

Positive POST



Greenwich University

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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.

January in History

January 12, 1952 :

Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC), Headed by Founder Chairman Ghulam Faruque

January 1, 1955:

Pakistan International Airlines comes into being.

January 1, 1961:

Decimal coinage introduced in Pakistan.

January 5, 1963:

First trade agreement is signed between Pakistan and China.

January 10, 1966:

Tashkent Declaration signed between India and Pakistan.

January 30, 1972:

Pakistan snaps ties with Commonwealth on recognizing Bangladesh.

January 1, 1981:

Interest-free banking introduced.

January 3, 1981:

International Islamic University starts functioning.

January 3, 1982:

Pakistan defeats Argentina 12-3 in World Cup Hockey in Bombay.

January 15, 1983:

First three F-16 jets reach Pakistan.

January 25, 1983:

Wifaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman) Order is promulgated. Justice Sardar Iqbal is named, WM.

January 19, 1989:

Students unions are restored in Punjab .

January 12, 1992:

Lahore-Islamabad launched.

January 15, 1994:

Motorway project

Pakistan Television transmission gets access to 38 countries via satellite.

January 2, 2006:

Dr. Shamsbad Akhtar assumes office of State Bank Governor having the first woman Governor of SBP.

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 and Political outcomes.

Pakistan hopes for IMF 'lifeline' as donors pledge generous sums

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a pause in its demands for economic reforms before releasing more financial aid, as the country tries to rebuild after catastrophic floods.

The call came as the country received over \$10 billion in pledges at a donors' conference, hosted jointly by the government of Pakistan and the United Nations.

PM Shehbaz told the conference his country was "racing against time" to deal with towering needs.

"I am asking for a sustained international support plan. I am asking for a new lifeline," he said.

He added the flooding immediately affected 33m people, destroyed more than 2m homes and damaged over 8,000km of roads and 3,100km of railway track.

"This is the greatest climate disaster in our country's history," agreed Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, decrying the "colossal calamity."

Federal Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal said the Post-Damage Needs Assessment conducted jointly by the Government of Pakistan, World Bank, ADB, the EU and UN relief agencies has estimated the aggregate cost of the



calamity at \$30.1bn, APP reported. Speaking to reporters, PM Shehbaz said he was trying to persuade the Fund to give Islamabad some breathing space as it tackles the "nightmarish" situation.

The global lender wants Pakistan to withdraw remaining subsidies on petroleum products and electricity, aimed at helping the masses

"Even before these floods hit Pakistan, we were already facing humongous challenges," he said.

"Yet we had to again connect with the IMF and resurrect an agreement which was violated by the previous government and accept even harsher conditionalities," said Sharif.

He said Pakistan was complying with the IMF's conditions "as best as possible" but asked "how on earth" the additional burdens could be shouldered by the country's poorest. "Yet, we are committed to IMF's

programme. We will do everything to comply with the terms and conditions. Though I am constantly trying to persuade them: please give us a pause," he said.

PM Shehbaz also spoke with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Saturday and asked her to "kindly be considerate and compassionate and give us some breathing space".

Later, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar also met with World Bank Vice President Martin Raiser on the sidelines of the conference.

He appreciated the financial and technical support extended by the World Bank to cope with the challenge posed by the floods, the Ministry of Finance said in a tweet.

Mr Dar also met with IMF Mission Chief to Pakistan Nathan Porter, ISDB President Muhammad Al-Jasser, and USAID, Deputy

Administrator Isobel Coleman.

"No country deserves to endure what happened to Pak-istan," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told an international conference in Geneva, which is seeking billions of dollars to support recovery from the disaster.

Mr Guterres said Pakistan and its people responded to "this epic tragedy with heroic humanity".

"We must match the heroic response of the people of Pakistan with our own efforts and massive investments to strengthen their communities for the future," he told the conference.

The UN chief said Pakistan's "monsoon on steroids" proved the need for the agreement reached at the climate summit (COP27) in November to create a "loss and damage" fund, which is aimed at covering the climate-related destruction endured by developing nations less responsible for global warming than wealthy polluters.

"If there is any doubt about loss and damage, go to Pakistan," he said. "There is loss. There is damage."

