



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

October in History

22 October, 1947: Battle of Muzaffarabad ends in a Pakistani victory and Muzaffarabad is made the capital of Azad Kashmir.

17 October 1951: Finance Minister Malik Ghulam Mohammad (1895–1956) of Muslim League becomes the third Governor General. Governor-General Khawaja Nazimuddin of Muslim League becomes the second Prime Minister.

6 October, 1955: Governor-General Ghulam Mohammad's resignation is succeeded by Iskander Mirza.

26 October 1959: Ayub Khan announces his system of 80,000 Basic Democrats, who would further form the electoral college for the elections of the President and the members of the Central and Provisional Legislature.

24 October, 1990: 1990 Pakistani general election.

10 October, 2002: Pakistani general election, First general elections since the 1999 military coup held.

10 October, 2014: Activist Malala Yousafzai becomes the first Pakistani to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle to voice girls' right to education.

31 October – 17 November, 2018: Pakistani troops take part in 2018 Batangafo clashes.

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Riyadh central to Pakistan's economy, PM tells MBS

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif underscored the importance of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan's future economic plans, as he met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative (FII) in Riyadh.

During his meeting with the crown prince, the premier highlighted the importance of the deep-rooted relations between the two countries and appreciated the kingdom's support for Pakistan's economic revival and stability.

The two leaders also took stock of bilateral engagements, especially the decisions taken in previous high-level meetings held in Makkah and Riyadh in April 2024. The premier also informed MBS of the government's economic, institutional and policy reforms agenda, saying the Kingdom had a central role in Pakistan's future economic plans.

The PM appreciated the kingdom's efforts to promote regional peace and stability in the Middle East and reiterated Pakistan's unwavering commitment to stand by Riyadh in these efforts. The two leaders exchanged views on regional developments and agreed to closely coordinate positions on regional issues.

Separately, the prime minister posted on 'X' that he had the honour of meeting Mohammed Bin Salman along with his delegation.

"Thanked him for his gracious hospitality. Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia are historical and time-tested. During our very productive talks, we reviewed the progress in Pakistan-KSA relations across multiple sectors and reaf-



firmed our commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, particularly in areas such as trade and investment, culture, innovation, technology, and beyond," he added.

PM Shehbaz arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday for a two-day visit to attend the FII session from Oct 29 to 31. During the moot, he is expected to engage with leaders and entrepreneurs.

This year's conference is themed "Infinite Horizons: Investing Today, Shaping Tomorrow" and focuses on global investments aimed at addressing major issues such as artificial intelligence, robotics, education, energy, space, finance, healthcare, and sustainability.

'Knowledge-based economy' Addressing the FII, the PM highlighted the importance of knowledge-based economy driven by innovation in domains of artificial intelligence, education and health. He also called for collective global efforts and partnerships to overcome contemporary challenges.

"Pakistan stands ready to join those who dare to dream big. We invite you to invest, to bring your expertise and creativity to Pakistan, as we build a future rooted in resilience and shared prosperity," the prime minister said.

The PM said Pakistan was laying the foundation for a knowledge-based economy driven by innovation in three pivotal domains, artificial intelligence, education, and health in which it looked forward to forging useful partnerships.

He elaborated Pakistan was blessed with something truly precious the youth who was their promise to tomorrow. "Talented, resilient, and armed with an untiring spirit, they are now ready to take on the emerging challenges," he added.

Inspired by Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, championed by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, the prime minister said Pakistan shared a common mission and invested in its youth to shape the future.

The premier further said that in agriculture, climate resilience, and the fight against misinformation, they could unleash AI's potential not merely to compete, but to uplift and empower.

"Our aspirations in AI and beyond are deeply rooted in a solid educational foundation. Through educational reforms, vocational training, and digital literacy, we aim to build a skilled and tech-savvy generation," he added.

He said projects like Daanish Schools and the Education Endowment Fund in Pakistan that his government steered, made quality education accessible to those who once saw it as an unattainable dream.

