching people throughout the region with critical support.

Across Gaza, between 22 December and 8 January, some 560,000 people received primary and secondary healthcare services.

The Secretary-General called on all parties to respect international humanitarian law. "Civilians must be protected and respected at all times and their essential needs must be met," Dujarric said on his behalf.

"There must be an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages being held in Gaza," he added.

Trudeau Slams Trump's Talk of Annexing Canada as a Distraction from Tariff Threats

WEB DESK

TORRENTO



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau dismissed U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's comments about possibly annexing Canada, calling it a strategic distraction from the real issue of proposed tariffs on Canadian goods.

In an interview with CNN on Wednesday, Trudeau responded to Trump's remarks, made on Tuesday, suggesting that the U.S. could take economic force to acquire Canada. Trump's comments came as part of a broader threat to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian imports unless Canada strengthens its border security.

"What I think is happening in this is President Trump, who is a very skillful negotiator, is getting people to be somewhat distracted by that conversation," Trudeau said. "The real impact of those tariffs would be far more significant."

Trudeau outlined the potential consequences of such tariffs, which could significantly raise prices for American consumers. "Oil and gas and electricity and steel and aluminum and lumber and concrete and everything the American consumers buy from Canada (are) suddenly going to get a lot more expensive," he warned.

The Prime Minister emphasized that Canada would retaliate if Trump followed through on the tariff threats, reiterating comments made earlier this week that there was "not a snowball's chance in hell" that Canada would join the U.S. under any circumstances.

Trudeau also recalled the trade dispute between the two nations in 2018, when Canada responded to U.S. tariffs by imposing levies on American goods such as Heinz ketchup, bourbon, and Harley Davidson motorcycles. "We don't want to do that because it drives up prices for Canadians and harms our closest trading partner," he explained, stressing the importance of maintaining strong relations with the U.S.

Despite the provocative nature of Trump's rhetoric, Trudeau remained firm in his stance against any form of U.S. control over Canada, affirming the country's sovereignty and commitment to defending its interests.

UN chief offers condolences amid devastating wildfires in California

WEB DESK

UNITED NATIONS



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed sorrow over the raging wildfires that have devastated the Los Angeles area, claiming lives and displacing thousands.

The fires, described as some of the worst in the city's history, have burned thousands of acres, destroyed homes, and left firefighters battling to contain multiple blasts in unprecedented conditions.

"The Secretary-General is shocked and saddened by the widespread devastation caused by the fast-moving wildfires," said his Spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric, in a statement released.

Guterres extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and expressed solidarity with those displaced, many of whom have lost their homes.

The fires have claimed at least 10 lives, displaced more than 100,000 people, and destroyed hundreds of buildings. Damages are estimated to exceed $50 billion, according to US private forecaster AccuWeather.

The Secretary-General commended the courage and dedication of first responders working in "extremely difficult conditions" to protect lives and contain the fires.

More than 7,500 firefighters are battling the blazes, with officials describing the conditions as historic and dangerous.

Local fire chiefs reported that dry vegetation and winds with the force of hurricanes have fuelled the fires, leaving four out of six major ones completely uncontained.

Efforts are being further delayed by resource shortages and the challenging landscape.

Prevention and preparedness

Rainfall levels from late 2024 until now have been below average. This has created dry conditions that, combined with the Santana Winds – a well-known weather pattern in the region – have exacerbated fire risks, according to experts.

The Santana Winds, which typically sweep through the mountains, raise temperatures and drastically lower humidity, rapidly drying out vegetation and creating ideal conditions for wildfires to spread.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted the importance of prevention strategies to mitigate the impact of wildfires, including regular clearing of underbrush in forests, available water for firefighters, and testing firefighting capacities.

Evacuation planning is another critical priority, with experts stressing the importance of avoiding blocked evacuation routes.

"Wildfires move rapidly, and any evacuation system needs to account for all people, especially those who are elderly and unable to move quickly," said James Douris of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), an expert in early warning systems.

Health risks and climate factors

Beyond the immediate destruction, wildfires also pose significant public health risks.

According to WHO spokesperson Dr. Margaret Harris, wildfire smoke, a toxic mixture of pollutants, can cause premature deaths and long-term damage to the lungs, heart and brain.

"Better Than Staying in Jail": Inmates Deployed to Help Fight Wildfires in Los Angeles

WEB DESK

LOS ANGELES



In an effort to contain the devastating wildfire raging in the forests of Los Angeles, California, authorities have called on inmates from the state's prison system to assist in firefighting efforts.

According to international media, around 14,000 firefighters are currently battling the blaze, including approximately 400 inmates. The Los Angeles Times reports that about 30% of California's firefighting force is made up of prisoners.

