

# 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.

## March in History

**March 12, 1952:** Princely states of Kalat, Makran, Las Bela and Kharan agree, with the concurrence of the Central Government, to integrate their territories into Balochistan.

**March 15, 1955:** The biggest post-independence irrigation project, Kotri Barrage is inaugurated.

**March 23, 1956:** Constitution is promulgated on Pakistan Day. Major General Iskander Mirza sworn in as first President of Pakistan.

**March 23, 1956:** Constituent assembly adopts name of Islamic Republic of Pakistan and first constitution.

**March 8, 1957:** President Iskandar Mirza lays the foundation-stone of the State Bank of Pakistan building in Karachi.

**March 23, 1960:** Foundation of Minar-i-Pakistan is laid.

**March 21, 1965:** Pakistan and China sign a border agreement in Peking (Beijing).

**March 14, 1972:** New education policy enforced. Free education in all private and public schools.

**March 1, 1981:** National population census starts throughout the country.

**March 29, 1983:** Foundation-stone of Satellite Earth Station is laid near Rawalpindi.

**March 8, 1998:** Population census begins in the country.

**March 23, 2003:** AAJ TV, Pakistan's premier channel inaugurated.

**March 02, 2019:** Pakistan released Abhinandan Varthaman and returned him to India in a simple ceremony via Wagha border.

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.

## S. Arabia-Iran patch-up takes world by surprise

Regional powerhouses Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed on Friday to restore ties and reopen diplomatic missions in a surprise, Chinese-brokered announcement that could have wide-ranging implications across the Middle East.

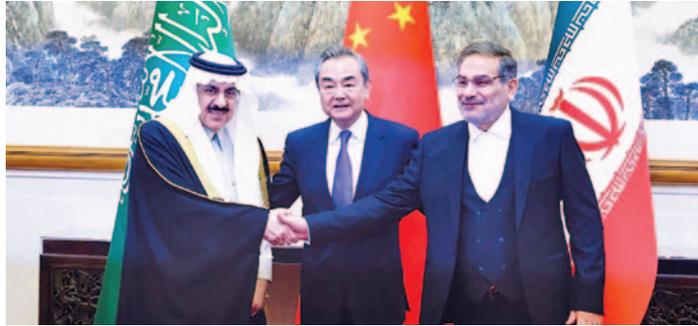
In a trilateral statement, Tehran and Riyadh said they would reopen embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago.

Friday's announcement, which follows five days of previously unannounced talks in Beijing and several rounds of dialogue in Iraq and Oman, caps a broader realignment and efforts to ease tensions in the region.

"Following talks, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen embassies and missions within two months," said the joint statement, which was published by both countries' official media.

Riyadh cut ties after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in 2016 following the Saudi execution of revered Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr just one in a series of flashpoints between the two long-standing rivals.

The detente between Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and Iran, a pariah for Western governments over its nuclear activities, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterised by turbulence for decades.



The agreement, signed by Iran's top security official, Ali Shamkhani, and Saudi Arabia's national security adviser Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban, agreed to re-activate a 2001 security cooperation accord, as well as another earlier pact on trade, economy and investment.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi described the deal as a victory for dialogue and peace, adding that Beijing would continue to play a constructive role in addressing tough global issues.

A White House national security spokesperson said Saudi Arabia, which is looking to expand its partnership with China, had kept the United States informed about the talks in Beijing but that Washington had not been directly involved.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, an agreement has been reached to resume diplomatic relations and re-open embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months.

The agreement also includes both sides' affirmation of the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs

of states.

They also agreed to implement the Security Cooperation Agreement and the General Agreement for Co-operation in the Fields of Economy, Trade, Investment, Technology, Science, Culture, Sports, and Youth, which was signed in 1998.

'Hash out their differences' "It kind of sets the scene for the region's two superpowers to start to hash out their differences," said Dina Esfandiary of the International Crisis Group.

"The potential downside of that, of course, is that if they are the ones who are divvying up the region and sorting things out amongst themselves, you start to lose sight of regional contexts and grievances, which could potentially be problematic."

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian welcomed the rapprochement and said Tehran will "actively prepare other regional initiatives".

"The return to normal relations between Tehran and Riyadh offers great opportunities to the two coun-

tries, the region and the Muslim world," he tweeted.

