

Positive Post



Greenwich University

A Publication by Department of Mass Communication & Media Studies and the Diplomatic Academy

Pakistan's standing in the global rankings

Overview

Pakistan observed a slight improvement in the overall international rankings in 2021 covering socio-economic and political outcomes of the country. Several elements complemented the prospects including successful democratic transition, efficient counter-terrorism measures leading to enhanced peace and security, and foreign direct investment inflows under CPEC, among others. Albeit, decoupling economic growth from human development suggests that the country needs to enhance its scores in health, education and standard of living by ensuring political will, equitable financing and efficient governance to ensure parallel growth for marginalized segments as well. Civil and political liberties must grow hand in hand to ensure a conducive environment for democratic dialogue and accountability which ultimately supports its nation building process.

DEMOCRACY INDEX

Pakistan was placed at the 104th spot among 167 states on the global Democracy Index 2021, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).

Index from 0 (authoritarian regime) to 10 (full democracy)

Compiled based on indicators covering: Electoral process and pluralism, Civil liberties, Functioning of government, Political participation, and Political culture.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Pakistan ranked 161 out of 192 countries in the Human Development Index scoring 2022 0.562 out of 1.000 in 2018 compared to 0.560 out of 1.000 in 2017.

Index from 0 (low development) to 1 (very high development)

Compiled based on indicators covering: life expectancy, education, and per capita income

PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

Pakistan's press freedom rank dropped to 145 out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index, An annual ranking of countries published by Reporters Without Borders (RWB), an international non-governmental organization dedicated to safeguard the right to freedom of information.

Compiled based on indicators covering: pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and infrastructure.

TERRORISM INDEX

Terrorism Index in Pakistan decreased to 7.83 in 2021 from 7.92 in 2020.

Index from 0 (lowest impact) to 10 (highest impact)

Compiled based on indicators covering : Total number of terrorist incidents in a given year, total number of fatalities caused by terrorism in a given year, total number of injuries caused by terrorism in a given year and the approximate level of total property damage from terrorist incidents in a given year.

ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

In 2021, index of economic freedom for Pakistan was 51.7 score.

Though Pakistan index of economic freedom fluctuated substantially in recent years, it tended to decrease through 2002 - 2021 period ending at 51.7 score in 2021.

Compiled based on indicators covering: Market openness, Regulatory efficiency, Government size and the rule of law.

Positive Post is a strategic effort to project achievement and contributions of Pakistan. While showcasing Greenwich University's cultural diplomacy initiatives, it also encapsulates a compilation of different developments complementing Pakistan's socio-cultural, economic & Political outcomes

Historic April

17 April, 1953: Muhammad Ali Bogra is sworn as the new prime minister.

2 April 1954: Pakistan forms an alliance with Turkey which, although not including military cooperation, opens the way to the Middle-East alliance due to its allowance of the entry of other nations.

April, 1962: Elections for the National[99] and provincial assembly were held on the basis of Basic Democracies.

21 April, 1972: Martial Law lifted; constitutional rule is restored in the country. Hamoodur Rahman is sworn in as Chief Justice of Pakistan.

10 April, 1973: 1973 Constitution of Pakistan enacted by the National Assembly.

22 April, 2004: The European Parliament voted in favour of a new trade and cooperation agreement with Pakistan, giving a vital boost to Islamabad's relations with the European Union.

26 April, 2006: Pervez Musharraf lays foundation-stone of Diamir-Bhasha dam.

11 April, 2022: Shehbaz Sharif is sworn in as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

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PM Shehbaz discusses investment opportunities, digital economy with VEON group chief

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif discussed investment opportunities and the promotion of the digital economy with Kaan Terzioglu, chief executive officer of VEON Group a telecommunications and digital services company, state-run PTV said on X.

During a meeting with the VEON Group CEO at PM House, the prime minister “emphasised the promotion of digital investment in Pakistan”, the broadcaster said.

In the meeting, the prime minister outlined the successful auction of the 5G spectrum that was held last month, with 480 megahertz (MHz) sold for \$507 million.



The three bidders —Zong, Jazz and Ufone had competed for the 2,600MHz band, a key frequency range for 5G services. Zong acquired 110MHz, Ufone 180MHz and Jazz 190MHz during the

auction.