The use of prisoners in firefighting operations is not a new practice in California, as the state has been utilizing inmate labor for wildfire management since 1915. In fact, a program was established in 1946 to properly train inmates in firefighting techniques through a special "fire camp" program.

The program is entirely voluntary, with inmates choosing to participate. Participation is contingent on meeting certain requirements, including physical fitness and good behavior within the prison. Inmates convicted of certain crimes, such as sex offenses or arson, are disqualified from the program.

Inmates who work as firefighters are compensated, but the pay is minimal. They earn only $27 for a 24-hour shift, during which they are provided with food, typically consisting of sandwiches and fruits. They typically work on "burnout" operations, where they deliberately set controlled fires to prevent the main fire from spreading.

Inmates are trained in more than 30 "fire camps," which are low-security facilities also functioning as firefighting schools. These camps are generally referred to as "conservation camps."

While the program provides valuable trained firefighters during emergencies, it has faced criticism for being exploitative. Critics argue that the program resembles a form of modern-day slavery. However, one inmate expressed that despite the dangers, "this is better than staying in jail."

The wildfire in Los Angeles is now being considered the costliest disaster in U.S. history, with initial damage estimates reaching $150 billion. Over 6,000 homes and buildings have been destroyed, and an additional 4,000 to 5,000 homes have been partially damaged. The insurance industry has suffered losses exceeding $8 billion due to the fire.

The fire has scorched more than 36,000 acres, with five different locations still burning. Authorities have received an offer of assistance from Australian firefighting teams. The number of fatalities in the incident has reached 10, with dozens more injured. Authorities fear the death toll may rise further as the situation unfolds.

Sri Lanka's president to pay state visit to China

WEB DESK

BEIJING

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will pay a state visit to China from January 14 to 17, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying announced Friday.

The visit, the first one to China by President Dissanayake since taking office, is of great significance to the development of China-Sri Lanka relations, Guo Jiakun, also a spokesperson for the foreign ministry, told a news briefing on the same day.

During the visit, President Xi Jinping will hold talks with President Dissanayake. Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee Zhao Leji will meet with him respectively.

Noting that China and Sri Lanka are traditional friendly neighbors, Guo said that since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1957, China-Sri Lanka relations have stood the test of the changing international landscape and maintained sound and steady development, setting a good example of friendly coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between countries with different sizes.

China stands ready to work with Sri Lanka to take President Dissanayake's visit as an opportunity to continue the traditional friendship, deepen political mutual trust, expand high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and practical cooperation in various fields, strive for new progress in bilateral strategic cooperative partnership based on sincere mutual assistance and everlasting friendship, and deliver more benefits to the two peoples, Guo said.

Pakistani products attract visitors at 29th Beijing New Year Goods Fair

WEB DESK

BEIJING



Pakistani products attracted a large number of visitors at the 29th Beijing New Year Goods Fair in Beijing.

The event officially kicked off at the National Agricultural Exhibition Center on January 3 was attended by visitors from around the world, offering a vibrant mix of cultural and commercial displays.

Pakistani exhibitors displayed a variety of items, including detailed handicrafts, marble products, onyx, and traditional woodwork, all of which captured the attention of visitors. The fair served as an important platform for Pakistani businesses to increase their international presence and promote the unique aspects of their culture.

A Pakistani businessman remarked that with the growing global interest in Pakistani products especially in onyx, they are happy to present their goods at such a prestigious event.

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and we hope to establish new partnerships and boost exports".

Visitors expressed great appreciation for the vibrant colors and high quality of the displayed products, with many particularly drawn to the intricate wood carvings on traditional tables and furniture, reflecting Pakistan's diverse cultural heritage.

As the fair continues through the week, it underscores the importance of such events in fostering trade and cultural exchange between countries. The participation of Pakistani vendors is not only a testament to the quality of their products but also a celebration of the rich traditions that Pakistan offers to the world.

It is worth mentioning that the 29th Beijing New Year Goods Fair features nearly 10,000 high-quality products from domestic and international enterprises, with a full range of food and clothing items on display.

Global growth to remain subdued amid lingering uncertainty, with South Asia's economic outlook 'robust': UN report

WEB DESK

UNITED NATIONS



Global economic growth is projected at 2.8 per cent in 2025, unchanged from the past year, with prospects in South Asia remaining "robust", according to a UN flagship report released on Thursday.

"South Asia's economic outlook remains robust, with regional GDP anticipated to grow by 5.7 per cent in 2025, compared to 5.9 per cent in 2024, supported by strong performance in India and recovery in Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka," the report produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) said.

However, it warned that risks to the outlook are tilted to the downside owing to deceleration in external demand, ongoing debt challenges, and social un-rests.

"Additionally, strong export growth in services and certain manufactured goods will bolster economic activity," the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2025 report said.