Saudi Arabia's top diplomat Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said the agreement stems from the kingdom's preference for "political solutions and dialogue" an approach it wants to see become the norm in the region.

Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar all hailed the announcement. The White House too welcomed the deal, but said it remains to be seen whether the Iranians will "meet their obligations".

The head of Lebanon's Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militant group, called the agreement a "good development".

"It could open new horizons in the region," said Hassan Nasrallah, who is often critical of Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan welcomes normalisation Pakistan also warmly welcomed the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the Saudi Arabia and Iran, facilitated by China.

In a statement issued on Friday, the Foreign Office said Pakistan firmly believed that this important diplomatic breakthrough will contribute to peace and stability in the region and beyond. "We commend the role played by China's visionary leadership in coordinating this historic agreement which reflects the power of constructive engagement and meaningful dialogue," it said. The statement lauded the sagacious leadership of Saudi Arabia and Iran for this very positive development.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Hadiqa Kiani rebuilds 100 houses, maternity clinic in flood-ravaged villages in Balochistan

First phase of her project involved reconstruction of 100 houses, maternity clinic, grocery store, and primary school

Renowned Pakistani singer Hadiqa Kiani has fulfilled her promise to rebuild villages in Balochistan, the province affected by floods last year.

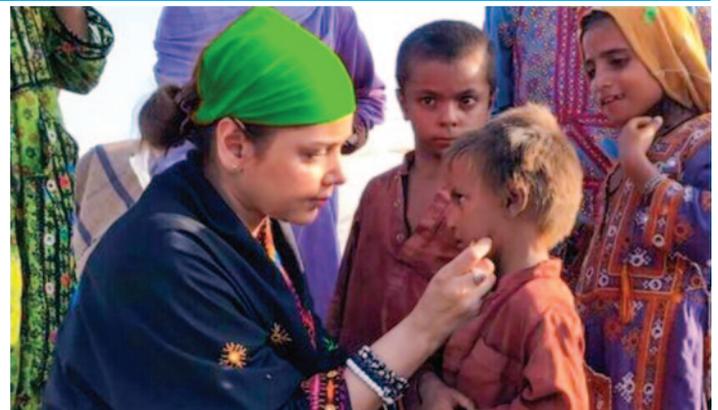
Kiani had started her project, Vaseela-e-Raah, in August and had collected donations from Lahore and Karachi to aid in the rebuilding process.

By September, she had visited the sites and communicated with the affected people.

Hadiqa Kiani shared her project updates on Instagram on Wednesday, revealing that the first phase of her project had been completed.

She wrote, "By the grace of Allah and by your active support, we have completed the first phase of our project in Balochistan."

*Courtesy: Saama Web Desk*



## By-elections on 37 NA seats suspended

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday suspended the election schedule for 37 National Assembly seats which had fallen vacant after the resignation of PTI lawmakers in light of the orders issued by the Islamabad, Peshawar, Sindh and Balochistan high courts.

These polls were to be held later this month.

Meanwhile, amid confusion about whether the PTI will hold its election rally in Lahore on Monday, the ECP officials are set to meet Punjab caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi today to review the opposition party's plan and the arrangements for polls in the province scheduled for April 30.

Besides, the ECP will hold crucial meetings this week to determine the fate of general elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies, currently hanging in the balance even after a Supreme Court's verdict on the matter.

PTI Chairman Imran Khan postponed the party's rally in Lahore on Sunday after the provincial government banned public gatherings by imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

However, it is yet to be confirmed whether or not the former ruling party will take out its rally, as Mr Khan has to appear before the Islamabad sessions court in the



Toshakhana case.

The electoral watchdog, through a notification issued on Sunday, suspended by-elections for 37 constituencies of the National Assembly.

Of these seats, by-elections were to be held on 24 seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, nine in Sindh, three in Islamabad and one in Balochistan.

The electoral process has been suspended on the orders of the Peshawar, Islamabad, Sindh and Balochistan high courts this month based on different petitions.

According to the ECP, the by-elections were postponed in light of the respective high court decisions. The by-elections were scheduled for March 16 and 19.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Babar Awan filed a petition before the ECP, demanding it set aside the imposition of Section 144 in Lahore.