"Today, he said these graduates aren't just students; they are builders of tomorrow as doctors, engineers, and innovators. They are pioneers, driving progress and uplifting their communities, a testament to the transformative power of accessible education. Their success stories reinforce my belief that education is a true equaliser and a game-changer for individuals and nations alike," he observed.

The PM said that health was the cornerstone of human advancement and Pakistan's healthcare sector was home to over 275,000 registered doctors with their youth pioneering new health-tech solutions.

"Imagine the impact, pooling resources in areas like genome sequencing and personalised medicine. With such collaborations, we can redefine the whole healthcare system," he stressed.

Gaza genocide Talking about Palestine, PM Shehbaz emphatically said the global dream of progress and prosperity would never be fulfilled and transformed into action unless peace was restored in Gaza and bloodshed by Israel immediately stopped. He categorically referred to the situation in Gaza and said that without peace, the world would not progress and prosper, the PM's Office media wing said in a press release.

Courtesy: Dawn

‘Chinese response on debt flexibility positive’

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has described that China’s initial response to Pakistan’s request for extended debt maturities related to the Belt and Road Initiative as positive and encouraging.

Speaking to US media and at think tank events, Mr Aurangzeb suggested that Pakistan might achieve greater debt flexibility as it manages

tied to power plants to “create enough space” for reducing electricity costs. He noted electricity prices had already surged, surpassing housing costs for some residents.

“We have just started that discussion and the response is encouraging,” he said, adding that negotiations were still in the early stages. He had previously addressed the issue during a visit to China in July.

silieny fund during his Washington visit. He also highlighted the government’s economic stabilisation measures, noting that State Bank of Pakistan has cut its benchmark interest rate by 450 basis points over three consecutive meetings, reducing it to 17.5pc from 22pc. He hinted that the next SBP meeting, scheduled for November 4, might bring another rate cut.

favourable economic indicators, crediting the successful stand-by arrangement with the IMF. He outlined government’s reform priorities, focusing on raising the tax-to-GDP ratio, cutting losses in the energy sector, improving governance in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), accelerating privatisation, and controlling spending through federal government downsizing.



the burden of past borrowing. He emphasised the necessity of comprehensive structural reforms, as required by the recent \$7 billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Mr Aurangzeb is currently in Washington to participate in the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. During his visit, he has also engaged in bilateral discussions with US officials and finance ministers from allied nations.

At an event hosted by Jihad Azour, IMF’s Director for the Middle East and Central Asia, Mr Aurangzeb identified key priorities, including broadening the tax base, reforming the energy sector, and privatising State-Owned Enterprises (SEOs).

In an interview with Bloomberg, the finance minister highlighted efforts to extend the maturities on debts

During meetings with financial experts, lenders, and bankers, the Pakistani delegation emphasised that the country had entered a phase of relative stability, following the approval of the new \$7bn IMF programme. They also mentioned that China had rolled over \$16bn of the around \$26bn in debt due this fiscal year, which began in July.

The finance minister informed Bloomberg that Pakistan must maintain fiscal discipline to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio from under 10 per cent to 13.5pc, with the aim of reducing future dependence on IMF loans. Pakistan has had 25 IMF programmes to date, making it one of the most frequent borrowers.

Instead of seeking new loans, Mr Aurangzeb expressed the hope to secure additional funding from the IMF’s climate re-

He also attended a meeting with IMF’s Managing Director, alongside finance ministers, central bank governors, and regional financial institution leaders from the Middle East and North Africa. He emphasised the integration of social protection measures into IMF lending frameworks and called for more financing directed at climate resilience.

During these meetings, the finance minister advocated for increased debt relief mechanisms and concessional financing for vulnerable countries. He also backed the inclusion of challenges like climate risks, domestic public debt, and complex debt restructuring in the review of the Low-Income Countries Debt Sustainability Framework (LIC-DSF).

