

POSITIVE



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

February 2025

8 February, 1948: The Nawab of Dir, Sir Nawab Shah Jahan Khan acceded to Pakistan.

24 February 1948: Referendum approves Junagadh's accession to India.

8 February, 1949: Azad Kashmir Government shifts its capital to Muzaffarabad.

19 February, 1955: Pakistan signs SEA treaty and becomes a part of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

5 February, 1966: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League, announces the Six Point Program calling for limiting the federal government to defence and foreign affairs.

15 February, 1989: Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is completed and Soviet Afghan war ends.

3 February, 1997: 1997 Pakistani general election, Nawaz Sharif becomes prime minister for the second time.

24 February, 2003: Senate elections: Ruling party wins most seats in voting to the upper house.

February, 2011: Operation Madad is successfully executed.

9 February, 2017: 2017 Pakistan Super League began.

22 February, 2017: Operation Zarb-e-Azb ends in a Pakistani victory.

25 February, 2021: End of 2020-21 India-Pakistan border skirmishes

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'Political' development schemes for lawmakers make a comeback

On the eve of the first year in office, the PML-N government has revived the controversial parliamentarians' development schemes, which could not take off in the first half of the current fiscal year (2024-25), despite over Rs460 billion revenue shortfall in first seven months.

In a major move, the government doubled the size of these political schemes, code-named 'Sustainable Development Goals Achievement Programme' (SAP), to almost Rs50bn from Rs25bn allocation in the budget books 2024-25.

It also declined a demand of the coalition partner PPP to carry forward around Rs30 billion in unspent funds from the last fiscal year.

The government also relaxed principles already notified for the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to ensure quick disbursements to satisfy parliamentarians associated with the government. This is in addition to about 300pc increase in the salaries of parliamentarians allowed last week.

The government has also decided that since the Pak Public Works Department (PWD) that used to implement most of such schemes had been abolished, the task should be given to Pakistan Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (PIDCL) of the housing ministry.

Allocation to Rs50bn SDG Achievement Programme doubled; PPP request for rollover of unspent funds declined

At a recent meeting, the Steering Committee on SAP, led by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, was informed that Chairman Senate Yousaf Reza Gilani and Deputy Speaker National Assembly Ghulam Mustafa Shah had written letters for re-validation of funds which lapsed during the financial year 2023-24.

It may be recalled that the then PML-N government had al-

located Rs91bn in FY2023-24 budget for the parliamentarians' scheme and approved for disbursement about Rs61bn before it was replaced by the caretaker government which put a freeze on such political schemes.

As a result, about Rs57bn could



be utilised by end of the fiscal year. The two PPP constitutional officeholders wanted those Rs34bn unspent funds to be utilised this year.

Mr Dar, however, explained that the Public Finance Management Act 2019 did not allow such re-validation of lapsed funds of previous years, therefore the committee feels constrained to agree to the proposals, as per the official record seen by Dawn.

SDGs Achievement Programme Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, however, told the meeting that Rs50bn had been allocated by the government for the SAP for FY24-25 under PSDP.

However, the PSDP available on the ministry's official website

involves an allocation of Rs25bn for SAP without approval of the respective schemes.

Based on the planning minister's statement, all members of the steering committee unanimously agreed that SAP funds may be released to respective federal

ministries/divisions and provincial governments.

The committee approved the release of Rs48.37bn for execution of SAP schemes after authorisation for release from the Ministry of Planning and relaxation of quarterly release strategy from the Finance Division.

The committee comprised 27 members, including a total of 16 parliamentarians, seven federal secretaries and four provincial representatives.

The parliamentarians included seven sitting cabinet members and nine MNAs, including Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Shazia Marri, Sardar Yousaf Zaman, Riazul Haq, Javed Hanif Khan, Khalid Magsi, Ijazul Haq, and Tariq

Fazal Chaudhry.

Of the total Rs48.37bn, Rs28.87bn were approved by Punjab-based parliamentarians, followed by Rs15.25bn for Sindh, Rs2.25bn for Balochistan, Rs1.25bn for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Rs750 million for Islamabad.