He said in the petition that the elec-

tion schedule had been announced and the Election Commission had already permitted political parties to undertake political activities as per law, but Punjab's interim government "in blatant violation of ECP's code of conduct and relevant orders" has directed Lahore's deputy commissioner to impose Section 144 to stop the PTI rally in Lahore.

"This is the second time since the announcement of the election schedule that the Punjab interim government has led to this fascist tactic to stop Pakistan's largest political party (PTI) from doing electoral/political activity," the petition said.

It said that on March 8, the provincial government banned rallies and ordered a police operation on PTI workers, which led to the death of a party worker Ali Bilal, also known as Zille Shah and several others were injured.

The petitioner feared that the "Punjab interim government/chief minister/cabinet wants to repeat the same events even now and this high-

handedness may lead to a constitutional crisis and political instability".

One reason given by the district administration to ban public gatherings in Lahore was a Pakistan Super League (PSL) match in the city.

However, Mr Awan said in the petition that the match was scheduled to start at 7pm, whereas the PTI rally was to be held between 2pm and 5:30pm.

Besides, he said the Supreme Court had already issued directions to the federal government and interim government of Punjab for holding of the election within 90 days.

He said it was the constitutional duty of the federation, in terms of Article 148(3) of the Constitution, "to ensure that the government of every province is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution".

"There can be no doubt that this duty includes ensuring that a general election to the assembly of every province is held, and enabled to be held, in a timely manner within the period set out in the Constitution," the petition said.

"The ECP is requested to take notice of this illegal imposition of Section 144 in Lahore and the order may be declared null and void and without justification and the PTI may be allowed to hold election rally as per plan," the petition added.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Another Sarwat Gilani film to premiere at Cannes

Pakistani short film Noor has made waves by being selected for the prestigious Cannes Film Festival which is another feather in the cap of actor Sarwat Gilani.

The film, tells a story of a girl with visual aberrations and her family's reluctance to understand her situation, won in the Best Health Film category.

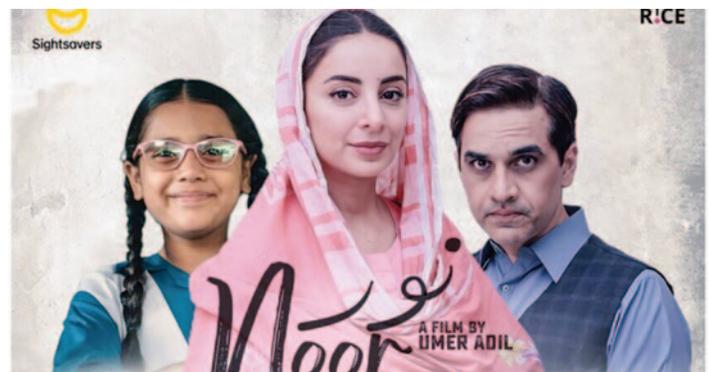
This marks the second time a Pakistani film has been selected for Cannes after Saim Sadiq's Joyland. Produced by See Prime and di-

rected by Umer Adil, the film stars Sarwat Gilani, Omair Rana, Mizna Waqas, Tanisha Shameem and Tasneem Ansari.

This is also Sarwat Gilani's second successful film at Cannes.

The short film's story touches on an important issue and raises awareness of the struggles faced by individuals with vision problems, particularly in the face of family members who may be unwilling to acknowledge the issue.

With its inclusion in the Cannes



Film Festival, Noor has further highlighted the significance of these issues and brought them to a global stage.

Noor's success at Cannes is a testament to the growth and progress of

the Pakistani film industry. The film's storyline, coupled with its excellent direction and acting, have rightfully earned it recognition on an international platform.

*Courtesy: Saama Web Desk*

## Qatar to help Pakistan tackle economic challenges

Qatar will help Pakistan during the current economic crisis and contribute to the country's progress and development, its emir said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on the sidelines of the 5th UN Least Developed Countries (LDC) Conference.

The premier is on a two-day official visit to Qatar to attend the conference.

According to a press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the emir reiterated his resolve to continue Qatar's complete cooperation and support in the "development and progress agenda of Pakistan".