During the meeting, PM Shehbaz also shared details of the government’s initiatives to digitise the economy by ensuring transparen-

cy and increasing youth participation in the IT sector, PTV added. Terzioglu lauded the investment opportunities in Pakistan and the government’s efforts to establish a cashless economy, according to the report. He also expressed VEON Group’s intention to further increase investment in the country, said the state broadcaster. Apart from the spectrum auction, the government is also working on expanding satellite-based internet services, linking Pakistan with international cable systems to become an internet transit hub, and expanding fibre networks across the country.

Courtesy: Dawn

International Finance Corporation briefs Aurangzeb on ‘growing portfolio’ in Pakistan

A delegation from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) called on Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and discussed its “growing portfolio in Pakistan, which now exceeds \$2 billion annually and approximately \$2.7bn committed this year”, according to the finance ministry. IFC is the private sector arm of the World Bank Group.

According to the ministry, the IFC delegation comprised IFC Divisional Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia Simon Andrews, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan Bolormaa Amgaabazar and IFC Country Manager Naz Khan.

Key areas of engagement included financial sector support through risk-sharing and guarantee facilities to promote trade and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) financing; expansion of local currency financing to mitigate foreign exchange risks; and upcoming initiatives such as a diversified payment rights facility and a green bond issuance with a leading local bank, the ministry said.

“Discussions focused on further scaling private sector investment, particularly in infrastructure and public-private partnerships,”



it said.

The ministry added: “While progress had been made in areas such as urban water management and distribution efficiency projects, both sides acknowledged the need to develop a stronger pipeline of projects and enhance coordination to unlock larger-scale private investment in sectors including energy, transport, and logistics.”

The minister emphasised the importance of adopting a client-centric approach to financing solutions, particularly in facilitating local currency lending to support private sector growth and reduce exchange rate vulnerabilities, it said, adding that Aurangzeb underscored that “such initiatives complement, rather than substitute, foreign currency inflows

and are essential for sustainable economic expansion”.

“The meeting also covered collaboration on job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation, including proposals for developing a venture capital ecosystem and strengthening private sector engagement in policy formulation,” the ministry stated.

During the meeting, both sides discussed mechanisms to further institutionalise dialogue between government and business stakeholders to support effective and responsive policymaking.

The broader discussions addressed regional economic connectivity, particularly with Central Asian countries, and the importance of leveraging emerging opportuni-

ties in agri-business, infrastructure, and trade linkages, it added. Aurangzeb briefed the delegation on the government’s ongoing efforts to maintain macroeconomic stability amid global uncertainties, including proactive management of energy supply chains, fiscal discipline, and targeted subsidy frameworks.

The ministry stated that both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening collaboration, accelerating implementation of priority initiatives, and leveraging the full suite of World Bank Group instruments to support Pakistan’s reform agenda, private sector development, and sustainable, inclusive economic growth.

Aurangzeb welcomed Andrews on his recent appointment and appreciated the IFC’s enhanced engagement in Pakistan over the past few years, particularly in investment, trade finance, and advisory support.

He acknowledged the positive impact of IFC’s on-ground leadership and responsiveness, noting that increased senior-level presence has significantly strengthened collaboration and delivery, the statement said.

Courtesy: Dawn

'Historic milestone': Pakistan, Norway sign carbon market deal under Paris Agreement

Pakistan and Norway on Wednesday signed the former's first-ever carbon market deal under the Paris Agreement, according to an official press release.

According to the press release, "Pakistan and Norway on Wednesday signed the country's first landmark bilateral agreement under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement, opening the door to international carbon trading, climate finance and major investment in clean energy and climate-smart agriculture."

To tackle climate change and its negative impacts, world leaders at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) signed the Paris Agreement on December 12, 2015, according to the United Nations. The agreement included commitments from all countries to reduce their emissions and work together to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and called on countries to strengthen their commitments over time.

The press release issued on Wednesday said that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in Islamabad under the auspices of the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination marked Pakistan's "formal entry into the global carbon market and is being seen as a breakthrough in the country's climate diplomacy".

Under the agreement, Pakistan will be able to develop carbon-credit generating projects in sectors such as clean energy, agriculture, transport and waste management and potentially sell the resulting emission reductions to Norway, the statement said.

Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Musadik Malik termed the agreement a "historic milestone", saying it would shift Pakistan from carbon market preparedness to practical implementation, the statement added.

"This is Pakistan's first bilateral agreement under Article 6.2 and an important step towards implementation," Malik said.

"It creates a credible pathway for international cooperation and investment in Pakistan's climate priorities."

Malik said the agreement would strengthen Pakistan's position in international carbon markets and create new opportunities for the country's emerging green economy.

"Carbon markets cannot be treated as an end in themselves. They must help countries like Pakistan finance transition pathways, create jobs, attract technology and deliver real benefits to communities," he said.

The climate minister said Pakistan had already put in place the country's first national policy guidelines for carbon trading, approved by the federal cabinet in January 2025, and was now moving to establish rules, reporting systems and bilateral arrangements needed to operationalise the market.

He said Pakistan had strong mitigation potential in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, transport and waste management, and that the agreement would encourage project developers and investors to move forward.

Addressing the signing ceremony, Norway's Ambassador to Pakistan Per Albert Ilsaas said the accord marked the beginning of a new era in bilateral environmental cooperation, the statement added.

"Pakistan is among the countries most affected by climate change, and we believe this partnership can deliver both measurable emission reductions and real development benefits," he said.

"Norway, which aims to become climate neutral by 2030, was seeking to purchase Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs) under Article 6, not to meet its formal climate targets but to go beyond them," he said.

"Norway is not purchasing ITMOs to meet its nationally determined contribution targets. We are purchasing them to achieve climate neutrality beyond those commitments," he said.



Ilsaas said Norway's Global Emission Reduction Initiative, launched in 2024 with a budget of \$1.5 billion, would provide carbon finance to countries such as Pakistan.

"Through Norwegian Global Emission Reduction (Noger), we want to channel carbon finance into countries such as Pakistan and help bridge the gap in climate mitigation finance," he said.

He added that Norway was looking beyond individual carbon-credit projects and was interested in large-scale programmes in renewable energy, industry and agriculture.

"We are looking beyond individual projects. We are interested in cooperation across entire sectors where climate policies can generate emission reductions at scale," the ambassador said.

The ambassador said Norway had already signed similar agreements with Benin, Indonesia, Zambia, Jordan and Senegal and was working to buy 15 million carbon credits by 2030.

The statement said that Ambassador Ilsaas also invited Pakistan to present a broader pipeline of projects, specifically pointing to renewable energy ventures such as the Zhenfa 100-megawatt solar project and the Indus wind energy project as possible candidates for future cooperation.

"Both sides also agreed that the new ambitious pact could significantly boost Pakistan's access to climate finance and private-sector investment, while helping the country pursue low-carbon growth and meet its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement," it concluded.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Ethiopia eye maritime alliance

Pakistan and Ethiopia have agreed to explore establishing a trilateral maritime alliance, potentially involving Djibouti, to enhance trade connectivity between Asia and Africa.

An understanding was reached during a meeting between Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry and Ethiopian Ambassador Dr Oumer Hussien, who called on the minister for the first time since assuming his diplomatic assignment. The two sides reviewed proposals and measures to expand bilateral trade and economic engagement.

During the meeting, the minister underscored Pakistan's growing focus on expanding maritime links with African nations and proposed forming a three-country alliance comprising Pakistan, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. He added that the framework could be expanded to include other countries through mutual consultation.

The minister highlighted that, despite being a landlocked country, Ethiopia could significantly enhance its trade capacity by utilising the Port of Djibouti under a structured maritime arrangement. He added that a formal agreement could be signed once the necessary groundwork is complete, with a ceremony planned to mark the occasion.

Ambassador Dr Oumer welcomed the proposal and emphasised the need for technical consultations between experts from both sides, with designated focal persons from each side to deliberate on operational modalities and develop a practical framework for the proposed alliance.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan may become 'fourth most populated nation' in five years

Federal Minister for Health Syed Mustafa Kamal said on Wednesday Pakistan will surpass Indonesia in population growth within the next five years.

"Pakistan is currently the fifth most populous country in the world, and at the current growth rate, it is projected to surpass Indonesia in next five years. The rapidly increasing population has become a serious national challenge, placing immense pressure on healthcare, education, infrastructure, and employment sectors," the minister said while chairing a meeting to review the growing population challenge and its implications for the country's health system and national resources.