Sources said about Rs40bn has since been authorised by the planning commission for disbursement.

It may be noted that the government has so far kept a tight lid on the core development programme under which only Rs148bn could be utilised in the first half of the fiscal year against a budget allocation of Rs1.1 trillion, accounting for 10.45pc.

This utilisation is even lower, both in absolute and percentage terms, than in the same period of last year when a caretaker government was in place. Six-month utilisation had amounted to Rs150bn last year, accounting for 16pc of Rs940bn annual allocation.

Despite relatively higher spending, the PSDP spending could not go beyond Rs635bn by end of the year and almost one-third of the budget allocation was used for deficit financing. If that is an indication, the development programme is unlikely to even cross Rs600bn this year.

Under the mechanism announced by the Ministry of Finance for the current fiscal year, the government should release 15pc of the budgeted allocation in the first quarter, followed by 20pc in the second quarter, 25pc in the third quarter and remaining 40pc in the last quarter of the fiscal year.

As such, the estimated release for PSDP by end-December should be at least 35pc of annual allocation or no less than Rs385bn, almost three times the actual spending in six months.

Courtesy: Dawn

All provinces agree to impose agriculture tax: PM

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif revealed that all four provinces have agreed to impose an agriculture tax, fulfilling a key condition set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Addressing a federal cabinet meeting, the prime minister lauded the provincial governments for their cooperation on the issue, acknowledging the role of all chief ministers, President Asif Ali Zardari, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and PML-N President Nawaz Sharif in facilitating the agreement.

According to sources, the rate of agricultural tax will vary across provinces, with Punjab and Sindh expected to generate the largest share of revenue. The tax is set to come into effect from the next fiscal year, starting July 1, 2025.

Meanwhile, the federal government will introduce the Ramazan Relief Pack-age this year without involving utility stores to curb corruption and prevent the distribution of substandard commodities, PM Shehbaz Sharif said.

During a televised address at the federal cabinet meeting, the prime minister said that complaints from the previous year's package had prompted this decision.

"I instructed months ago that this cannot go on with the utility stores," the premier said, adding that the Ministry of National Food Security had been directed to develop an alternative solution. PM honours polio team's sacrifice About the launch of the polio vaccination drive, PM Shehbaz mentioned the martyrdom of a policeman, Abdul Kha-liq, who was deployed on the security of the polio team in Jamrud. The premier paid tribute to Mr Khaliq's sacrifice to make Pakistan a polio-free nation.

He also lauded the services of PM's Coordinator on Health Dr Mukhtar, Polio Coordinator, Dr Ayesha Raza Farooq, secretary of health and polio vaccinators for their tireless efforts to rid the country of this disease.

The prime minister also high-



lighted his visit to Quetta, where he met security personnel injured in an anti-terror operation in Kalat. The operation resulted in the martyrdom of 18 security personnel and the elimination of 23 terrorists.

"I met the injured [at the hospital]. They were in high morale and were even ready to sacrifice their lives for the country," he said. "These are the martyrs and Ghazis who are resolved to rid the country of terrorism and striving day and night for the cause."

PM Shehbaz said the soldiers of the army, police, FC and Rangers sacrificing their lives were actually bearing the brunt of the disastrous policies of a government in the past when thousands of terrorists were set free.

The cabinet offered Fateha for the martyred security personnel and the fallen policeman.

The prime minister expressed pleasure over the inflation coming down to a nine-year low of 2.4 per cent in January from 28.73pc in the same month a year ago.

He congratulated the entire nation, the cabinet members, particularly the finance minister, his team and the FBR, for their efforts during the last 11 months to bring the inflation down to the lowest level.

"Now, we are fully striving to head towards economic growth. This is the main challenge. All of our energies will be focused on economic growth. Just like other targets, we will achieve this too," he resolved.