He welcomed the prime minister and reiterated his keen interest in strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation, investment, trade and employment opportunities for skilled manpower.

According to the PMO, the two leaders deliberated upon an array of mutually beneficial issues and exchanged views to diversify cooperation in economic and investment sectors.

The prime minister appreciated Qatar's support for



development projects in Pakistan and highlighted the vast opportunities for cooperation between the two countries.

The emir lauded the contributions of the Pakistani diaspora in Qatar's development and hailed the contribution of Pakistani security authorities during the FIFA Football World Cup, 2022 hosted by Qatar, the press release added.

The emir also accepted the prime minister's invitation to visit Pakistan.

The prime minister arrived in Doha where he was greeted by Qatari officials.

"Just reached Doha on the invitation of my brother HH Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar to attend the 5th UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs)," the PM said in a series of tweets.

"Least Developed Countries have been badly affected by climate change, post-pandemic & geo-strategic disruption in food & energy supply chains. These global events have left them vulnerable. LDCs will be better served by putting welfare of people at the centre of public policy."

The conference will be held from March 5-9 to consider steps for accelerating sustainable development in the LDCs and put them on the road to prosperity.

After his meeting with the Qatar emir, Mr Sharif met Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) Chief Executive Officer Mansoor Ebrahim Al-Mahmoud.

They exchanged views on progress made on various investment proposals in multiple sectors of Pakistan's economy, a statement from the PMO said.

During the meeting, Mr Al-Mahmoud and PM Sharif highlighted investment opportunities in energy and infrastructure sectors of Pakistan.

The QIA CEO expressed a keen interest in investing in LNG power plants, airports, and solar power parks in Pakistan. The prime minister thanked the QIA chief for his interest in enhancing economic cooperation and invited Qatari investors to take advantage of the investment-friendly policies of the Pakistani government.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Played Role In Facilitating Saudi-Iran Thaw: Pakistan

As the widely welcomed rapprochement between two regional countries Saudi Arabia and Iran became public, Pakistan has also come forward to take credit for this major development saying it had also facilitated the trilateral dialogue.

Speaking at a weekly briefing on Friday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said, "Pakistan, like several other countries and friends of both Iran and Saudi Arabia, had played its part in facilitating dialogue. In this context, I would also like to recall that the first meeting of the two foreign ministers took place in Islamabad on the sidelines of the OIC meeting."

Welcoming the development, she stated: "It was obvious that this agreement was a result of China's mediation efforts and the constructive talks that it had facilitated, and the two sides were able to resolve their differences."

She added, "Pakistan does not wish to take away credit from China in this latest agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia on normalisation of relations and congratulates them on their successful diplomatic efforts".

Pakistan had earlier welcomed the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the two countries and commended China's visionary leadership in coordinating this historic agreement.

"We believe that this diplomatic breakthrough will contribute to peace and stability in the region and beyond. We hope this normalisation will define a template for regional cooperation and harmony," said the FO.

In response to reports that China has demanded overdue payments from Pakistan on the Chinese independent power plants installed under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the spokesperson said that these claims that have been made in the media have taken an inter-governmental conversation completely out of context by adding sensationalist jargon to it.

"Pakistan and China are all-weather strategic cooperative partners. China is a consistent, generous, and steadfast friend of Pakistan that has stood by Pakistan for the last several decades. China had come and invested in Pakistan's power sector under CPEC when no foreign investor was ready to invest in Pakistan. This investment had resulted in economic development for the country and helped us overcome shortages and breakouts," she explained.

"We are grateful to our Chinese friends for their consistent commitment to Pakistan, to CPEC, and for investments in Pakistan."

Pakistan and China, she added, will continue to



consult closely on all matters and find optimal win-win outcomes.

The spokesperson also refrained from commenting on Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's remarks who had said that Pakistan would never compromise on its nuclear strike capability for the revival of the stalled International Monetary Fund (IMF) package.

"First of all, I would not like to comment on a debate that is taking place in the Parliament. Secondly, I have said earlier and I would like to reiterate that the issues that you have mentioned about Pakistan's nuclear programme are not on the agenda with any government, any financial institution, or any international organisation. This debate is just speculative, and I would not like to add to the speculation," she responded.