He said the country's population is increasing by around 6.2 million people annually, which ex-



ceeds the total population of some countries such as New Zealand.

He noted that unchecked population growth was straining national infrastructure and undermining effective planning. "If we fail to control population growth, our vision for sustainable development will remain unachievable," the minister said, stressing the urgent need to reduce the fertility rate

from 3.6 to 2.0.

Health minister says country may surpass Indonesia in population growth

Highlighting global best practices, Mr Kamal said that countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and Iran have successfully managed population growth through effective strategies, enabling them

to provide better services to their people.

He reiterated that the ministry of health, in collaboration with all stakeholders, was committed to ensuring coordinated and integrated efforts to address the pressing issue.

He further stressed the need for collective national awareness and responsibility to tackle the population challenge, noting that rising population remains a significant burden on the health system. Adviser to the finance minister Adnan Pasha Siddiqui assured full financial and policy support from the ministry to control population growth. He emphasised that strong coordination among all relevant institutions will be ensured to effectively address the national challenge.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Italy to combat cultural heritage smuggling

Pakistan and Italy are set to roll out a structured bilateral cooperation mechanism to counter the smuggling of stolen cultural heritage, as cases of antiquities trafficking from Pakistan to European markets continue to rise.

The proposed framework includes intelligence sharing, specialised training, capacity building, and the transfer of modern technology to strengthen institutional responses against transnational crimes targeting cultural property. Officials say it will function as a dedicated liaison channel between the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Italy's elite art-crime police.

FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwar attended a high-level Zoom briefing on Thursday delivered by Brigadier General Antonio Petti, Commander of the Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC), Italy's 300-strong unit widely regarded as the world's leading cultural police force.

"International cooperation is the



only way to dismantle these networks. Cultural crime is transnational, and you cannot fight it alone," Brig Gen Petti was quoted as saying during the briefing.

The virtual briefing follows commitments made during Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi and FIA DG Dr Usman Anwar's visit to Rome in February. During that visit, the two sides agreed to establish a formal mechanism, with facilitation from the Pakistan embassy in Rome, to curb the smuggling of cultural artifacts.

"This partnership gives FIA access to the best forensic tools, da-

tabases, and operational tactics in the world," Dr Usman Anwar told Dawn after the briefing.

The briefing session comes after a sharp uptick in thefts from archaeological sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. In 2025 alone, the FIA reported seizures of smuggled Gandharan and Buddhist artifacts worth over \$3.2 million.

In February, the agency busted a major ring in Taxila attempting to move 2nd-century statues to Europe via Dubai.

During session, Brig Gen Petti

shared best practices used by the Carabinieri TPC, which has recovered more than three million stolen artifacts since 1969.

The Italian unit maintains "Leonardo", the world's largest database of stolen art, which FIA officers will now be trained to access in real time.

Under the upcoming framework, Pakistan and Italy will establish a dedicated FIA-Carabinieri liaison desk in Rome. The first cohort of FIA officers is scheduled to begin joint training at the Carabinieri's academy in Rome in the third quarter of 2026 (July-Sept period).

A formal MoU to codify the cooperation is expected to be signed in Islamabad next month. The Zoom interaction marks a significant step toward sustained coordination, joint initiatives, and knowledge exchange between the FIA and the Italian Carabinieri, as both countries move to protect cultural heritage from transnational criminal networks.

Courtesy: Dawn

'Pakistan opened door to dialogue': Islamabad becoming a direct mediator, say US scholars

American scholars are increasingly highlighting Pakistan's expanded diplomatic role as the Islamabad talks between the United States and Iran stretched into an intensive negotiating session.

After 21 hours of continuous talks, US Vice President JD Vance clarified that Pakistan had made a strong effort to help the process succeed. He said: "Whatever shortcomings in the negotiations were not because of the Pakistanis, who did an amazing job and really tried to help us and the Iranians bridge the gap and get to a deal."

The talks covering Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions relief, frozen assets, economic arrangements and regional security issues took place alongside expert-level exchanges and written proposals, suggesting a structured and increasingly formal negotiation process.

Michael Kugelman, Senior Fellow for South Asia at the Atlantic Council, has described Pakistan's position in elevated terms.