He told the cabinet members that, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sent a delegation to

Pakistan and both sides signed an agreement under which Saudi Arabia would provide oil worth \$1.2 billion on deferred payment.

Besides, the Saudi Development Fund will provide a loan for a \$40 million water supply scheme project in Mansehra.

He said that the entire nation would observe Kashmir Solidarity Day to express solidarity with their Kashmiri brethren.

The federal cabinet formed a committee, led by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, to accelerate the operationalisation of Gwadar Port.

PM Shehbaz directed the committee to organise an international conference to promote Gwadar's economic potential globally. He also sought detailed reports on imports and exports through the port.

The meeting was informed that dredging of Gwadar Port had been halted between 2018 and 2022 due to "criminal negligence" but was resumed in 2022-23, restoring the port's original depth.

The meeting was also informed that several public welfare projects had been completed in Gwadar, including the Pak-China Friendship Hospital, Gwadar Institute of Technical Education, Pak-China Primary School, Gwadar Livelihood Project, Gwadar Fisheries Processing and Export Zone, and Gwadar Solar Park.

The government is also laying the Main Line-4 railway network to connect Gwadar with other parts of the country. Meanwhile, the Gwadar-Quetta Highway is operational, improving connectivity for Turbat, Hoshab and Panjgur.

Courtesy: Dawn

Saba Qamar's remarks on Karachi spark mixed reactions

Renowned Pakistani actor Saba Qamar has candidly shared her thoughts on life in Karachi, expressing disappointment over the city's daily routine.

Speaking humorously, she remarked, "One can stay in Karachi for two days, maybe a week, but living here for three months is a real challenge."



She complained about the city's weather and pollution, stating that her skin and hair had been severely affected.

Her comments have sparked mixed reactions online. While some netizens criticized her statement as biased against Karachi and its residents, others defended her, agreeing that the city's hot and humid climate is well known.

Adding a touch of humor, Saba claimed that upon returning home, her family hardly recognized her an exaggeration many found amusing.

One user supported her view, saying Karachi's weather is harsh on skin and hair, while others dismissed her remarks, with one noting, "Millions live in Karachi without such issues this is just typical celebrity exaggeration."

Courtesy: The Nation

Govt eyes next IMF tranche as review wraps up

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded the first biannual review of the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) on a positive note, without imposing additional revenue measures.

Instead, the government committed to maintaining fiscal targets through expenditure controls, particularly the development programme.

Official sources, however, confirmed that the draft of the Memorandum of Economic and Fiscal Policies (MEFP) was still being finalised before the formal announcement of a staff-level agreement (SLA). This would be followed by IMF's Executive Board approval for the disbursement of about \$1.1bn by early next month. Therefore, both sides remained silent on the conclusion of talks, although Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, during the course of a wrap-up meeting on Friday morning, requested the IMF to release an end-of-mission statement by the evening.

However, the time gap and the travel schedule of the mission were delaying its issuance, an official who attended the meeting said. "There are no outstanding issues," he said.

The officials said the most challenging aspect of the two-week engagements pertained to gas rates for industrial captive power



plants, but a resolution was reached to the satisfaction of the IMF delegation, led by mission chief Nathan Porter.

The passage of the law for the introduction of agriculture income tax by all four provincial assemblies was also considered a landmark step, and the two sides agreed that a lot needed to be done on the ground for effective recoveries starting next year's budget. The two sides would remain engaged over the next couple of months to address technical and procedural hiccups in aligning four provinces.

Revised macroeconomic indicators, particularly GDP growth projections, led to a downward revision of federal tax collection estimates by more than Rs600bn. The original budget projection of Rs1.29 trillion has now been adjusted to Rs1.23tr.

The officials said the IMF staff mission appreciated the overall performance on benchmarks and

targets, but not without emphasising improved collections from retail and wholesale sectors where the authorities have so far struggled to meet targets.

The Fund's team also called for improved collections from real estate sectors. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) reiterated its proposal to ease taxation on the real estate sector for better recoveries. The two sides may discuss it further in the run-up to the next year's budget.