"Looming risks ahead East and South Asia face mounting downside risks that could dampen economic prospects. Key risks and challenges include escalating geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, and the impact of climate change, which could reignite inflationary pressures and pose severe risks to food security."

Replying to a question, Hamid Rashid, the Chief of Global Economic Monitoring Branch, Economic Analysis and Policy Division at DESA, said that once the debt issues of Pakistan and Sri Lanka are resolved, their economies are set to grow further.

In this regard, the report calls for bold multilateral action to address interconnected global crises, including debt, inequality and climate change.

Globally, the report the shows that despite withstanding a series of mutually reinforcing shocks, world economic growth has stagnated and remains below the pre-pandemic annual average of 3.2 per cent.

It highlights the enduring impact of weak investment, sluggish productivity, and high debt levels on global economic performance.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his foreword, called for decisive action to address these challenges.

"Countries cannot ignore these perils. In our interconnected economy, shocks on one side of the world push up prices on the other. Every country is affected and must be part of the solution," he stated.

The United States is expected to experience a slowdown in 2025 as labour markets soften and consumer spending settles down, the report projects.

Meanwhile, despite easing inflation and resilient labour markets, Europe's economic recovery remains constrained due to recurring challenges such as weak productivity growth and an ageing population.

In East Asia, the economy is projected to sustain relatively strong growth, supported by robust private consumption and stable performance in China.

In Africa, modest improvements in growth are anticipated, thanks to recoveries in major economies including Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa. Although conflicts, rising debt-servicing costs and climate-related challenges weigh heavily on the region's prospects.

Overall, global trade is forecast to expand by 3.2 per cent in 2025, driven by strong exports from Asia and a rebound in services trade.

Moreover, inflation is projected to ease globally, declining to 3.4 per cent, providing some relief to businesses and households.

Nevertheless, many developing countries are expected to face persistent inflationary pressures, with one in five experiencing double-digit rates. High debt burdens and limited access to international financing will continue to hinder recovery.

Food inflation remains a pressing issue, with nearly half of developing countries experiencing rates above five per cent.

This has deepened food insecurity, particularly in low-income nations already grappling with extreme weather events, conflicts and economic instability.

PCB Inducts Mushtaq, Inzamam, Saeed Anwar and Misbah into Hall of Fame 2024

● Inductees Express Gratitude and Reflect on Memorable Career Highlights

TAHIR CH.

LAHORE

Inzamam ul Haq, Misbah ul Haq, Mushtaq Mohammad and Saeed Anwar have been inducted to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Hall of Fame. The quartet has joined the other illustrious 10 cricketers who have won the coveted title.

The PCB launched its Hall of Fame in 2021 and since then Abdul Qadir, AH Kardar, Fazal Mahmood, Hanif Mohammad, Imran Khan, Javed Miandad, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Younis Khan and Zaheer Abbas have been named. Two cricketers are added to the group every year and since no cricketers were named in the year 2023, four former legendary cricketers have been added to the Hall of Fame in 2024.

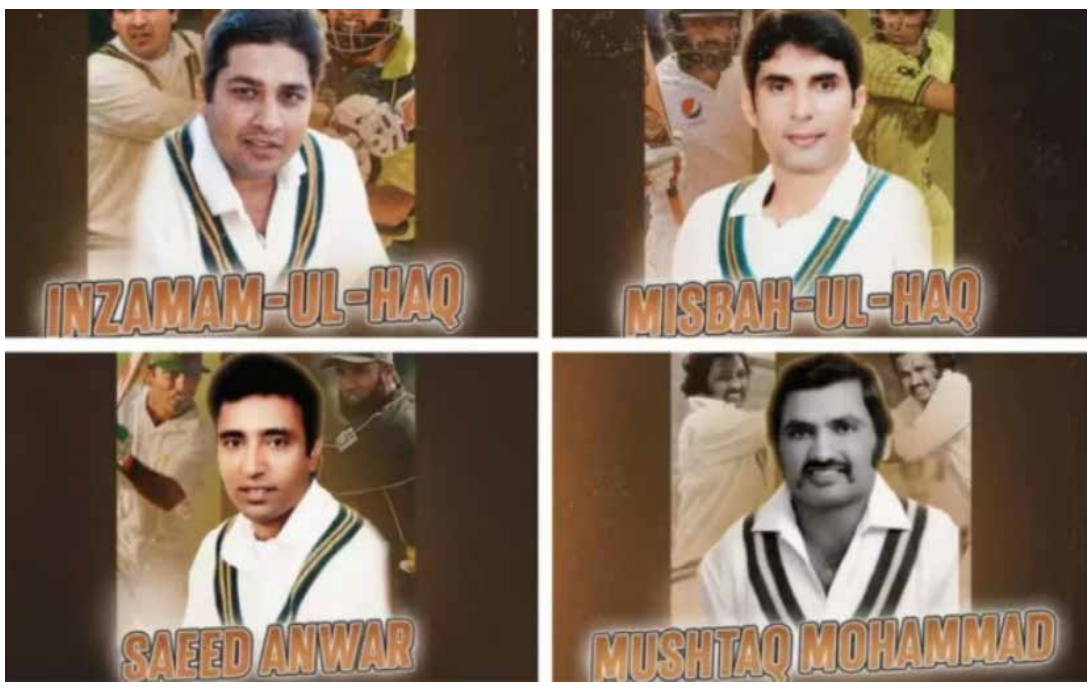
The four stalwarts will be formally inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame during the course of the year when they will be presented with commemorative caps and specially-designed plaques.