She said that reports that are seen in the media may not always be an accurate reflection of the discussions that may be taking place.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## PM decries 'unsustainable debt' of poor nations

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called for ways to address the issue of the "unsustainable debt burden" of Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Addressing the 5th UN Conference on LDCs, the PM also emphasised the need for a global financial system that addresses the issues of poor countries.

He said it was a matter of great concern that six LDCs are classified as suffering from debt burden while 17 are at high risk of debt distress.

"We also need to reform the unequal financial architecture [and] make it people-centric and designed to address special needs and weaknesses of LDCs," Mr Sharif said.

He also called upon the international community to join hands in tapping the full potential of the LDCs and help put them on the road to prosperity.

PM Shehbaz said "multiple crises" have taken a heavy toll on the LDCs as their GDP growth plummeted and international trade shrunk.

This led to a rise in poverty, food insecurity and inequality, the PM said, adding that these factors compounded the distress of LDC as they fell short of their developmental goals."

PM Shehbaz said that he was

pleased to note that the Doha Programme of Action had set an ambitious target to enable 15 additional LDCs to meet the criteria for graduating from the list by 2031.

He added that the "ambitious targets" would require "revitalised global partnerships based on effective means of implementation in certain areas".

Mr Sharif told the meeting that Pakistan was committed to implementing the programme of action, considering it as "an opportunity to accelerate sustainable prosperity" in the least developed countries.

"As we move towards the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, Pakistan will continue to advocate several specific steps to advance sustainable development in LDCs," he said.

The prime minister also said that the official development assistance (ODA), comprising 0.7pc of the gross national income (GNI) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, must be fulfilled. He said that 0.15 to 0.2pc must be allocated to LDCs.

He added that there are still steps needed to be taken to address inequalities among the countries.

Firstly, we must address vaccine in-



equality through adequate and timely access to safe and effective vaccines for LDCs, Mr Sharif said.

Pakistan was committed to the supply of safe and effective vaccines and the allocation of resources for LDCs, the prime minister said.

He added that universal access to social protection should also be provided in order to support the most "needy and vulnerable".

Lastly, an 'international technology pact' aligned with the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs) should be adopted to allow easy access for developing countries to build productivity and bridge the digital divide.

The PM said partnerships of LDCs with developed nations as well as the private sector and civil society were significant for global prosperity.

He emphasised the need for exploring opportunities to ensure sustain-

able development in the places where international assistance was needed the most.

He said the LDCs needed major investments in health, education and social protection systems to fully implement 'Agenda 2030' and achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

He pointed out that it was a matter of great concern that six LDCs had been classified as under extreme burden and added that the needy nations required a system of social protection.

The prime minister lauded the Doha Programme of Action 2031 particularly its concrete measures including the online universities, food stock system and investment support centre.

He congratulated the emir of Qatar for the successful hosting of the conference and the FIFA Football World Cup.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Transgender law comes under fire at CII meeting

Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) Chairman Dr Qibla Ayaz said that after a detailed review of the Transgender Persons (Rights of Protection) Rules, the council had reached the conclusion that "self-perceived identity" is un-Islamic.

Addressing a press conference after taking the sense of all stakeholders during a two-day meeting, he said these rules were framed in continuation of the Transgender Act and contained several provisions and clauses which were not compatible with Sharia.

The council expressed concerns over the social and legal problems faced by intersex and transgender persons, he said, adding that protection of basic human rights of these persons



must be ensured.

Dr Ayaz said the council also examined the amendment bills presented by Senator Mohsin Aziz, Senator Mushtaq Ahmed and Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri and suggested amendments to them.

Apart from the CII members and

other religious scholars and leaders, representatives of the transgender community, doctors, legal and social experts, civil society organisations, the National Database and Registration Authority and Ministry of Human Rights also participated in the meeting to review all aspects of the issues pertaining to the intersex and transgender community.

Islamophobia resolution

Meanwhile, the CII also passed a resolution in connection with the International Day to Combat Islamophobia and hailed the UN decision to celebrate it on March 15 annually as a commendable initiative.

Mr Ayaz said the council hoped that continuous, integrated and comprehensive measures would yield positive results in this context.