The second-quarter estimates for GDP resulted in the downward revision in the size of the economy to about Rs116tr from Rs124tr estimated for the current year in the budget 2024-25. Lower-than-projected inflation and economic growth were considered legitimate factors for revenue shortfall but still within the tax-to-GDP ratio targets.

Informed sources said the two sides would remain in contact vir-

tually to finalise the MEFP and SLA and even thereafter for the next year's budget consultations.

The sources highlighted that for the first time over the past programme reviews, the power sector had also met its targets on the back of higher base tariffs, lower interest rates, stable currency, etc., although technical losses and insufficient recoveries worried the IMF mission.

The IMF also stressed improvements in the track-and-trace system across sectors and enhanced implementation of point-of-sale (POS) systems in commercial activities. It also called for strong efforts to privatise power distribution companies and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

The authorities anticipate receiving the second tranche of over \$1bn under the \$7bn loan programme, which is largely considered a formality following compliance with key quantitative performance criteria, structural benchmarks and indicative targets.

The 37-month bailout package was finalised in July last year based on budgets approved by parliament and formally signed in September 2024. The first tranche of \$1.1bn was released upfront, with the remaining seven equal instalments scheduled every six months, contingent on meeting performance targets.

Courtesy: Dawn

Bushra Ansari honored with UK Parliament's Star of Pakistan Award

Veteran actor Bushra Ansari has been awarded the Star of Pakistan by the UK Parliament, becoming the first female drama actor from Pakistan to receive this prestigious honor.

The accolade was presented by MP Yasmin Qureshi at an event organized by the British Asian Society and Samara Events UK.

Recognized for her outstanding contributions to Pakistani drama and the entertainment industry, Ansari expressed gratitude for the honor, highlighting the global impact of Pakistani dramas in

promoting culture, attire, and the Urdu language.

"It is a privilege to receive this honor in such a prestigious setting," she said. She also shared her excitement on Instagram, writing, "So happy to receive the honor at the British Parliament today! Thank you, God."

With a legacy spanning decades, Bushra Ansari has excelled as an actress, comedian, singer, and playwright, redefining excellence across multiple genres.

Her work has entertained mil-



lions and shaped the landscape of Pakistani television and cinema, making her one of the most respected figures in the industry.

Beyond entertainment, she has been a strong advocate for women's empowerment, proving that

passion and dedication can break barriers. Her commitment aligns with the broader mission of organizations like the Labour Asians Society, which promotes equality, inclusion, and social change.

Courtesy: The Nation

PTA grants licence to two companies for VPN services

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority has issued licences to two companies for providing VPN services in an attempt to monitor traffic bypassing local censorship.

The licensed companies will only provide VPN services to commercial clients IT companies, banks, foreign missions, etc making the use of VPN by individual users unlawful.

The use of VPNs in Pakistan surged after X was banned in February 2024. Since then, the government has made multiple attempts to outlaw the use of VPNs by individual users.

However, there were no legal grounds to block VPNs and authorities lacked the tools and technical expertise to block all VPNs, a senior official of the PTA told Dawn.

Licensed firms will provide services to commercial clients, making the VPN use by individuals unlawful



The PTA then asked commercial entities to register their IP addresses on a web portal to avoid the purge and continue using VPNs. However, the scheme failed to yield the desired results, forcing the government to introduce a licensing regime to localise VPNs.

In a statement on Monday, PTA said that two VPN service providers have been registered under the category of 'Class Licence for the Data Services'. A class licence allows multiple users to operate under a general set of conditions without needing individual ap-

proval.

As of December 2024, PTA resumed granting Class Licences for Data Services, specifically for VPN service providers. The entities offering VPN and related services are required to obtain this licence to operate legally in Pakistan.

The two companies, whose names weren't announced by the PTA, will be authorised to sell VPNs to businesses.

The PTA has said that it will allow the use of VPNs for "lawful

purposes", ensuring data security, privacy and regulatory compliance while promoting transparency.