At a roundtable discussion with institutional investors organised by Jefferies International, Mr Aurangzeb highlighted Pakistan’s

In another meeting, Mr Aurangzeb briefed US Assistant Secretary for the Treasury Brent Nieman on key reforms, expressing gratitude for US support in securing Pakistan’s IMF Extended Fund Facility.

At Washington’s Wilson Center, Mr Aurangzeb stressed the need to “fix our energy equation” and expand the tax net to include currently untaxed or undertaxed sectors. He warned, “We cannot get onto a sustainable growth path unless” these reforms are achieved.

He also urged a shift in the economic model, stating: “The reason why we had so many boom and bust cycles... is that the DNA of our economy so far has been import-led and import-dependent. We have to change the DNA of the economy towards export-led growth.”

Courtesy: Dawn

Social media apps should be blocked if not regulated, says Punjab minister



Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari, while expressing frustration over the challenge of fake content on social media in her case, has proposed that if social media apps cannot be regulated, they should be shut down.

“The social media platforms are making money in Pakistan, but are not accountable to anyone. If social media apps cannot be regulated, they should better be shut down,” she said here on Monday.

The minister pointed out that social media was being regulated in the whole world except Pakistan.

Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar last week claimed that social media platform X (formerly Twitter) had been banned due to “national security issues and not to curb freedom of expression”.

In March, in its first direct admission regarding an official ban on X, the interior ministry informed the Sindh High Court that the social media platform was blocked in February till further orders on the reports of intelligence agencies.

Access to X has been disrupted in many areas of the country since February 17, following the then commis-

sioner Laiquat Chatha’s press conference against alleged rigging in the election on the Rawalpindi division seats of the National Assembly in favour of the ruling PML-N.

While the Punjab information minister had last month said the government might consider lifting the ban on X if social media rules and regulations were framed, Ms Bokhari on Monday emphasised on regulating the digital platforms. She pointed out that when social media was regulated in the entire world, then why steps could not be taken to regulate them in Pakistan.

“The social media cannot be run without regulation. Whenever we talk about regulation of social media, the talk of freedom of speech comes in the way,” the minister said.

The minister said despite her struggle for a couple of months, she still had not received any relief in ‘my fake video’ case.

“The Federal Investigation Agency officials complain that they cannot question the social media apps due to lack of capacity. This highlights the state of social media affairs in Pakistan, where everyone is free and unaccountable,” she said.

Courtesy: Dawn

Deadline to file returns extended to Oct 14

In a late-night decision, the government has extended until Oct 14 the deadline for filing income tax returns for the tax year 2024.

The move will provide an opportunity to people, who had not filed their tax returns by the Sept 30 deadline, to fulfil the requirement.

Although the income tax ordinance specifies Sept 30 as the deadline for submitting returns, the government has regularly extended the deadline to the end of October, and beyond in some cases.



Earlier in the day, FBR officials had rejected the impression that an extension would be granted this time around. But a late-night notification said the deadline had been extended until Oct 14.

The notification said the decision had been taken in view of requests from trade bodies, tax bars and the general public.

Traders had previously requested an extension of the deadline to October 31 owing to issues with the Iris portal.

As of Sept 30, 2024, FBR has received some 3.66 million income tax returns against 1.95 million received during the same period last year, an increase of 87.9 per cent.

In the previous tax year, i.e. 2023, it had received a total of 6.24m returns.

According to preliminary statistics, 340,473 new filers en-

tered the tax rolls between July 1 and Sept 30, 2024.

FBR’s major accomplishment this year is an increase in the quantity of overall returns since last year. However, nil-filers also saw a tremendous rise this tax year. These are usually submitted for one-time financial transactions or to take advantage of lower tax rates for placement on the Active Taxpayers List.

From July 1 to Sept 30, 2024, the number of nil-filers was 1.33m, accounting for 36.45pc of all returns submitted during

tax year 2024. The previous year, i.e. 2023 saw 3.37m nil-returns, over half of the total number of returns filed.