It noted that certain elements in the West and some other countries were engaged in nefarious designs to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred towards Islam and Muslims, due to which there were serious threats to the global peace

*Courtesy: Dawn* 5

## Dar blames 'trust deficit' with IMF for delayed deal

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar blamed a delay in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme on the previous government, whose "failure to meet commitments" created a trust deficit that has continued to bite.

However, he said the current government was trying its best to put the economy back on track and complete the IMF programme at any cost. He said the country was "very close" to signing a staff-level agreement with the IMF, which would offer a critical lifeline for taming a balance-of-payments crisis.

An agreement would release \$1.1 billion, which is part of a \$6.5bn bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obligations.

"We seem to be very close to signing the staff-level agreement, hopefully, God willing, in the next few days," Mr Dar said at a seminar organised by the Ministry of Finance in Islamabad with international lenders on strengthening public finance management.

"I and my team are absolutely committed to completing this pro-

gramme to the best of our ability," he said. "We have been in the review and I think it has taken longer than it should have, in my opinion."

Mr Dar said the upcoming budget 2023-24 would envisage steps for taking the country out of the quagmire the present government inherited and putting the nation back on track and on a high and sustainable economic growth trajectory.

He said the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition government was handed over the economy that was in a shambles. He said the previous government signed the IMF agreement, but instead of honouring its promises, it reversed the conditions it had already implemented.

"This created a lot of trust deficit" with the international community, he said, adding that these were not agreements of an individual but commitments of a sovereign state. Mr Dar said the current bailout programme had taken longer than all the previous programmes because of the trust deficit.

He said reforms in the energy sector, which has piled up more than Rs4 trillion (\$14.18 billion) in debt, were the most critical to get the economy



back on track. "The power sector has to be structurally reformed and fixed and let me endorse that the issue was and has been very grave," he said.

However, he said that "we are now in a position to move forward with full confidence" and emphasised that the country had the strength and resilience to overcome the challenges but had been missing consistent policies and suffered fiscal mismanagement over the years. He said the only IMF programme Pakistan ever completed was during PML-N's tenure and even the powerful military dictators could never go beyond ninth or tenth reviews of the lender's programme.

The finance minister said Pakistan was passing through very challenging times and all have to make contributions to come out of the quagmire the present government inherited.

To achieve this, he said the government had already announced austerity measures under which the prime minister has banned the purchase of all vehicles and all other new durable items until June 2024 on top of a 15pc cut on current and non-employee expenditure at all the ministries, divisions and attached departments.

Luxury vehicles from the cabinet members had been withdrawn and the cabinet members would be bound to travel economy class and not to stay at five-star hotels anywhere at home or abroad.

However, this was followed by devastating floods that caused over \$30bn losses and damages to the economy and the federal and provincial governments had to make available Rs452bn for relief and rehabilitation activities.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Task force proposed to 'check' anti-army campaign

The government is mulling forming a special task force to check social media campaigns against the army, an official source told Dawn.

He explained that a summary to set up the task force has been moved but was still awaiting approval. "For now it is just a proposal."

The proposed task force will comprise officers from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra). The proposed task force will be assisted by the police and other law enforcement agencies and frame recommendations to check the misuse of social media.

The move came at a time when the government has accused the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and its chairman,



Imran Khan, of running a vilification campaign against the military.

As widening political polarisation in the country was also reflected in the digital world, several social media trends vilifying the army and its officers have been promoted in the recent past. In Aug 2022, the military expressed strong disapproval of "false propaganda and insensitive comments on social media" after six army officers were martyred in a helicop-

ter crash in Balochistan. Later, the FIA constituted a team to trace and arrest those behind the campaigns.

An official of the interior ministry said eight TikTok accounts, 44 Twitter accounts and more than 50 Facebook accounts have been identified who were allegedly involved in running 'anti army' campaigns on social media.

This is the government's second attempt to quell the army's criticism on social media in as many months.

In February, differences emerged within cabinet members after a bill proposing a crackdown on social media was presented for the apex body's approval.