"Pakistan's role has shifted from facilitator and go-between to direct mediator and peace negotiator. For now, at least, Pakistan's in the driver's seat in the difficult &

delicate effort to guide the US & Iran to an off ramp," he wrote.

Kugelman also stressed that the current diplomatic effort is far more complex than earlier examples of Pakistani mediation, saying: "Some have cited precedents for Pakistani mediation, e.g., facilitating US-China normalisation, helping w/US-Taliban talks. Let's be clear: What it's doing now trying to end conflict [between] two deeply hostile states who see eye to eye on [very] little is much more ambitious. A massive lift."

Elizabeth Threlkeld, South Asia Program Director at the Stimson Centre, has emphasised Pakistan's geopolitical positioning and balancing act among competing regional powers.

"Pakistan borders Iran ... it also has strong ties with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has rebooted its relationship with Washington over the course of the last year with the second Trump administration."

"And it also has a strong relationship with China. And so over the course of the conflict and, indeed, even before this conflict began, Pakistan had played a quiet and helpful role in trying to pass messages among all of those sides and



particularly the US and Iran."

She added: "And in this case, it really has managed to walk a very difficult tightrope in bringing these talks together, at a moment when it had a lot on the line in terms of its own liabilities in this conflict, given its exposure."

Threlkeld also pointed to the diplomatic payoff for Islamabad's recent engagement with Washington: "Pakistan has very deftly managed to rebuild its relations with President Trump in his second term. And in some ways, that's already a victory for Pakistan because it succeeded in playing this role."

Daniel Markey, also a Senior Fellow at the Stimson Centre, highlighted broader shifts in US engagement in South Asia, while reposting Vance's pictures with Indian and Pakistani leaders. "These photos being almost exactly 1 year apart really do show the rapid up-

heaval in US South Asia policy," he noted.

Taken together, the views of American scholars suggest a notable reassessment of Pakistan's diplomatic standing.

Kugelman emphasises Pakistan's elevated role as being "in the driver's seat".

Threlkeld highlights its balancing act across rival powers and its history of quiet message-passing diplomacy, while Markey situates the developments within a broader shift in US South Asia policy.

While the negotiations ultimately failed to produce an agreement, US analysts broadly converge on one point: Pakistan is no longer merely hosting or facilitating diplomacy between Washington and Tehran, but is actively shaping one of the most sensitive negotiation processes currently underway.

Courtesy: Dawn

Health techs attracting foreign investment

Google has invested half a million dollars in our company, said Syed Ijlal Jafri, Group Chief Information Officer of Martin Dow Group, at the launch of Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry's flagship report "Recommendation for Pakistan's Digital Future".

The investment was in data and health tech, an industry the report estimates will grow to \$2.19 trillion in 2034 from \$387.8 billion in 2025. Currently, countries such as Bangladesh are becoming preferred markets for e-marketplace health investments, with apps such as Maya offering on-demand consultations, similar to Pakistan's Sehat Kahani model.

However, health tech is a small part of a broader tech picture.

In Pakistan, the digital economy could contribute five to seven per cent to GDP by 2030 if bottlenecks were addressed. While there has been strong momentum towards digitisation, as indicated by the country's \$3.8bn IT and IT-enabled exports in FY25 and a freelance economy of \$779 million in earnings, there are significant infrastructure gaps.

While 5G has been auctioned and the telcos have geared up their investments, the report outlines that only about 18 per cent of cellular towers are connected through optical fibre cable compared to the global benchmark of around 40pc, limiting preparedness for existing technologies.

The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication



plans to expand fibre-optic connectivity to 7.5 million homes over the next five years, from the current 2m fibre-to-the-home subscribers. However, OICCI's report raises "serious implementation concerns, given the current ground realities," especially since the regulatory duty was raised to 20pc last year from 10pc, increasing costs by 107pc and deterring expansion of the fibre-optic network.

While there is a lot that needs improvement, there have been glim-

mers of progress, which include better rankings on the Network Readiness Index and the reduction in the mobile internet gender gap. Quoting GSMA data, the report states 8 million women gained access to mobile internet in 2024, reducing the gender gap from 38pc to 25pc, the first major drop since 2021, driven primarily by increased usage by females in rural areas.