The four cricketers have been wonderful servants of the game for Pakistan and won laurels for the country during different eras. All of them served as captain of the Pakistan cricket team while Misbah ul Haq was the most successful captain in the team's cricketing history.

Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi, in his commendation message, said, " On behalf of the Pakistan Cricket Board, I extend heartfelt congratulations to these four cricketing legends on their well-deserved inductions into the PCB Hall of Fame. This honour represents a tribute to their outstanding contributions to Pakistan cricket and to the global game."

"These four giants of the game hold a special place in Pakistan's rich cricketing history. Their contributions not only elevated the sport within Pakistan but also inspired future generations to pursue excellence. Their talent, charisma and unwavering commitment have made them true ambassadors of cricket and the PCB takes immense pride in honouring their accomplishments," Naqvi added.

Paying tribute to the skill and mastery in the game, Chairman PCB said Mushtaq Mohammad is regarded as one of Pakistan's finest captains, known for his astute leadership and inspiring style. Inzamam-ul-Haq's immense talent and match-winning ability have left an indelible mark on the sport.



Misbah-ul-Haq took charge of the Pakistan team during challenging times, guiding it to the pinnacle of Test rankings and achieving a historic series win in the Caribbean. Saeed Anwar, with his natural grace and classical technique, redefined the role of an opener and thrived against some of the world's best bowlers under all conditions.

Inzamam-ul-Haq played international cricket from 1991 to 2007 and was a member of Pakistan's 1992 World Cup-winning team. He is the leading run-scorer for Pakistan in ODI cricket with 11,701 runs, and currently third in the list of Pakistan Test run-scorers (8,829). He captained Pakistan in 31 Tests, winning 11, drawing 9 and losing 11. Also led in 87 ODIs, winning 51, losing 33 and 3 no-results

Misbah-ul-Haq represented Pakistan from 2001 to 2017, was part of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2009 winning squad and guided the team to the No.1 spot in the ICC Test Team Rankings in 2016. The only cricketer to captain Pakistan in, at least, 50 Tests, leading in 56 Tests and winning 26; also led the team in 87 ODIs (including in the 2015 World Cup) and in eight T20Is.

Mushtaq Mohammad played for Pakistan from 1959 to 1979 and captained the team to its first-ever Test win in Australia in 1977, featured in inaugural ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 1975 in England before coaching the Pakistan side to the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 1999 final – also in England.

Meanwhile, Saeed Anwar represented Pakistan from 1989 to 2003, amassing a total of 31 centuries and 68 half-centuries, including three centuries and three half-centuries across the 1996, 1999 and 2003 World Cups. He scored 8,824 runs in 247 ODIs, including 7,227 runs in 205 away ODIs. More than 20 years after his last match, Anwar remains Pakistan's leading century-maker in ODI cricket with 20 such scores. He also led the Green Shirts in 11 ODIs.

Acknowledging the honor bestowed on him by the Pakistan cricket, former batting great Inzamam ul Haq said "I am deeply honored to be inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame, joining a group of remarkable cricketers from my generation and those before me. To be recognized by the parent organization of Pakistan cricket is truly special and I hope this initiative continues to inspire current and future generations of cricketers.

Misbah ul Haq, in his note of thank, said "I have been incredibly fortunate to have shared the field with some of the most talented and skilled cricketers, whose support and camaraderie enabled me to grow and improve throughout my career. As a captain, I had the privilege of leading players who were committed, passionate and driven to give their all for Pakistan. Their contributions were instrumental in shaping some of the most iconic moments in our cricketing history. For that, I remain deeply grateful.

The four icons of the game were inducted following an independent and transparent voting process, which was participated by Wasim Akram, Zaheer Abbas (both PCB Hall of Famers), Azhar Ali (former Pakistan captain), Bismah Maroof, Nain Abidi (both former women international cricketers), Majid Bhatti, Mohi Shah, Mohammad Yaqoob, Nauman Niaz, Sawera Pasha and Zahid Maqsood (cricket journalists/analysts).