During one cabinet meeting, some members observed that the law should also apply to those defaming the parliamentarians while for some, harsh punishment would be tantamount to curbing freedom of expression. The interior ministry had presented the proposal titled Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

The cabinet was informed that despite the presence of Section 500 in the Pakistan Penal Code (Punishment for defamation), there was 'a long-standing need for a separate provision to protect the judiciary and armed forces' from scandalous and derogatory attacks.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Governor fixes May 28 for KP assembly polls

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Governor Haji Ghulam Ali fixed May 28 as the date for general polls to the provincial assembly, without officially communicating the decision to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The decision to set the poll date was announced by the governor during a brief interaction with reporters after his meeting with ECP representatives for final consultation.

Informed sources told Dawn that no specific date or dates were proposed by the commission during the meeting, but the governor observed that election campaign during Ramazan would not be possible and candidates should have sufficient time for campaigning after Eid-ul-Fitr.

An official said a letter would be written to the KP governor asking him to officially convey the poll date to the ECP.

The poll date fixed by the governor comes exactly four months after the dissolution of the assembly and coincide with the silver jubilee of Pakistan's emergence as a nuclear power.

Informed sources told Dawn that the KP governor during a meeting with the commission expressed his reservations over the prevailing security situation in the province. Besides police lines tragedy, he said, police in different districts of the province were faced with the challenge of terrorist attacks. He noted that the electoral candidates would find it difficult to run poll campaign. He said both the contesting candidates and the voters should be protected.

Before attending the meeting at the ECP, the KP governor called on President Arif Alvi and discussed with him matters relating to the holding of general elections in KP in the light of Article 224(2) of the Constitution and the March 1 order of the Supreme Court.

President Alvi advised the governor to implement the SC order in letter and spirit wherein the governor had been directed to consult the ECP and forthwith appoint a date for the holding of the general election to the KP Assembly to avoid unconstitutional delay.



Defence Secretary Lt Gen (ret) Hamooduz Zaman Khan and Additional Secretary Maj Gen Khuram Sarfraz Khan briefed the ECP on the country's prevalent situation and the military's deployment in different parts of the country and on the borders.

According to a press release issued by the ECP, they said the army attaches importance to its primary duties, as security of the borders and the country was its first priority. They said the army was not available for election duty at this time, due to the present situation in the country.

The ministry officials said the current economic situation was also affecting the army. However, they added, in the end it would be the government's decision whether it kept the military restricted to its primary duties or appointed it for secondary tasks such as election-related duties.

They also said the army could perform as a quick response force and would not be available for static duty.

Earlier, the chief secretary and Punjab police chief briefed the commission on general election to the provincial assembly, the law and order situation in the province and the peaceful conduct of elections, security concerns, economic problems of the province and other difficulties.

The IGP said police deployment was not limited to the day of election as it was also their duty to ensure protection of the citizens and prevention of crime.

He recalled that during the 2018 elections, 3,330 political meetings and campaign events were held,

whereas even more activities were expected during the upcoming elections, and therefore it would be very difficult to provide security keeping in view the current law and order situation.

He also shared the details of the operation against criminals in the Kacha area, and said it would take four to five months to complete. "After the operation, there is a strong hope that the situation will be better for the conduct of elections," he said.

The chief secretary said currently 40,000 teachers were performing census duty and the same teachers would perform duty during matriculation examinations in April, when elections were also scheduled to be held.

The chief secretary and IGP categorically stated that keeping in view the prevailing overall economic and law and order situation, foolproof security could not be provided for the April 30 election, unless other security agencies, including Pakistan Army, assisted the police.

It was not just about holding elections, rather ensuring clean and transparent elections, the chief secretary said, adding that in the given circumstance it was not possible to hold elections, "especially if scattered elections are held i.e. now provincial elections are held now and later the National Assembly elections will be held".

All the three ECP meetings were held under the chairmanship of Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and were attended by commission members, secretary and other senior officials.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## SBP introduces new measures to streamline export of IT services

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has announced measures to facilitate IT & IT-enabled services exporters in the country. The move aims to boost the export of IT services, which has seen steady growth in recent years.

According to the SBP, exporters of IT & IT-enabled services can now retain 35% of their export proceeds in their Special Foreign Currency Accounts (SFCA), making it easier for them to manage their finances.

The bank has also introduced digital account opening and maintenance, making the process of opening and managing accounts more convenient and accessible for exporters.



Furthermore, the SBP has promised swift resolution of complaints and access to nominated focal persons of banks, providing a channel for exporters to voice their concerns and seek assistance.