Ahead of the conference, Achim Steiner, head of the UN development agency, told AFP that Pakistan would face "extraordinary amounts of misery" if the world did not step up and help.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan expects no US interference in Russia ties

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Monday expressed the hope that the United States would not interfere in growing bilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia.

FM Bhutto-Zardari was in Russia on a two-day official visit during which both sides, according to APP, agreed to pursue initiatives to deepen bilateral cooperation in various fields, including education, economy, energy and connectivity.

"As far as interference by other countries are concerned, I expect that they will not interfere in bilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia," the foreign minister said during a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in

Moscow. He was replying to a question whether Pakistan has managed to receive guarantees from the US that it will not block the [energy] deal or impose sanctions.

"We absolutely will do whatever is necessary to provide our people they require. The people of Sindh, Balochistan, South Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been devastated by a natural catastrophe and recent flooding have thrown up severe economic challenges and we will do whatever we can to reduce difficulties of poor people of Pakistan," he added.

However, the foreign minister evaded a question in what currency Pakistan would pay for Russian oil.



He said Pakistan could act as a bridge between super powers.

"Pakistan sees itself as a bridge builder between super powers as we equally value our relation with the US and Russia.

According to a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad, the situation in Afghanistan and cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) were also

discussed during the meeting before the joint presser.

Ukraine conflict In reply to a question about the Ukraine conflict, Mr Bhutto-Zardari called for resolution of the issue through diplomatic means, saying that developing countries like Pakistan were facing consequences in terms of its economic impact, according to APP.

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PM vows to highlight flood victims' plight at Geneva moot

As thousands of flood-hit people continue to brave chilly nights under the open sky in several parts of the country, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has vowed to highlight their plight at a conference in the Swiss city of Geneva next week and unveiled the government's plan to build 12 solar-powered schools in Balochistan.

"The floods that hit Pakistan year I have never seen this much damage in my life," the premier told a gathering during a visit to Sohbatpur, a district in Balochistan's Nasirabad division.

"The last time I came to Sohbatpur, the entire district was inundated and even transporting medicines and food here was a challenge," he said, adding that helping the affected citizens was a test for the government, but it still managed to distribute Rs100 billion with the help of the National Disaster Management Authority.

Severe floods submerged large swathes of the country last year, killing nearly 1,700 people, and damaging farmlands and infrastructure.

Mr Sharif was speaking at the event after inaugurating a smart model school in town, which has been rebuilt in the last five months at a cost of Rs80 million.

He also announced Tamgha-i-Khidmat a government award to acknowledge one's services to nation-building, especially among the poor for Nasirabad's commissioner for rehabilitating flood-hit people and rebuilding schools in a short time.

The prime minister emphasised that a lot of work still needed to be done and flood victims needed blankets, warm clothes and other relief goods due to winter.

"There are thousands of people under the open sky in the mountains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the plains of Sindh," he said. "They are waiting for help."

He said that at the Geneva conference, he would discuss the



remaining challenges faced by Pakistan along with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan will be held in Geneva on Jan 9. The event will be co-hosted by the government of Pakistan and the United Nations.

It aims to bring together government representatives, leaders from the public and private sectors and civil society to support the people and the government after the devastating floods of 2022.

The premier said he had contacted leaders of all friendly countries and invited them to attend the conference. He hoped that "civilised societies will play their part here. Our resolve is absolute, and we won't rest even for a minute".

The Sohbatpur ceremony was attended by Balochistan Governor Mir Jan Muhammad Khan Jamali, federal ministers Maulana Abdul Wasey and Marriyum Aurangzeb, MNA Nawabzada Khalid Magsi, Senator Sana Jamali, provincial minister Noor Muhammad Dummar, Nasirabad Commissioner Bashir Ahmed and several tribal elders. Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo was not present.

The premier said the provincial and federal governments had decided to build 12 schools across Balochistan to provide children with free education.

"These schools will be on a par with the Danish schools in Punjab," he said, referring to a flagship project of the PML-N government.

"Students in these schools will be given mainstream education which is provided at any private school in the country."

He elaborated that the schools would feature accommodations for students, state-of-the-art technology, e-libraries, skilled teachers and medical clinics.

The schools would be run on solar energy, he said, adding that the first such school would be inaugurated in Sohbatpur on March 23.