Reign sign D Emily Mason to one-year deal

WEB DESK

PARIS

Seattle Reign FC signed former Rutgers defender Emily Mason and former North Carolina forward Maddie Dahlien.

Mason, 22, and Dahlien, 20, are the first college athletes to sign with the club following the NWSL's transition away from a draft. Mason inked a one-year deal for 2025 and Dahlien signed a three-year contract through 2027.

Mason started 72 of 82 matches at Rutgers from 2021-24 and collected six goals and seven assists. She made the All-Big Ten first team in 2022 and 2024.

"Emily is a smart, versatile and highly skilled defender with tremendous potential as a professional," Reign general manager Lesle Gallimore said. "Her impressive collegiate career and reputation as a leader and teammate speak volumes about her character and talent."

Dahlien helped the Tar Heels win the 2024 national championship and recorded seven goals and thirteen assists in 65 matches across three seasons. She was an All-ACC third-team selection in 2024.

"Maddie's relentless work ethic, competitive spirit and growth mindset align perfectly with the values of our club," Gallimore said.

"Her speed and tenacity make her a dynamic threat in attack, while her ability to press defensively adds another dimension to her game."

UK govt backs England's cricket match against Afghanistan

WEB DESK

ENGLAND



England's upcoming Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan should go ahead despite calls for a boycott over the Taliban's treatment of women, according to a senior British government minister.

A group of more than 160 British politicians have called on the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to refuse to play Afghanistan in protest at the women's sports policy of the Taliban.

Since returning to power in 2021 the Taliban have effectively banned female participation -- a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board at odds with International Cricket Council (ICC) rules.

The ICC, however, has allowed the Afghanistan men's team to continue to compete in global competitions, with England due to face them in the one-day international Champions Trophy in Lahore on February 26.

And Cabinet minister Lisa Nandy said the match should be played amid concerns a boycott would see England docked points were they to forfeit the game.

"I do think it should go ahead," Nandy, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport told the BBC on Friday.

She added: "I'm instinctively very cautious about boycotts in sports, partly because I think they're counterproductive.

"I think they deny sports fans the opportunity that they love, and they can also very much penalise the athletes and the sports people who work very, very hard to reach the top of their game, and then they're denied the opportunities to compete.

"They are not the people that we want to penalise for the appalling actions of the Taliban against women and girls."

The ECB has resisted calls for a boycott, with chief executive Richard Gould saying instead he would "actively advocate" for collective action by the ICC instead.

That position has been backed by Downing Street, with a spokesman for UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer urging the ICC to take the lead on the issue.

South Africa, who are also due to play Afghanistan at the Champions Trophy, have backed the ECB's stance.

This is despite veteran anti-apartheid campaigner and British politician Peter Hain, who played a key role in sparking his native South Africa's sporting isolation during the 1970s, calling for a boycott.

Muhammad Asif Defeats Naseem Akhtar to Reach SAARC Snooker Championship Final

● Asif Aims for SAARC Snooker Title in Final Clash

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

COLOMBO



Pakistan's seasoned cueist Mohammad Asif proved his class once again, defeating Sri Lanka's Thaha Irshath in a flawless final to win the 3rd SAARC Snooker Championship at the Moors Sports Club here on Friday.

The reigning world champion showcased his unmatched skillset in the one-sided affair, winning the match in straight frames.

With his victory, Mohammad Asif has now etched his name as the second Pakistani to claim the SAARC Snooker title, joining Asjad Iqbal, who won the inaugural edition in 2019.

Asif got off to a flying start, comfortably taking the first frame with a 67-point break to stamp his dominance early on.

The second frame, however, was where Irshath showed glimpses of resistance. At one stage, the Sri Lankan cueist seemed to have control of the frame, but a crucial error on the pink allowed Asif to bounce back and seal the frame 73-46.

The third frame started with a rare slip from Asif, as a scratch on his initial break gave Irshath an early lead.

However, the Sri Lankan's inability to capitalize on the opportunity proved costly. Asif swiftly turned the tables with a 58-point clearance, extinguishing any hopes of a comeback.

By the fourth frame, Asif had all the momentum and showed no mercy. With a spectacular 50-point break, he outclassed Irshath 109-6.

The final frame was the icing on the cake for Asif, as he delivered a crushing 74-0 win to complete the rout and lift the title in style.

It was a dominant tournament for Mohammad Asif, who remained unbeaten throughout. His impressive campaign included a hard-fought semi-final victory over fellow Pakistani Muhammad Naseem Akhtar, who had also been undefeated until their encounter.