The idea of introducing VPN service providers was floated by the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), a trade body representing the IT and IT-enabled services sector.

The P@sha chief, Sajjad Mustafa Syed, said the licence to two companies was a "welcoming step", and it will facilitate around 2.5 million freelancers in the country, the majority of whom were women trying to support their families. Mr Syed didn't explain how individual freelancers stand to benefit when the licences were only allowed to sell VPN services to commercial clients.

The VPN service providers will resolve "security issues", which were the government's main concerns, as licensed service providers will allow the government to monitor VPN traffic, he added.

Courtesy: Dawn

Japan's envoy inaugurates Sogetsu Ikebana Spring Exhibition highlighting cultural heritage

Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, AKAMATSU Shuichi on Sunday inaugurated the Sogetsu Ikebana Spring Exhibition highlighting the rich cultural heritage of Pakistan and its connection to Japan through the flower arrangements. The exhibition, organised by the Sogetsu Lahore Study Group, showcases the work of Sogetsu Ikebana artists who have drawn inspiration from these ancient civilizations, capturing their essence in unique and evocative floral arrangements. The flower arrangements not only demonstrate the artists' skill but also tell stories, linking the past with the present and fostering a deeper understanding of these historical influences. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Ambassador AKAMATSU Shuichi expressed his delight to see the exhibition with such an evocative theme 'Gandhara, Taxila, and Mehrgarh Civilizations'. As these names, he said, are important in Pakistan, Japan, and worldwide, showing



the rich history and culture that has thrived here for thousands of years. Appreciating the beautiful Sogetsu exhibition, the Ambassador said he was deeply impressed the way these artists have drawn inspiration, from ancient civiliza-

tions and capturing their essence in delicate flower arrangements. "These arrangements aren't just beautiful; they tell stories, linking the past with the present", he further added. The Ambassador said this Ikebana exhibition and oth-



er cultural events strengthen the bond and understanding between Japan and Pakistan, promoting peace, harmony, and respect through art. He also expressed his gratitude to Lahore Sogetsu Study Group for their invaluable assistance with the beautiful Ikebana arrangements for the Japan's National Day celebration in Islamabad that added a special touch to the occasion. The Ambassador also congratulated the Lahore Sogetsu Study Group for receiving the Japanese Ambassador's Commendation in 2024, saying this award testifies their significant contributions in promoting Japanese culture in Pakistan especially in Lahore. Neveen Syed, Director of the Sogetsu Lahore Study Group, expressed her gratitude to Blue Pine Serviced Residencies and all participating artists for their contributions in arranging this fascinating exhibition.

Courtesy: The Nation

9th edition of Italian Design Day celebrated

The Consulate of Italy in Karachi celebrated the ninth edition of the Italian Design Day in Karachi.

An initiative promoted and organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome through its network of diplomatic missions abroad. "Inequalities. Design for a better life" is the theme of this year's design day, in dialogue with the next International Exhibition of the Triennale di Milano. Consul of Italy Mr. Fabrizio Bielli.

While welcoming the audience, highlighted the role of quality design in reducing the impact of inequalities on the well-being of individuals in everyday life. The Italian diplomatic network in the world is a true protagonist in the framework of strategy, "Diplomacy for Growth" launched by Minister Antonio Tajani with the aim of strengthening design as a distinctive element of MADE IN ITALY, a communique said

on Monday. The Consul organized an exclusive Curtain Raiser for the forthcoming Pakistan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale for Architecture 2025, which was presented to the audience by a team of architects from Coalesce Design Studio and MAS Architects. The theme of the Pakistan Pavilion - titled (Fr)agile Systems coincides with the theme of IDD 2025 and is a reminder of the stark inequity of architecture and design that continues to ravage landscapes and ecosystems on an unprecedented scale.

To reiterate the imperative to rethink climate resilience as an adaptation process attuned to asymmetries and imbalances of an interconnected world for a call to action for a future in which architecture is both deeply rooted in cultural heritage and critically engaged with ecological realities.