PM extends support to madressahs Meanwhile, in a meeting with a delegation of Ittehad-i-Tanzeemat-i-Madaris, Prime Minister Sharif vowed to bestow complete administrative autonomy to hundreds of seminaries in the country and lauded their role "to protect Pakistan's interests".

"The government will extend its maximum support to the seminaries to help them impart education in accordance with modern-day needs," he said.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, Mr Sharif assured the seminaries of maximum administrative autonomy and ease of registration process.

Acknowledging the services of the seminaries for religious education, he said that around five million students were studying there free of charge.

The premier also expressed condolence over the death of renowned religious scholar Mufti Rafi Usmani and said that not only Pakistan, but the whole Muslim world recognised his services to the religion.

Courtesy: Dawn

Swindon Town FC to train teenagers in Pakistan

The future football stars of Swindon Town could come from Pakistan, thanks to a special relationship between the club and the country.

Staff from the football club are flying out to Karachi at the end of the month where they will offer training



Organisers said two Karachi coaches will also come to England to join the Swindon team for 12 days.

Swindon Town FC Vice-chairman, Zavier Austin, said: "It would be a magical story if we found a hidden gem."

He added: "We could change his life, change his family's life."

The football club set up the academy in Pakistan last year and are working with the Pakistan Football Federation.

It said hundreds of boys applied to be part of the Karachi academy but they could only take on 18 of them.

During their training, the teenagers get paid a small amount each month and get lessons in football and English.

Academy director Jamie Russell said: "Hopefully it would be brilliant if we could get a boy from Karachi to come across and fit into the group and work over here.

"It would be fantastic for us to be a step in their journey."

The Karachi Commissioner Muhammad Iqbal Memon said: "Swindon Town Academy has given them the opportunity to have the best training available.

"It is a fantastic opportunity not only for these kids, but the overall community of Karachi."

Courtesy: BBC News

PM orders Covid-19 vaccination for 5 to 11-year-olds

After the successful implementation of the first phase, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the officials to start the second phase of Covid-19 vaccination of children between five and 11 years.

The premier issued the directives to the National Institute of Health (NIH) during a meeting to review the virus' situation in the country. The premier was briefed by the NIH Executive Director Maj Gen Aamer Ikram about the current Covid-19 situation.

The PM was told that as many as eight million children between the ages of 5 and 11 years 25pc of the total group have been vaccinated with a 97pc success rate.

The prime minister, while appreciating the progress, directed the officials to vaccinate the remaining 75pc children at the earliest, the source added.

Mr Sharif was also briefed that around 90pc of the population have been fully and 95pc population has received at least one shot of vaccine.

According to the official data, over 132m people have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus while more than 139m people have received at least the first dose.



The number of people who have received booster doses as well stood at over 49.5m.

The prime minister also inquired about the situation of new variants and arrangements at the airports to stop the possible arrival of the virus from across the globe.

He was informed that a BF.7 variant of the virus is circulating in China.

The health authorities are carrying out random testing and genome sequencing to identify new variants and decrease the chances of spread in the country, the PM was briefed. Rumours

The NIH on Tuesday also refuted the rumours of the detection of new variants in Pakistan.

In a statement, the NIH said the news circulating

about the new variant was "inaccurate".

The reported variant in some areas is XBB, an old variant of Omicron, the statement said, adding that since its appearance, 29 cases of the XBB variant have been reported from Pakistan.

This is not the BF.7 variant which is spreading in China, the NIH added, while categorically stating that no case of BF.7 was yet detected in the country.

An official of NIH told Dawn that the XBB strain was discovered around three months back and became a dominant strain across the globe.

The official added that a number of cases of XBB have been reported from Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi however no case of BF.7 has been reported.

"Even if it arrives in Pakistan, there is nothing to worry about as the majority of Pakistanis are vaccinated and the immunity level of this region is high," he added.

Talking about the current situation, the official added no death has been reported for the last many weeks and only 15 patients are currently under treatment across hospitals in the country, out of which two were on ventilators.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Iran sign 39 MoUs to boost trade

Pakistan and Iran have signed 39 memorandums of understanding to enhance bilateral trade, improve economic relations and ensure cooperation in various fields such as transportation, tourism, fisheries, mines and minerals.