To combat this trend, the government has now decided to eliminate both the non-filer and notional-filer categories.

Notional filers are people who file a return just to obtain reduced tax rates, despite the fact that they have not paid any taxes. This presents a significant challenge for the government.

It was proposed that non-filers be prohibited from engaging in any financial or investment activities and that there be a travel restriction except for Haj and Ziarat trips. The proposed approach has three tiers based on the amount filed. Non-filers cannot acquire cars, immovable property, or financial instruments or open bank accounts, except the Asaan Account.

Courtesy: Dawn

ECC okays Rs45bn grant for defence, hikes rabies vaccine price

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Thursday approved a supplementary grant of Rs45 billion for defence and a 122 per cent increase in the maximum retail price (MRP) of anti-rabies vaccines for public hospitals.

The ECC meeting, chaired by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, also approved a special allowance equivalent to 20 daily allowances for Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) personnel and another supplementary grant for the country's participation in the upcoming UN climate change conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan.

The meeting was also attended by ministers for industries and power, and the minister of state for revenue.

The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination briefed the ECC on the shortage of anti-rabies vaccines at the Federal General Hospital Chak Shahzad in Islamabad. The vaccine, produced by the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Islamabad, was previously priced at Rs891.65.

However, in the market, the WHO-approved rabies vaccine was sold at Rs2,126.40 and the non-WHO-approved vaccine at Rs1,266.14. To address this, the ECC approved a proposal to increase the MRP of NIH-produced rabies vaccine to Rs1,980 per vial (0.5ml per dose), allowing the institute to cover the cost of imported materials and ensure a sufficient supply for public hospitals.

The ECC also approved a proposal to increase the rate of special allowance (equal to 20 daily allowances) for ANF employees on a par with other federal law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

The meeting was told that the salaries of ANF employees were considerably low compared to employees of other LEAs despite undertaking similar work and encountering similar dangers and hazards peculiar to their job of drug prevention and border patrol. The increased allowance, amounting to Rs264.744 million, will be accommodated in the current fiscal year's budget.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by the defence division for a supplementary grant



of Rs45bn for various already approved projects of defence services for the current fiscal year, an official statement said.

This is on top of about Rs60bn supplementary grants approved a few weeks ago for Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, over and above the annual allocation for defence approved as part of the federal budget in the last week of June.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination for a grant of Rs150m to meet the requirements of the COP29 to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11-22.

The meeting was told that Pakistan, being highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, was actively engaged in the United Nations Framework Conven-

tion on Climate Change, and COP29 would provide Pakistan with an opportunity to showcase its domestic climate actions, such as renewable energy projects, afforestation initiatives, and disaster risk reduction measures by setting up a Pakistan Pavilion at the event.

The meeting also took up a proposal of the Ministry of Inter-provincial Coordination for a grant of Rs400m for holding the 14th edition of the South Asian Games in Pakistan in April next year.

However, the ECC decided to defer the approval, requesting the ministry to resubmit the proposal with a more holistic plan, including proper cost estimates and funding strategies through sponsorships, commercial advertising and government support.

Courtesy: Dawn

Saudi team arrives to boost trade cooperation

A high-powered delegation of Saudi Arabia led by its Minister for Investment Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdul Aziz Al Faleh arrived here on a three-day official visit.

Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Privatisation & Communications Abdul Aleem Khan, Minister for Trade Jam Kamal Khan and Minister for Petroleum Mohammad Musadik Malik along with senior officials received Saudi Arabia's minister at Islamabad airport.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will sign several trade and investment agreements and some Memorandums of Understand-

ing (MoUs) during the Saudi minister's stay.

The Saudi delegation will also visit Special Investment and Facilitation Council (SIFC) and discuss investment plans in various sectors.

Investment agreements, meetings with businessmen, SIFC visit on the agenda

While welcoming the guests at the Islamabad Airport, the privatisation minister said the arrival of government officials and private companies' representatives from Saudi Arabia for investment in Pakistan was a welcome step and this visit

would be an important milestone in the investment sectors of the two countries.