With the cooperation of Italian



Trade agency, the Italian Development Committee and its member companies; Axis Design Studios, Best Board Industries, Novacolor by Innovators, S. Abdullah, participated along with Natuzzi Italia represented by Salmis Luxury Interiors to showcase Italian excellence in Pakistan. The companies displayed their product lines, which demonstrated the best practices and ideas, to address the pressing challenges in the field of architecture and design being implemented for projects in Pakistan.

A historical photographic exhibition titled "Photography for Lifetime Achievement" was displayed at the event. The exhibition celebrates the masters of the Compasso d'Oro Lifetime Achievement Award, reinterpreted through the lens of Italian photographers from the last two decades. The initiative aims to highlight photography not only as a documentary tool but also as a creative medium that has contributed to the dissemination and success of Italian design.

Courtesy: The Nation

Lahore Literary Festival 2025 begins at Alhamra

The 13th edition of the Lahore Literary Festival (LLF) commenced at the Lahore Arts Council, Alhamra, marking the beginning of a dynamic three-day celebration of arts, literature, history, and civilisation.

The opening ceremony was attended by various dignitaries, including LLF Chairman Iqbal Z. Ahmed, LLF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chairman Alhamra Razi Ahmed, Punjab Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bukhari, British Council Director James Hampson, UNESCO Officer-in-Charge in Pakistan Karahang Anthony Tom, and Alhamra Executive Director Tauqeer Haider Kazmi, among others. A highlight of the event was the special recognition of LLF CEO Razi Ahmed, who was honoured with France's prestigious 'Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' award for his outstanding contribution to arts and cultural exchange. The announcement by Chairman LLF Iqbal Z. Ahmed was met with



resounding applause, celebrating Razi Ahmed's dedication to promoting literary and artistic endeavours on both national and international platforms.

The festival opened on a patriotic note with a stirring rendition of the national anthem by a student from the Alhamra Academy of Arts. Razi Ahmed, in his address, expressed heartfelt gratitude to national and international delegates whose support has elevated the LLF into a premier literary event. Alongside British Council Director James Hamp-

son, he presented the 'Lok Dastan Prize 2025' to its winners, while esteemed scholar Rashid Ahmed and acclaimed writer Ikramullah were honoured with 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for their remarkable contribution to literature and scholarship. Razi Ahmed emphasised that the 13th edition of LLF was a celebration of literature, culture, and the power of ideas. "This festival continues to bring together voices from around the world, fostering dialogue and enriching minds," he remarked. Alhamra's Executive Director Tauqeer Haider

Kazmi commended the dedication of the Alhamra team, stating, "The success of this festival is a testament to their unwavering commitment. Their support has been instrumental in creating a platform where art and literature converge to celebrate centuries of civilisation.

"With over 150 national and international delegates in attendance, the LLF 2025 promises an enriching experience through 60 engaging sessions covering a broad spectrum of topics, from arts and literature to history and sociology. Over the next three days, participants will embark on an intellectual journey, exploring the diverse cultural heritage that has shaped civilisations across centuries. As a beacon of cultural dialogue and creative expression, the 'Lahore Literary Festival' continues to set the stage for transformative discussions, inspiring future endeavors in the world of arts and literature, Razi Ahmed concluded.

Courtesy: The Nation

Breathe Pakistan moot begins today

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will address a global climate conference at the Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad, which will be attended by national and international experts to find viable solutions to climate change.

The international conference being held today (Thursday) and tomorrow is part of DawnMedia's 'Breathe Pakistan' initiative, which aims to mobilise finance and find solutions to counter climate change.

The conference will witness a session on climate finance in which Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and two former State Bank of Pakistan governors will discuss the critical need for the finance required for adaptation and mitigation. Valerie Hickey, glob-



al director for climate change at World Bank, will also address this session. Ms Hickey will also speak in a separate panel about climate mainstreaming and increasing adaptive capacities of countries vulnerable to climate change.