The MoUs were signed at the conclusion of a two-day meeting of the joint border trade committee on Sunday night. The meeting discussed various issues relating to the implementation of agreements signed between the two countries in 2010 and 2006 for increasing trade volume and providing facilities for import and export at the Pak-Iran borders.

Both sides agreed that the Zahidan Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture and Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry will make joint investment for provision of the required infrastructures in customs, trade, transportation and airline sectors.

It was agreed that the authorities concerned would be approached to increase the number of items included in the Preferential Trade Agreement signed between Pakistan and Iran and reduce tariff.

It was decided that both countries would take measures to increase bilateral trade to \$5 billion annually and also try to achieve balance of trade.

Both sides agree on opening of more joint border

markets

Both sides agreed that an additional border crossing point shall be opened at Kohak-Panjgur in order to increase bilateral trade.

It was also agreed that recommendations should be sent to higher authorities for establishment of new joint border markets at Mir Javeh-Taftan (first priority), Jalgh-Mashkel (second priority) and Shamsar (third priority) after approval by the relevant authorities and identification of exact locations by a joint technical team.

The two sides agreed that relevant ministries and authorities would be approached to sign a free trade agreement between Iran and Pakistan. It was agreed that efforts shall be made by both sides to reduce import tariff on fresh fruits through negotiations with the relevant authorities.

Both sides agreed to set up maritime clearance stations at Pasabandar in Iran and Jiwani in Pakistan for bilateral trade.

The Iranian side agreed to declare Gabd-Ramdan as designated TIR border at the earliest for conducting international transit trade from Pakistan towards Turkiye, Azerbaijan, Russia and other regional countries via Iranian territory. They proposed to declare Pishin/Mand as designated TIR station.



Both sides agreed that vehicles loaded with cargo shall be allowed without carnet/visa up to customs area at Mir Javeh and Mir Javeh Special Economic Zone on Iranian side, while on the principle of reciprocity, the same facility is being extended to Iranian cargo vehicles up to NLC terminal and railway station at Taftan.

Iranian authorities agreed to provide shelters to Pakistani rice at Zahidan customs. They also proposed that LPG in cylinders may be allowed to be imported via all land border stations from Iran to Pakistan.

The meeting was informed that a ferry service with Iran is being finalised and the same will be shared with the Iranian side after completion of codal formalities.

The Pakistani side said the number of railway wagons for freight transportation would be increased up to 500 on the completion of a bridge at Hirak by the end of June 2023, considering the increased demand of the traders.

Courtesy: Dawn

Govt unveils 'early to bed, early to rise' policy

In order to stabilise the economy, the federal cabinet on Tuesday decided to implement "bold" decisions that include the closure of markets at 8:30pm and wedding halls at 10pm, the use of efficient electronic appliances, and a 40 per cent reduction in power consumption in government offices.

The cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, also vowed to enforce these decisions under a National Energy Conservation Plan, introducing certain measures to ensure judicious utilisation of national resources.

In the cabinet meeting on Dec 20, the government had already approved a comprehensive National Emergency Plan for the conservation of energy to save hundreds of billions of rupees.

"The approval to the conservation plan has been accorded in line with the advice of the Power Division. It will come into force at once across the country," Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said after the cabinet meeting.

Mr Asif said restaurants, hotels, and markets would be shut down by 8:30pm and marriage halls by 10pm. "With this initiative, which has been taken in consultation with trade bodies, there will be a saving of around Rs 62 billion [annually]."

He said additional duties would also be imposed on inefficient electric fans, whose production would be halted from July 1, 2023.

The use of energy-efficient fans, which were easily available in the market, would help save Rs15 billion annually as they consumed about 40 to 60 watts of electricity as compared to the old ones consuming about 120 to 130 watts.

The defence minister said there would be a saving of approximately Rs 23 billion annually with the use of light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs. "No production of incandescent bulbs will be allowed after February 1, 2023, and a duty will also be imposed on them," he added.

Mr Asif added only two factories were producing such bulbs, one in Lahore and the other near Peshawar, and there would be no effect on their business. "The decision would help the country save Rs22 billion per annum, whereas the federal government departments would have to install energy efficient electric appliances, including fans and LED bulbs to avert excessive power consumption," he added.