Sabalenka eyes Australian Open win to widen gap on rankings rivals

WEB DESK

MELBOURNE

Aryna Sabalenka will look to join a select group of players to win three straight Australian Open titles this month but the big question ahead of the year's first Grand Slam is can anyone stop the Belarusian from tightening her grip on the women's game?

The 26-year-old world number one is the red-hot favourite at Melbourne Park, where another victory would give her a fourth major title and widen the gap in the rankings to Poland's Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff of the United States.

Sabalenka, who started her season by winning an 18th career WTA title in Brisbane on Sunday, has reached at least the semi-finals at nine of her last 12 Grand Slams, a run which included the addition of the U.S. Open crown to her trophy cabinet.

That kind of form has earned comparisons with Serena Williams, who got to the final four at 10 Grand Slams between 2014 and 2017 during a run when the American great won six of her 23 major titles.

"Definitely, I've got some confidence at the Grand Slams," said Sabalenka, who can become the first woman to capture three successive Australian Open titles since Switzerland's Martina Hingis achieved the feat from 1997-1999.

"I know I'm capable of so many things, that I'm able to hold that beautiful trophy. It's good to know that. But there's still (some) way to go. A lot of things have to be done.



A real estate investment trust launched by Argentine soccer star Lionel Messi has made its Spanish market debut at 57.4 euros per share.

"You have to focus on improving yourself every day, do your best, and hope for the best. That's my mentality going into the Australian Open."

After being replaced by Sabalenka as world number one at the end of last season, Swiatek has no shortage of motivation heading into the Melbourne Park major.

The Pole held the top spot for 125 weeks during two spells from the 2022 season and while the clay courts of Paris continue to offer her the best chance of adding to her five major titles she is already showing strong form in Australia.

A Melbourne semi-finalist in 2022, Swiatek, 23, delivered some strong individual performances in the United Cup mixed team competition, taking Poland to the final last weekend.

"I'm very satisfied with my game," said the world number two, who served a month-long suspension late last year over a doping violation.

"I was able to overcome difficult moments by maintaining a high level of tennis for a long time. This is what all players seek, so it's nice to feel like this already in the first week of competition."

Swiatek came up short in her bid to lead Poland to victory at the United Cup after she lost in straight sets to American Gauff, who hailed the win over the Pole as one of the best performances of her career.

Gauff's sole Grand Slam title came at Flushing Meadows in 2023 and she underlined her hardcourt credentials by beating both Sabalenka and Swiatek en route to winning the WTA Finals in November.

"I think after the way she finished (last season), she's going to be really interesting to see," said Australia's former women's doubles world number one Rennae Stubbs.

Fit again, Neuer back in Bayern goal for away game at Gladbach

WEB DESK

BERLIN



Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer will make his comeback on Saturday at Borussia Moenchengladbach after a rib injury, but his replacement Daniel Peretz will be sidelined for several weeks, coach Vincent Kompany said.

Neuer broke a rib during a rough challenge that also earned him his first career red card in their German Cup loss to Bayer Leverkusen on Dec. 3.

Israel international Peretz stepped in until the winter break, but he twisted his ankle in training earlier in the week and will now be sidelined for several weeks.

"There is good luck that Manuel is back with us and bad luck that Daniel will be missing for some weeks," Kompany said. "We don't know yet for exactly how long. Hopefully at the end of the month or start of next month, Daniel will be back."

Bayern are in top spot on 36 points as the Bundesliga resumes after the three-week winter break, with a four-point lead over champions Bayer Leverkusen.

They also travel to Feyenoord in the Champions League on Jan. 22.

The Bavarians have lost five of their last nine away games at Gladbach, more than against any other team in the same period.

Kompany will also be missing in-form Jamal Musiala - the attacking midfielder, who has scored nine league goals so far, is out with the flu.

"I have said it before that Jamal....cannot be replaced one-for-one," Kompany said. "But we will not change what we have planned for this game on Saturday. We go into the game to win it.

"But Jamal will be back very soon. It is normal not to have all players available at all times, so we need to solve it differently and we have done that season," Kompany said.

Murray braced for Djokovic ire in coaching debut at Australian Open

WEB DESK

AUSTRALIA



Andy Murray is prepared to face the pressure from Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open, as he believes that the "unique opportunity" to coach him is worth it.

The Serbian 24-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic made the shock decision to hire Murray in November, just months after the Scot called time on his playing career.

In his first comments since then, fellow former number one Murray, who has known Djokovic since their junior playing days, said the call came out of the blue.

"I said to him: 'Look, I need to think about it and talk to my family,'" the BBC quoted Murray as saying.

"So I spoke to them and after a couple of days I thought that it was a pretty unique opportunity and experience.

"I thought it would be a good idea to try it."

Andy Murray is himself a three-time major winner — and five-time finalist in Australia — with both players members of the so-called "Big Four", along with Rafael Nadal, who retired last year, and Roger Federer, who left the sport in 2022.