The moot will also have a roundtable to inspire dialogue between

the government and the corporate sector and explore sustainable public-private partnerships, which will be attended by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, among others.

A session on agriculture, forestry, and food systems in climate

change will be attended by agriculture and forestry experts at which FAO Representative Florence Rolle, Climate Change Ministry Secretary Aisha Humera Chaudhry, and former climate change minister Malik Amin Aslam will speak.

In the concluding session of the conference on Feb 7, former prime minister and Senate Chairman Yousaf Raza Gilani will address the audience.

Other speakers include climate expert Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, climate activist Karishma Ali, youth activist Zunaira Qayyum Baloch, and Senator Musadik Malik.

Courtesy: Dawn

Kashmir march calls for unity in freedom struggle

A massive gathering called for unity among all political and religious parties on the single-point agenda the Kashmir freedom struggle.

The march, organised by Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), unanimously adopted a declaration that stressed the need for fostering an ideological atmosphere in the base camp [a term often used for the liberated territory] to ensure the success of the ongoing freedom movement across the divide.

The people of India-held Kashmir look with hope towards this part, and it must fulfil its essential role in supporting their heroic movement, the declaration added.

The event, held at Burhan Wani Chowk, was attended by JI Pakistan emir Hafiz Naemur Rehman as the chief guest, along with AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, JI AJK emir Dr Muhammad Mushtaq, former emir Abdul Rashid Turabi, refugee leader Uzair Ghazali, and PPP's regional secretary general and cabinet member Faisal Mumtaz Rathore.

A large number of women and

young girls were among the participants, waving JI flags and holding placards inscribed with anti-India and pro-freedom slogans. The declaration stressed upon the importance of not only military preparedness, but also countering ideological discord at India's behest to create chaos.

To achieve this goal, the base camp must remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken the movement, it asserted, without making explicit references.

Calling for the allocation of the liberated territory's resources towards public welfare and the Kashmir freedom struggle, while eliminating extravagance, the gathering also demanded immediate revival of mandatory National Cadet Corps (NCC) training for students to instill discipline and preparedness among them.

Expressing regret over the prolonged denial of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination, the declaration lamented the inability of the United Nations to implement its own resolutions coupled with India's obstinate stance had directly led to military conflict, rendering South Asia unstable and placing regional peace



at the mercy of nuclear powers.

Drawing parallels with Palestine, the declaration reaffirmed that the Kashmiris, like their Palestinian brethren, were fiercely resisting illegal occupation under a right granted by international law.

The declaration demanded that war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and acts of genocide in Palestine and Kashmir be investigated by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), akin to the Nuremberg Trials.

The declaration further demanded immediate reversal of actions to establish settler colonies and alter demographic balances, release of all political prisoners, including women and children, and grant of unrestricted access for humanitarian organisations and UN observers to assess the situation

first-hand.

Recognising the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation as the last resort for the oppressed people of Palestine and Kashmir, the declaration called upon the forum to take decisive action in support of their causes.

Earlier, in his speech, the JI emir said that the silence of the international community, had emboldened India to commit severe atrocities in the occupied territory. He said that those who controlled politics in the past had disappointed the people.

Kashmiris should not lose hope due to the shortcomings of the rulers. The 250 million people of Pakistan will stand shoulder to shoulder with them until the dawn of freedom. This is not a battle of geography but of ideology, he claimed.

Courtesy: Dawn

Global conference in Islamabad to breathe new life into climate action

As Pakistan faces increasing vulnerability due to climate change, almost 100 experts from across the world will converge on Islamabad for a two-day climate conference to raise awareness, stimulate action, and lay the foundation for a climate-resilient society.

The international conference to be held at the Jinnah Convention Centre on Feb 6-7 is part of DawnMedia's 'Breathe Pakistan' initiative, which aims to encourage collaborations on climate solutions and mobilise finance to counter climate change.