Khawaja Asif said the government was in negotiation with motorcycle manufacturing companies for the production of electric bikes. "The motorcycles that run on petrol will



slowly be phased out. We have already been importing e-bikes and had started negotiations with motorcycle companies for the modification of existing ones, this will help save us around Rs86 billion."

The minister said all stakeholders, including the traders' community, were taken on board about the decisions to be made by the cabinet for the conservation of energy, which would have long-term effects.

He noted that Pakistan was blessed with bright sunlight 365 days a year – a huge renewable energy potential, but it was bearing the heavy cost of energy produced on imported fuel.

"Today, symbolically no light was on in the cabinet meeting room, with all curtains removed from window panes, and the cabinet members worked in daylight," the minister said and suggested architectural changes for more vibrantly luminous houses.

The minister underlined that some 29,000 megawatts (MW) electricity was consumed during the summer and 12,000 MW in the winter. Approximately 17,000 MW more elec-

tricity was used in the summer, including 5,300 MW by air conditioners and 12,000 MW by fans.

The minister said reforms were underway in housing societies' by-laws and building codes to ensure energy efficient infrastructure.

He said the installation of conical baffles in geysers within a year was made mandatory. The baffle provided cost-intensive heating for warm water as "it traps heat using less energy", which would help save Rs92 billion per year.

The street lights, as a symbolic measure, would be illuminated only at 50 per cent capacity and it would provide an incentive to the public for energy conservation and would help save Rs4 billion per year, he said.

For water conservation, he said, wholehearted measures would be taken, including review of water tariff for rural and urban areas. The building control authorities were directed to ensure water conservation measures in housing societies, incorporating the same in their by-laws.

Courtesy: Dawn

Move Over Moses and Zoroaster: Manhattan Has a New Female Lawgiver

The artist Shahzia Sikander calls the eight-foot sculpture she has placed atop a New York courthouse an urgent form of "resistance."

Shahzia Sikander's "NOW" (2023) crowns the courthouse of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court at 27 Madison Ave. It is not the first time the court has changed the lineup of figures presiding over its rooftop. Credit...via Shahzia Sikander and Madison Square Park Conservancy;

Frenzied commuters in New York's Flatiron district have been stopped in their tracks in recent days by an unlikely apparition near Moses, Confucius and Zoroaster. Standing



atop the grandiose state courthouse is a shimmering, golden eight-foot female sculpture, emerging from a pink lotus flower and wearing Justice

Ruth Bader Ginsburg's signature lace collar.

Staring regally ahead with hair braided like spiraling horns, the

sculpture, installed as part of an exhibition that opened last week, is the first female to adorn one of the courthouse's 10 plinths, dominated for more than a century by now weathered statues representing great lawgivers throughout the ages all of them men.

Shahzia Sikander, 53, the paradigm-busting Pakistani American artist behind the work, said the sculpture was part of an urgent and necessary cultural reckoning underway as New York, along with cities across the world, reconsiders traditional representations of power in public spaces and recasts civic structures to better reflect 21st-century social mores.

Courtesy: The New York Times

Pakistan, Russia to sign oil supply agreement in March

Pakistan and Russia decided on Friday to address all technical issues insurance, transportation and payment mechanism to sign an agreement by late March this year for the supply of Russian oil and other petroleum products at discounted rates.

“On crude products and future supply of oil products, we have already decided to draft an agreement and to sort out all issues that we have with regard to transportation, insurance, payments and volumes and we have already established the timelines for this agreement” for late March this year, said Russia’s Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov at a joint news conference with Economic Affairs Minister Ayaz Sadiq.

The news conference came after the conclusion of the three-day eighth session of the Pakistan-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

The two sides, nevertheless, signed three agreements for cooperation in the customs and aviation sectors.

This was, however, short of expectations Minister of State for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik had pitched early last month after his return from Moscow.

At a Dec 5 presser, Dr Malik said the detailed terms and conditions of the discounted oil commodities would be settled during the upcoming visit of the Russian energy minister to Islamabad by mid-January and before that, the two sides would crystallise proposals to a stage that an executive summary or an agreement could be signed and supplies start flowing.