Courtesy: Dawn

PM Shehbaz says Centre, provinces need to make collective efforts to provide relief amid global oil crisis

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the Centre and provinces need to set their priorities and make collective efforts to provide relief to the needy amid the global oil crisis triggered by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

He made the remarks while addressing a high-level meeting, attended by Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir, the chief ministers from all four provinces and federal ministers.

The premier said that the Centre and provinces should utilise their resources sagaciously and curtail their development projects as much as possible while also utilising their resources on agricultural-related initiatives.

“We have to spend this money on public goods and transport. Now we have to set our priorities jointly,” he added.

He also highlighted the government’s initiatives to protect the



economy and the common man from the adverse impact of the global oil crisis.

In his remarks, PM Shehbaz also said that like other countries across the world, Pakistan was “being severely affected by this war”.

He added that after achieving macroeconomic stability, the “time for prosperity and development had arrived but unfortu-

nately, as a result of this war, we are facing unlimited economic difficulties”.

He said two Pakistani vessels that were “waiting to pass through the Strait of Hormuz” were able to do so thanks to the efforts made by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and CDF Munir.

“In recent days, arrangements were made for 20 more Pakistani-flagged vessels” [to pass

through the strait], which will see further progress in the coming days,” he highlighted.

He also recalled that his teams held separate meetings with the chief ministers soon after the conflict sparked, after which it was decided to “pass on” hikes of Rs55 in petroleum prices.

The PM also highlighted the various austerity measures undertaken by the government, especially thanking PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari for “showing great interest” and calling upon him, as well as President Asif Ali Zardari for holding meetings.

“We gave a blanket cover in these three weeks, and regarding this, the Centre contributed Rs129bn. We made a Rs100bn cut in the Public Sector Development Programme and we added the savings into the account, from which the Centre bore the expenses,” he said.

Courtesy: Dawn

First lady urges public cooperation as nationwide anti-polio campaign begins April 13

First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has urged public cooperation as the nationwide anti-polio campaign is set to begin from April 13.

The week-long campaign aims to vaccinate over 45 million children under the age of five across all provinces and regions as part of the ongoing efforts to eradicate polio.

In a statement released, Aseefa called on families and communities across Pakistan to fully cooperate with the upcoming nationwide polio vaccination campaign to ensure that every child is protected from the crippling disease.

Pakistan, she said, stood at a “critical juncture” in its fight against the virus. “Years of sustained effort have brought the country closer to eradication, with the coming phase representing the final stretch where reaching every child is essential,”



she stated.

“From April 13 to 19, frontline health workers will conduct door-to-door visits, covering urban centres as well as remote communities.

“In addition to administering polio drops, children will also receive Vitamin A supplementation to support immunity and healthy growth,” Aseefa said.

In her statement, the first lady also highlighted measurable progress.

“In 2025, 31 cases of polio were reported nationwide, while in 2026, only one case has been recorded so far.” However, she cautioned that the threat persists.

“As long as the virus exists anywhere, it remains a risk everywhere.”

She stressed the need for consistency, urging parents and caregivers to ensure their children receive vaccination in every campaign, alongside routine immunisation.

The first lady also acknowledged the contribution of frontline workers, whose continued efforts remain central to reaching every household.

She called for collective resolve, emphasising that ending polio was now within reach and depends on the participation of parents, families, communities and institutions alike. No child, she underscored, can be left behind.

The campaign will be conducted in coordination with Afghanistan, reflecting a shared commitment to interrupt cross-border transmission and close remaining gaps.

Courtesy: Dawn

Sindh gov't announces monthly Rs2,000 subsidy for motorcyclists amid rising petrol prices

In response to surging petrol prices and an ongoing energy crisis, the Sindh government has announced a monthly subsidy of Rs2,000 for registered motorcyclists across the province. Public transport and goods transport operators will also receive monthly subsidies ranging from Rs70,000 to Rs100,000.

A day earlier, the government further increased petrol prices by Rs137 per litre to a record-high of Rs458.4. The new price of petrol is also far higher than the increase in the international market, as PM Shehbaz decided to increase the petroleum levy to a record Rs160.61 per litre on petrol.

It was the second major increase in the fuel prices in less than a month after PM Shehbaz increased the diesel and petrol prices by Rs55 per litre last month. The cumulative increase in the petrol price within a month stands at 63%, and that of the high-speed diesel at 75%.