Djokovic and Murray faced each other 36 times in their careers with the Serb winning 25 of them.

Nineteen of those clashes came in finals, with both men known for sounding off at their box in pressure moments. This time it could be Murray on the receiving end.

"I know it's not easy out there — it's stressful and at times he's going to want to vent towards his team and his box," said Murray.

"Providing that he's giving his best effort and trying as hard as he can, I'm absolutely fine with him expressing himself how he wants."



ISLAMABAD: Women are sits on green belt along 7th Avenue as enjoying sunshine during cold weather, in the Federal Capital. — Staff Photo

WhatsApp, Facebook & Instagram Services May Be Disrupted in Pakistan, IT Ministry Warns

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The Ministry of Information Technology has issued a warning that social media services, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, may face disruptions in Pakistan. The statement highlighted that technical issues in the submarine cables could affect these platforms, particularly during peak usage hours.

To mitigate the impact, additional bandwidth has been added to reduce the disruptions caused by the cable faults, leading to noticeable improvements in internet speeds. However, the Ministry cautioned that there might still be slower service on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram during peak hours.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) recently attributed the slowdown in internet services to the growing use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) in the country. According to the PTA, VPN traffic has exacerbated the slowdown, and the increased demand on international bandwidth could lead to a loss of foreign exchange.

The PTA report also pointed out that the use of VPNs costs Pakistan approximately one dollar per megabyte. Due to the disruptions, the reliance on VPNs has surged, bypassing local Content Delivery Networks (CDNs), which typically provide around 70% of the internet content in Pakistan.



Providing best facilities to Hujjaj govt's top priority: Ashrafi

● Ministry opens private Hajj bookings for 2025, packages start from Rs.1.1 mln

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ISLAMABAD

Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and the Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Islamic Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on Friday, said that the government prioritizes providing the best facilities to the intending pilgrims (Hujjaj Karam) and was taking steps to facilitate them in collaboration with private Hajj groups.

Addressing a press conference along with the Chairman of the Hajj Organizers Association of Pakistan (HOAP) Nasir Khan, he said that Saudi Arabia had appreciated the role of HOAP for making the best Hajj arrangements last year and "We follow the regulations of the Saudi government during Hajj".

He added that the Pakistani government are working to improve arrangements for the government quota and private Hajj pilgrims.

Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi stated that the Ministry of Religious Affairs had settled the matters with the private Hajj bookings groups in the last day meeting and 904 private groups would carry out the Hajj operation 2025.

He added that last year, only 14 complaints had been lodged of 90,000 private pilgrims while this year "We will ensure no complaint".

He said that the Hajj conference and Hajj Exhibition was going to start in Saudi Arabia on January 13 in which a Pakistani delegation led by Chairman HOAP Nasir Khan would participate.

Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony thanked the Saudi government for giving respect and facilitating the Pakistan Hajj mission.





Chairman HOAP Nasir Khan on the occasion said that exemplary arrangements would be ensured during Hajj 2025 while 80 per cent of intending pilgrims who were going to perform Hajj and collect the blessing of Allah Almighty would perform the Hajj at the cost of Rs one million.

Meanwhile, The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony has granted private Hajj organizing companies and their sub-companies permission to commence bookings for Hajj 2025.

According to Spokesperson Muhammad Umar Butt on Friday, Private Hajj Scheme bookings will be open from January 10 to 31, 2025.

He said the ministry has published details of various Hajj packages under the Private Hajj Scheme on its official website.

Umar said basic Hajj packages range from Rs.1.1 million to Rs.2.15 million, while additional premium packages exceeding Rs.3 million must be approved by the 'Hajj Policy Formulation Committee.'

He said Private Hajj operators are required to conduct bookings for pilgrims in compliance with the Service Provider Agreement (SPA). For packages costing over Rs.3 million, operators must submit complete details during the approval process, he added.

Details of all transactions involving packages over Rs.3 million will also be shared with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other relevant authorities, he stated.

The spokesperson said pilgrims opting for private Hajj packages are advised to verify the company's registration via the ministry's website or the 'Pak Hajj' mobile application before making any payments. He said the ministry has strictly instructed that all monetary transactions should only be made through the company's official bank account, and a signed service agreement must be obtained for the selected package.

He urged pilgrims to thoroughly review the facilities included in their Hajj packages before finalizing their booking to ensure transparency and avoid any inconvenience.

Malala Yousafzai to Attend Girls' Education Summit in Islamabad

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai will participate in a high-profile summit on girls' education, set to take place in Islamabad on January 11-12, 2025. The event aims to advance girls' education and raise awareness about women's empowerment in Muslim communities.