According to a joint statement read out at Friday’s conference, the two sides reached an in-principle agreement on the supply of Russian crude oil and oil products to Pakistan, with technical details to be finalised in March at the latest.

“After consensus on the technical specifications achieved, the oil and gas trade transaction will be struc-



tured in a way it has a mutual economic benefit for both countries,” it said, adding that the process would be completed within March.

Friendly currencies

Responding to a question, the Russian minister said liquefied natural gas (LNG) volumes were committed to long-term LNG volume contracts and its spot market was very small, but two leading companies, including Gazprom, would have additional capacities by late 2023.

“We have decided that it would be a good idea for Pakistan to approach Gazprom and Novatek, two largest LNG-producing companies, in late 2023 to discuss the conditions when they have spare capacities,” he said.

Mr Shulginov said the transactions between the two countries could be done through the currencies of any friendly country.

On the delay in the Russia-supported Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline (PSGP) from Karachi to Lahore, Minister Sadiq said the energy minister was working on a holistic plan for the energy sector involving the supply of gas to pipelines and related matters.

Oil supply after March

On the sidelines of the news conference, Musadik Malik said all details had been settled, including transportation, structure and currency, etc., that would be inappropriate to be disclosed before an agreement is concluded by March.

He said the oil supplies from Russia would start after March, but LNG imports from Moscow

would be looked into by the end of the current year.

Responding to a question, he said two refineries Pak-Arab Refinery Company Ltd (Parco) and Pakistan Refinery Ltd had expressed their capability to use recipes to operate 32 to 35 per cent of their refining capacity on Russian crude. Besides, private refinery Cnergyico could process up to 80-90pc of its capacity on Russian crude.

He said currencies from all friendly countries would be welcome for transactions with Russia. He added that all these specifics relating to transaction structure, including currency, shipping, pricing, insurance and commercial terms, had been discussed and settled but could not be made public before March. “The supplies of oil and oil products would begin soon after March,” he said.

The two sides also discussed innovative ways of doing business, including through barter, and agreed to explore the option further. In the context of the desire of both parties to promote regional integration and Eurasian connectivity, the two sides agreed to share information towards developing and improving rail and road infrastructure.

On the last day of the IGC meeting on Friday, the two sides signed an agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs-related matters; a protocol on the exchange of documents and data on the customs value of goods transported; and a working agreement on the airworthiness of aeronautical products.

Courtesy: Dawn

Contd.... Pakistan expects

“We have a firm belief that all conflicts can be resolved peacefully and there are no obstacles which diplomacy cannot surmount. Ukraine conflict is no exception. Developing countries like Pakistan are facing negative consequences of the conflict in terms of economic impact, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said.

He expressed the hope that the strong tradition of diplomacy of Russia would help achieve the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The foreign minister said that Pakistan considered Russia an important player in West, South and Central Asia, and it would keep up high-level contacts with it.

He said “our friendly and detailed discussion” encompassed all aspects of bilateral relations and regional matters. He said both countries were celebrating the 75th anniversary of their bilateral diplomatic relations and that Pakistan desired to strengthen its operation with Russia in the fields of trade, security, defence, counter-terrorism, education, and people-to-people contacts.

He recalled the summit-level meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand as well as the InterGovernment Commission meeting held in Islamabad focusing on trade, economy, and energy cooperation.

Afghanistan situation The foreign minister said that Pakistan and Russia had good cooperation on Afghanistan, and wanted to achieve common goals of peace and stability in the war-torn country.

In reply to a question about Russia-Pakistan military cooperation, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia was satisfied over its military cooperation with Pakistan.

He said the two countries were holding regular military contacts, including joint exercises and military training. He said the elimination of terrorism from the region was directly linked with Afghanistan, and they had agreed to use the capacities of SCO, particularly its Contact Group on Afghanistan, for the purpose.

Courtesy: Dawn

Dar expects Saudi Arabia, China to beef up forex reserves by Jan-end

Saudi Arabia and China were set to beef up Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves much before the close of this month, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said and announced that the government would be shortly imposing flood levy on the affluent and a significant gain tax on banks' foreign exchange earnings to ramp up revenue.