Addressing a press conference in Karachi on Friday, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said the subsidy aims to ease the burden on daily commuters as petrol would not be available at lower rates at fuel stations. He added that the application process would be operational within two to three days, and subsidies would be linked to national identity cards and registered motorcycles.

The CM further stated that motorcycle transfers would now be free of charge, and owners could register their vehicles in their name. "A subsidy of Rs100 per litre will be provided, and the first transfers will be completed within 15 days. Each registered motorcyclist will receive Rs2,000 directly," he added.

Shah advised citizens to check their motorcycle registration on the Excise Department's website and said that the subsidy is part of a targeted relief programme. He also noted support measures for small farmers, including a minimum wheat price of Rs3,500 per maund and a Rs1,500 per acre subsidy for farmers with up to 2 million acres, to offset losses



caused by rising diesel prices. Payments to farmers will begin on April 6.

CM Murad also said the province would independently administer the programme for a one-month trial period, following discussions on a third proposal. He clarified that the final plan comprises four components, with two administered by the provinces and one by the federal government, but funding will be provided to the provinces.

He highlighted that Sindh has 6.7 million registered motorcycles, many of which are not registered in the actual owner's name. "We decided that Rs100 per motorcyclist will be provided as subsidy," he said.

The chief minister also stressed coordination with the federal government, noting that provincial leaders participated in a historic meeting chaired by President Asif Ali Zardari to discuss energy imports and subsidy measures. He explained that while subsidies were initially extended broadly, IMF guidance advised targeting relief toward those most affected by rising fuel costs.

Shah added that the long deliberations led to the decision to provide targeted subsidies to motorcyclists, small farmers, and transport operators to alleviate the economic impact of rising petroleum prices.

Punjab, Islamabad announce free public transport

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz announced that public transport across all cities in the

province will be made free of charge.

Under the decision, passengers will not be required to purchase tickets on services including the Orange Line Train, Metro Bus, Speedo Bus, and Green Electro Bus.

In addition, the chief minister announced direct financial support for the agriculture sector. She said that all wheat-growing farmers in Punjab with landholdings of up to 25 acres would receive a diesel subsidy of 10 litres per acre at Rs150 per litre.

Motorcyclists will also benefit from a subsidy of Rs100 on 20 litres of fuel for each registered bike owner.

She praised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for maintaining petroleum product supply and prices for a month despite global pressures, saying that "by providing billions of rupees in relief, the prime minister has made a sincere effort to protect the public from hardship".

Furthermore, the public transport in the capital will also be made free of cost for the next 30 days, on the directives of the prime minister, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi wrote in a post on X.

According to the minister, the initiative will take effect from Saturday and is aimed at providing relief to the general public amid rising economic pressures. He added that the Ministry of Interior will bear the cost of the scheme, which is estimated at Rs350 million.

Courtesy: Dawn

PM Shehbaz launches Rs10m housing loans under Rs3.2tr 'Apna Ghar Programme'



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday launched the "PM Apna Ghar Programme" under which housing loans of Rs10 million will be given on easy instalments.

The scheme will be implemented in the federal capital, all four provinces, as well as Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Addressing the launch ceremony in Islamabad, PM Shehbaz said a total of 500,000 housing units will be constructed under the programme, supported by a total allocation of Rs3.2 trillion.

The loans are to be returned in 20 years, he said. During the first 10 years, the markup on the loan will be 5 per cent, while in the next 10 years it will be charged at the market rate at the time.

The premier said that for the first year, the government has set a target to fund 50,000 houses for which an amount of Rs321 billion had been earmarked. Under the scheme, a maximum of 10 marla housing units will be allowed to be built.

PM Shehbaz said he would personally review the programme's progress on a monthly basis to address any shortcomings and ensure timely payments.

Besides the new housing programme, under the PM Fuel Package 2026, Rs1.2bn has been disbursed digitally to over 32,000 beneficiaries, including operators of buses, trucks, long-haul vehicles, and delivery vans. The initiative aims to provide relief amid rising fuel costs.

Meanwhile, the European Investment Bank's international development arm, EIB Global, is committing a total of €160m to help Pakistan rebuild homes in Sindh and to improve water quality in Karachi – the country's largest city.