Malala, a renowned advocate for education, is expected to speak on the critical need to protect girls' right to education, drawing from her personal experience and ongoing advocacy efforts. The summit will bring together Muslim leaders from around the world to discuss solutions to challenges faced by girls in accessing education.

Malala, who survived a Taliban attack in 2012 for speaking out against the ban on girls' education in Pakistan's Swat Valley, has long been a vocal advocate for girls' rights. The tragic attack, which left her critically injured, led to her evacuation abroad for treatment. Since then, Malala has made several visits to Pakistan but has remained a prominent global figure for girls' education.

In a statement on X (formerly Twitter), Malala shared her excitement for the summit: "I am excited to join Muslim leaders from around the world for a critical conference on girls' education. On Sunday, I will speak about protecting rights for all girls to go to school, and why leaders must hold the Taliban accountable for their crimes against Afghan women & girls."

Malala's attendance at the summit, organized by her Malala Fund, underscores her continued commitment to advocating for education for all girls, particularly in regions where girls face significant barriers to schooling.

The summit is expected to provide a platform for world leaders to collaborate on advancing education for girls in Muslim-majority countries, with a strong focus on accountability and action against groups like the Taliban that impede educational opportunities for women and girls.

Polio Resurgence in Pakistan: 70 Cases Confirmed in 2024

● Karachi East now has reported two polio cases in 2024

STAFF REPORTER

KARACHI

The National Institute of Health's Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication has confirmed a new case of wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) in a male child from Karachi East. This brings the total number of polio cases in Pakistan to 70 for the year 2024, with this particular case first observed on December 21, 2024.

With this confirmation, Karachi East now has reported two polio cases in 2024. The resurgence of the wild poliovirus remains a significant public health concern for Pakistan, which has been battling an increasing number of WPV1 cases. The breakdown of cases across the country shows 27 from Balochistan, 21 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 20 from Sindh, and one each from Punjab and Islamabad.



Polio, a debilitating and paralytic disease, has no cure, making vaccination efforts even more crucial. To protect children, multiple doses of the oral polio vaccine, alongside completing routine vaccinations for children under five years old, are essential to building immunity against the disease.

The Pakistan Polio Program is actively addressing the resurgence with several nationwide vaccination campaigns each year, ensuring vaccines are delivered directly to children's doorsteps. Additionally, the Expanded Program on Immunization offers free vaccinations for 12 different childhood diseases at health centers across the country.

The first national Polio vaccination campaign for 2025 is scheduled to run from February 3 to 9. Health authorities emphasize the importance of parents ensuring their children are vaccinated against polio to help eradicate the disease once and for all.

Rain forecast for parts of Punjab

STAFF REPORTER

LAHORE

The Met Office on Friday forecast rain in parts of Punjab on Saturday (January 11).

According to the forecast, there are chances of rain with thunderstorm in Lahore, Sheikhupura, Kasur, Okara, Sahiwal, Sialkot, Narowal, Gujranwala, Rahim Yar Khan, Khanpur, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Pakpatan and Khanewal areas of Punjab on Saturday. The Met Office forecast overcast but dry weather in other districts of the province.

In Murree and the surrounding areas, the Met Office has forecast extreme cold and snowfall with light rain. Southern and central areas of Punjab will remain under the blanket of fog.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, weather will remain cold and partially overcast. Mountainous regions will remain in the grip of the ongoing cold wave. Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan and the surrounding areas will receive fog in the morning.

In Balochistan, weather will remain dry and cold while mountainous regions will witness extreme fog in the morning and evening.

In Sindh, weather will remain cold and dry in most parts of the province.

In Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, weather will remain extremely cold and partially overcast.



Continuous efforts, unwavering determination core principles of PN Dockyard: Vice Admiral Ovais

STAFF REPORTER

KARACHI



Vice Chief of the Naval Staff Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami on Friday emphasized that continuous efforts, unwavering determination, and a strong commitment to innovation are the core principles of PN Dockyard.

Addressing at Pakistan Navy COMLOG Command Annual Efficiency Award Ceremony 2024 here, he congratulated the award winners and advised to continue the good work with same zeal and zest, said a press release issued by Directorate General Public Relations (Pak Navy).

In his address, Commander Logistics, Rear Admiral M Sohail Arshad highlighted operational achievements of COMLOG Command during the year 2024.

He apprised that COMLOG Command successfully carried out its mandated role despite the challenges. He further highlighted that professional excellence has been and will continue to remain hallmark of COMLOG Command.

The ceremony is organized annually to recognize the efforts of employees and units for their pivotal role in achieving Command's objectives.

During the ceremony, the Chief Guest presented awards to individuals and units for their outstanding performances.

The event was attended by a large number of senior serving and retired Technical Branch Officers, CPOs/Sailors and Navy Civilians of COMLOG Command.

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