"Our foreign exchange reserves by end-June would be much better than you can think," Mr Dar said while speaking at a joint news conference with five other PML-N ministers.

He said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme would be completed at all costs, China and Saudi Arabi would enhance their support, government-to-government (G2G) disinvestments would be completed, and the current account deficit would be about \$3 billion less than earlier projections.

The presser had been called in response to a "white paper" launched a day earlier by the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), suggesting that Pakistan was on the verge of anarchy because of hyperinflation and unemployment.

Mr Dar repeatedly snubbed questions about the possibility of the country defaulting on its foreign debt, insisting that such speculation was being pushed by the PTI, whose white paper was "a pack of lies" and was allegedly based on selective data, misleading numbers, factually incorrect and devoid of economic context.

The minister disagreed that a threshold committed with the IMF under the eighth quarterly review for contingency budgetary measures had been crossed, as revenue collection during the first five months (July to November) of this fiscal year was above target.

However, he hastened to add that a heavy revenue ticket of Rs270-



290bn super tax pitched for December could not yield results because of stay orders, resulting in a revenue shortfall in December.

"We are in any case planning to beef up revenues and considering a flood levy and a substantial recovery on account of unprecedented foreign exchange wind-falls" earned by the banking sector, but there would be no measure that adds up to the burden on common people already suffering a lot of hardship, he said.

He noted that petroleum prices had not gone up for over three months and instead dropped by Rs19-20 per litre for petrol and diesel and by Rs29-30 for kerosene and light diesel.

Responding to a question, the finance minister said many countries had imposed taxes on foreign exchange earnings.

He said various agencies were already in action to combat the smuggling of foreign exchange and other commodities like wheat and fertiliser.

The minister recalled that during the prime minister's visits in September, China and Saudi Arabia had agreed to increase their support to Pakistan, and the Saudi finance minister later confirmed this to international news agencies.

He said the process got delayed, but Saudi Arabia would increase its support much earlier than the end of this month, while the Chinese loan rollover was also being

processed. He said the privatisation transactions, particularly the sale of LNG plants and others on a G2G basis, were also progressing and would be completed within six months.

Responding to a question, the minister said the IMF delay was because of the credibility gap caused by "reckless decisions" of the PTI government on the eve of the no-confidence vote.

Resultantly, the Fund raised questions not only about the quarter ending December instead of the original end-October performance but also sought details about the subsequent 11th and 12th reviews (until June), particularly on how Pakistan would finance \$16.3bn flood-related requirements.

"We have provided these things" and would be meeting the IMF on the occasion of a donors' conference in Geneva on January 9, Mr Dar said.

Inflation 'major concern'
On inflation, he conceded that it was a major cause of concern for the government and it would now focus on gradually bringing it down. He insisted that inflation and other economic indicators would be much better by June 30, 2023.

Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal said the major factor for higher prices of essential commodities was a total lack of support from Punjab, besides massive devaluation, PTI's package for force energy price cuts and the global

inflationary cycle.

Mr Dar said it was a dishonest presentation of the country's economic situation by the PTI leaders, adding that they did not present what they inherited except the current account deficit, which too was being depicted out of context and even the PTI failed to show any improvement on that count by the end of its government.

He said the economic situation since April 2022 was strongly influenced by the legacy that the new government got from the previous administration.

He said the IMF managing director had recently noted that one-third of the globe would be facing a serious recession problem in 2023, with Pakistan being no exception.

The finance minister said the PTI's claim of about 100pc to 200pc increase in prices was incorrect because "authentic data" showed the prices of wheat rose by 33pc, cooking oil 21pc, masoor pulse 19.5pc, mash pulse 35pc, tomato 13.7pc, petrol 47pc, and vegetable ghee by 14.9pc.

Mr Dar also dismissed the PTI's figure of creating 5.5m jobs during its government and said that official data finalised by the party itself put this number at 3.2m between 2019 and 2022.

He said the PML-N's previous government had increased revenue collection from Rs1.938 trillion to Rs3.844tr in the last year, while the PTI administration reduced it to Rs3.829tr in its first year and reached Rs6.1tr in five years despite promising to double it from Rs3.9tr in 2018 to 8tr in its first year in office.