Pakistan requires almost \$380 billion by 2030 to become climate-resilient. However, the lack of international finance has hampered its efforts, evident by the fact that a 35 per cent reduction in emissions which was contingent on money from the Global North as per its 2021 NDCs has not been met.

According to DawnMedia CEO Nazafreen Saigol-Lakhani, the impetus for the initiative came from a lack of action at COP29 in Baku in November last year.

"We had thought that we'd see some climate justice and we'd get some commitments from the Global North regarding countries in the Global South that don't contribute so much to damaging the environment but are disproportionately affected by it. But unfortunately, none of these came through," she said, adding that the conference aimed to "mobilise our own resources within the country". "What we really want to do with the conference is begin dialogue on how public-private partnerships can help finance and fund activities that can combat climate change and its effects," she said.

Over the two days, the conference will witness around fourteen sessions, featuring eminent speakers

from Pakistan, the United Nations, global financial institutions, regional countries and the media.

The event will open with some heavy-hitters; 'The World, Pakistan & Provinces in Climate Change' will be addressed by President Asif Ali Zardari via video, while Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the chief ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and UN and World Bank officials will be in attendance.

This will be followed by discussions featuring Supreme Court Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, former State Bank governors Shamshad Akhtar and Salim Raza, as well as a conversation between former climate change minister Sherry Rehman and Ali Cheema, the vice chancellor of Lums.

The final session on the first day has a regional outlook: 'The South Asian Symposium on Climate Change' will feature three separate panels comprising the federal and provincial climate ministers, climate policy experts, and civil society members. Panellists will discuss air pollution, development and decarbonisation, and melting glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalaya mountain range.

Harjeet Singh, climate activist and strategic adviser for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, underscored how "much-needed regional cooperation" is key to combating climate change.

"South Asia shares its air, rivers, mountains, and seas, and our challenges whether it's extreme weather, rising sea levels, or air pollution are deeply interconnected. No country can tackle this crisis alone," said Mr Singh, who is also among the panellists.

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) Executive Director Dr Abid Suleri said



multidimensional challenges posed by climate change required multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

"The Breathe Pakistan Climate Conference is a necessary step in aligning Pakistan's climate policies with regional and global frameworks," Dr Suleri said, adding that by bringing together policymakers, private sector leaders, and international experts, the conference has the potential to bridge governance gaps, unlock climate finance, and push for transboundary cooperation.

This is also a niche Ms Saigol-Lakhani sees the Breathe Pakistan conference filling. "The objective is really to initiate dialogues between Pakistan and its neighbouring countries and come up with solutions on a regional level to mitigate the effects of climate change," she said.

Another highlight of the conference will be the 'Media and Climate Change' panel, which would feature half a dozen leading journalists from Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh and the UK.

There will also be sessions on women empowerment to fight climate change, and another on climate education to prepare children and youth for the changing world. The conference will culminate on Friday evening with a formalisation of the Breathe Pakistani Conference resolution.

The DawnMedia CEO said that their goal was to come up with solutions that can mitigate the ef-

fects of climate change on a regional and national level, and, furthermore, to ensure that these solutions are implemented by the stakeholders as well as the government.

"The first stage of the Breathe Pakistan was to increase awareness of the brand among people on a general level, and the corporate sector and policymakers from the government in particular. This conference is the culmination of the first leg of the campaign, but we aim to continue with it in the near future," Ms Saigol-Lakhani added.

Mr Singh believes that initiatives like Breathe Pakistan are crucial in not only spotlighting local and national challenges, but also fostering much-needed regional cooperation.

"Regional cooperation among governments, civil society, academia, and the media is critical to achieving meaningful climate action. Whether it's through shared policies on clean energy, disaster preparedness, or regional adaptation strategies, collaboration at every level will determine our collective future," said Mr Singh.

Dr Suleri also believes such initiatives could lay the groundwork for a collective South Asian response to climate change, if followed by concrete policy implementation and sustained regional dialogue.

Success will "depend on translating high-level discussions into actionable, long-term commitments", he noted.

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