In case their issues remain unresolved with banks or to share any suggestions, IT & IT-enabled services exporters can directly contact the SBP team facilitation. [itexporters@sbp.org.pk](mailto:itexporters@sbp.org.pk)

The SBP's move is expected to provide a boost to the country's IT & IT-enabled services sector, which has become an increasingly important contributor to the country's economy.

The measures are aimed at making the process of exporting IT services easier and more streamlined, while also addressing the concerns and needs of exporters.

*Courtesy: Saama Web Desk*

## Mohammad Yousuf expected to serve as Pakistan's coach for Afghanistan series

Pakistan cricket team could be under the guidance of another interim coach with former batting great Mohammad Yousuf expected to lead the side for a short term against Afghanistan.

Pakistan Cricket Board has yet to name a replacement for Saqlain Mushtaq who left the post some time ago after his contract expires.

Acting PCB head, Najam Sethi, remains adamant about giving the reins to Mickey Arthur but the two parties are yet to come to an agreement on the details, necessitating an interim setup.



Mohammad Yousuf served as the team's batting coach under Saqlain's tenure with the team.

The 48-year-old is likely to be joined by other accompanying staff

on an interim basis as well.

PCB, under the management committee, has used this formula before including with the selection panel which went from Shahid Afridi to

Haroon Rasheed in a quick time.

Pakistan will take on Afghanistan in three T20 international matches beginning on the 25th of March with the second and third games set to take place on the 27th and 29th of the same month.

Pakistan had offered to step in for the games after Australia backed out of the scheduled tour.

It will be the first time Pakistan and Afghanistan have played each other in a bilateral three-game T20I series.

*Courtesy: Pakistan Observer*

## PSL8, Match 17: Peshawar Zalmi beat Karachi Kings by 24 runs

Peshawar Zalmi registered victory over Karachi Kings in the 17th match of the eighth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL8) in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

Romen Powell was declared the Man of the Match for his impressive 64 runs off 34 balls knock as Zalmi set a target of 198 runs for Karachi Kings that they couldn't achieve in the given overs.

After Mohammad Amir got quick wickets of Zalmi opening pair Babar Azam and Mohammad Haris before removing Saim Ayub, middle ordered helped the team to recover from early losses and build a tough target for Kings.

Tom Kohler-Cadmore made unbeaten 56 runs, Haseebullah scored fifty while Rovman Powell smashed 64 to build 198 runs target for Kings.

In reply, Karachi Kings could score 173 for the loss of 8 wickets in 20 overs. Azmatullah Omarzai and



Aamer Jamal both claimed three wickets each for Zalmi.

Peshawar Zalmi now hold the 4th spot, followed by Karachi Kings who earlier far suffered three of their four defeats by close margins – by two runs against Peshawar Zalmi, by six runs against Quetta Gladiators and by three runs against Multan Sultans.

They, however, took fans' heart with their crushing 66-run win over Multan Sultans on Sunday in what was their last match at home, and

how they steamrolled arch rivals Lahore Qalandars by 67 runs.

Kings will now play Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators before locking horns with Lahore Qalandars at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore on 12 March, which will be the last group match of this edition.

Zalmi, on the other hand, have never failed to qualify for the Play-offs in the history of the PSL and they hope to further continue the streak.

Their captain, Babar Azam, has been leading the franchise from the front. He has amassed 178 runs at an average of 44.50 and has smashed two half-centuries. While it is critical for Peshawar Zalmi that Babar's bat continues to ooze runs, in Mohammad Haris and Saim Ayub, both of whom have made 108 runs each, they have two young batters who have taken the league by storm.

Squads

Peshawar Zalmi: Babar Azam (capt), Mohammad Haris (wk), Saim Ayub, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Rovman Powell, Dasun Shanaka, James Neesham, Wahab Riaz, Usman Qadir, Arshad Iqbal, Suyfan Muqem

Karachi Kings: Matthew Wade(w), James Vince, Tayyab Tahir, Shoaib Malik, Imad Wasim(c), Ben Cutting, Irfan Khan, Aamer Yamin, Muhammad Musa, Tabraiz Shamsi and Akif Javed.

*Courtesy: Daily Pakistan*

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