He said that during the first six months of the 2022-23 financial year, the revenue collection jumped 17.5pc to Rs3.429tr from a year ago and the annual target of Rs7.5tr would be met.

Courtesy: Dawn

'The Legend of Maula Jatt' creates new domestic and global records

Pakistani movie *The Legend of Maula Jatt* has now cemented itself as Pakistan's highest-grossing movie of all time having amassed Rs 1 billion domestically and completing \$10 million globally in its two-and-a-half month run in cinemas.

Figures shared by industry insiders and producers and director of the movie showed that despite its staggered release across the country, the movie continues to attract large crowds, witnessing a late surge in ticket sales, in part thanks to winter vacations and influx of expatriates.

Data shared by industry insiders showed that despite falling to a domestic collection of Rs 20.6 million for the 10th week, collection rose to Rs 28.5 million.



Meanwhile, TLoMJ Director Bilal Lashari tweeted about the milestone.

"Perfect timing as #thelegendofmaulajatt crosses 100 crore tonight at the Box Office in Pakistan and \$10 million worldwide." Once again, a big thank you to team Maula Jatt and fans of TLoMJ

across the world who made this film a roaring success.

"Wishing you all a very happy new year," he said. This effectively makes Lashari Pakistan's most successful director. News of TLoMJ's global gross comes amid news that the release of the Pakistani blockbuster has been cancelled in India. Should the decision be reversed, it would make TLoMJ become the first Pakistani film to be released in India in more than 10 years.

Given how it has proved itself across the world, there would have been the potential that the film could gather an even greater gross in India.

Courtesy: Daily Times

Director of Pakistani documentary on forced conversions says such themes inspire 'positive change'

Jawad Sharif, the director of the Pakistani documentary 'The Losing Side' on forced religious conversions in Pakistan which won big at the prestigious Cannes World Film Festival in France last month, said on Monday that films based on such themes help inspire "positive change" in society.

'The Losing Side', according to Sharif's production house, narrates the "traumatic stories" of four survivors of forced conversions and marriages in Pakistan's southern Sindh province. The documentary won the 'Best Human Rights Film' award in the November Online Edition of the Cannes World Film Festival 2022.

The 40-minute-long documentary film was shot in 2022 in different parts of Pakistan's southern Sindh province, including Tharparkar, Mithi, and Badin. As per official data, at least four million Hindus reside in Sindh.

According to a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Pakistani Minorities an informal group run by members of the UK's House of Commons and Lords each year, as many as 1,000 Pakistani Hindu and Christian girls aged 12 to 25 are forcibly converted to Islam to be married off to their abductors.

The report suggested that cases of forced conversions in the country have been increasing steadily in recent years, making it one of the most pressing

human rights issues in the South Asian nation.

In October 2021, Pakistan's Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions rejected the anti-forced conversion bill after the Minister of Religious Affairs opposed the proposed law.

"The reason behind highlighting such themes is to bring positive change in society by addressing the violations [of human rights] so they can be lessened or eradicated," Sharif told Arab News.

"When it comes to themes such as forced conversion and forced marriages [in Pakistan], it becomes quite a conflict to release the film," he added. "There is pressure from the government to not send out a negative message in media, given that the country's economic situation is bad."

But for Sharif, the reason behind highlighting such themes is to bring positive change in society by addressing human rights violations so they can be decreased or eradicated.

"We have filmed first-hand accounts of victims in 'The Losing Side'. They are basically survivors from the Hindu community in Sindh," he said.

"They were forcefully kidnapped, converted, and sold out to different parties who forced girls into multiple marriages, raped them, and used them," Sharif added. "It is a very emotional and sensitive



story featuring personal takes."

Sharif said men in this part of the world take advantage of minority women knowing they are vulnerable. He added that most minority girls live below the poverty line which enables the men, who have some authority over them, to manipulate them into surrendering.

"It was a huge challenge to film the girls and women as they were scared that people would come after them again after watching the documentary," he recalled. "My first target is local audiences to create awareness among the local community where the issue is prevalent," Sharif shared.

Sharif said recognition at an international film festival helps raise the issue in mainstream media, which makes it more prominent. "If we speak of legislation and policy change for forced conversion in Pakistan, the pressure mostly comes from international media," he added.

Courtesy: The Arab news

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