Mahira Khan pens the most wholesome thank you note for the cast and crew of Aag Lagay Basti Mein

Mahira Khan's latest film, *Aag Lagay Basti Mein*, has been basking in cinematic success ever since it was released on Eidul Fitr. The superstar took a moment to look back on Sunday and thank everyone who made it possible.

She started the caption of her Instagram post thanking the film's mastermind, Bilal Atif Khan, who wrote and directed the movie.

Mahira recalled how, when Bilal first came to her with the project, "I was listening with my eyes wide open, laughing while he narrated it. And then I told him I can't do this, no one will believe it or want to believe it." The director responded, saying he only considered her fit to play the role.

Mahira said she was incredibly proud of the debutant filmmaker, adding that, "I think I may have cried like your ama did for you." Next, she moved on to two of her long-standing team members, stylist Babar Zaheer and man-



ager Anushay Khan. Mahira said she loved Zaheer for making her character "raw, yet beautiful" and she thanked Anushay for her trust and confidence.

Art director Hira M Saad also got a nod for her work on the film, as did Abid Rizvi, the director of photography. Creative director Salman Noorani got a thank you too, especially for the heist scene, for which Mahira said, "mannn oh man, how cool was that".

All the actors got a thank you note saying, "We shine better because

of all of you." Tabish Hashmi and Javed Sheikh got special mentions, with Mahira saying it was "an honour" to be in the same frame as Sheikh.

The film's co-producer, Dr Ali Kazmi was acknowledged for all the work he did behind the scenes, as were all the assistant directors, technicians, spot boys, drivers, wardrobe assistants and guards.

The last mention, of course, went to the actor's co-star and the film's producer, Fahad Mustafa. She

thanked him for, "having the guts to make this film", "having a heart big enough to give space for everyone to shine", "having the passion to make a film like this" and "being a co-actor who elevates everyone around them".

She also thanked audiences "for making this little baby such a big success".

Mahira's film, *Aag Lagay Basti Mein*, continues its theatrical run into its third week, playing at cinemas across Pakistan and abroad in the US, UK, UAE, Canada, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

The movie follows the escapades of Barkat (Mustafa) and Almas (Mahira), a couple with big dreams and tight pockets. When Almas' kleptomaniac streak and desire to life a luxurious life in Dubai push the two into a heist, chaos and comedy ensue as they find out there are bigger fish in the sea.

Courtesy: Dawn

Tribute paid to playback singer Ahmed Rushdi

Iconic playback singer Ahmed Rushdi was remembered on his 92nd birth anniversary on Friday, as media outlets paid rich tribute to the legendary artist born on April 24, 1934, for his enduring contributions to Pakistan's music industry. Media outlets shared his remarkable body of work and paid heartfelt tribute to Ahmed Rushdi on his birth anniversary, highlighting his unmatched contribution to Pakistan's music industry and remembering him as a pioneering voice who redefined playback singing and pop music in the country. Ahmed Rushdi was one of Pakistan's most prolific playback singers, recording over 900 songs in a career spanning

nearly 20 years. He became especially popular for his work with actors Waheed Murad, Kamal and Muhammad Ali, showcasing remarkable versatility across fast-paced and emotional songs. His memorable tracks include "Dil Tumko De Dia Hai" and "Ae Abr-e-Karam" from *Naseeb Apna Apna*, along with iconic renditions like Habib Jalib's "Pyaar Mein Hum Ne Khaayi Hai Thokar." He also brought life to poetry by Suroor Barabankvi and Himayat Ali Shair, proving his mastery across diverse lyrical styles. Rushdi remains unmatched among male singers in Pakistan in terms of sheer output. Beyond films, his contribution to television in the



1960s was groundbreaking, helping shape early music programming and expanding the reach of popular music. Recognised as Pakistan's first pop singer, he introduced a new performance style on TV that included lip-syncing, dancing, and engaging directly with audiences. His appearances in shows like *Sunday Ke Sunday* and *Sangeet Bahar*, and later his

own program *Bazm-e-Rushdi*, inspired a generation of young musicians. Ahmed Rushdi passed away in Karachi in April 1983, just days before his 49th birthday. His legacy continues to live on through his timeless voice, unforgettable performances and lasting impact on Pakistan's music industry.

Courtesy: The Nation

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