He said the visit would also strengthen the deep-rooted ties between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and promote mutual business activities.

The privatisation minister said that private companies of Pakistan were ready for investment and bilateral business from Saudi Arabia and preparations for the visit of Saudi officials had already been completed by the ministry of investment as well.

The federal ministers described the visit of the Saudi delegation



as 'very important', expressing the hope that it would be result-oriented.

Saudi Arabia's investment minister will also meet President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his stay in the country besides holding important meetings with the business community in Islamabad.

Courtesy: Dawn

Indian foreign minister to attend SCO summit

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar will attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) heads of government meeting in Pakistan this month, according to an announcement by India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"EAM Jaishankar will lead a delegation to Pakistan for the SCO summit, which will be held in Islamabad on October 15th and 16th," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated during a briefing in New Delhi.

Pakistan is hosting the 23rd meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government under its rotating chairmanship. The SCO summit will see participation of heads of government and senior-level delegations from several countries. Jaishankar will represent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the forum.

PM Modi was always expected to skip the meeting due to ongoing tensions between Islamabad and Delhi over the Kashmir dispute, accusations of terrorism, and a history of military conflicts. He typically skips meetings of the SCO's Council of Heads of Government, the organisation's second-highest forum, and instead sends a ministerial representative.

The Indian premier usually participates in the top forum, the SCO Council of Heads of State, which last met in Astana on July 3-4.

Despite Modi's non-attendance, Jaishankar's participation marks the first time a senior-ranking Indian minister will visit Pakistan in nearly a decade. The last such visit was by then external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj in December 2015 for the Heart of Asia ministerial meeting. Days later, Modi made a surprise trip to

Lahore, where he met then prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Later in August 2016, India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh attended a meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) home ministers in Islamabad, amid heightened tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours over unrest in held Kashmir. However, just a month later, India led a boycott of the Saarc summit in Pakistan, causing its collapse by pulling out and convincing regional allies to do the same. Saarc, which requires all members to participate, has not held a summit since then.

Diplomatic ties between the two arch-rivals have mostly remained strained, hitting a new low in February 2019 after India launched airstrikes in Pakistani territory and later on Aug 5, "revoked the special status" of held Jammu and Kashmir. Despite the strained relations with India, Pakistan's willingness to engage was demonstrated in the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor in November 2019.

Last month, at the UN General Assembly, Jaishankar strongly criticised Pakistan for its alleged role in cross-border terrorism. He argued that while many nations face challenges beyond their control, some consciously make choices that lead to disastrous consequences, citing Pakistan as an example. He further remarked that a government that instills fanaticism in its people will see its GDP driven by radicalisation and its exports characterised by terrorism. He said that Pakistan is now suffering the consequences of its own actions and cannot blame the world, calling it "karma".

Earlier in June, following Modi's re-election, Jaishankar stated: "With Pakistan, we



seek a solution to the issue of cross-border terrorism. That cannot be the policy of a good neighbour."

India's participation in the SCO reflects a delicate balancing act. While it values regional security cooperation, India is wary of China's growing influence within the organisation. By selectively engaging in SCO meetings, India aims to counterbalance China's dominance while fostering ties with Central Asian nations.

Last year, then foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari attended the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Goa, India.

Meanwhile, the government has ordered the deployment of army troops in Islamabad, ahead of the upcoming SCO meeting. The move comes as the country grapples with political unrest and ongoing terrorism threats.

The federal government issued a notification authorising the deployment of the Pakistan Army in the capital to assist civil authorities in maintaining law and order during the high-profile event.

The notification, issued under Article 245 of the Constitution and sections 4 and 5 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, stated: "The federal government... is pleased to authorise deployment of requisite strength of Pakistan Army in aid of civil power from 5th to 17th October 2024 in Islamabad Capital Territory for

maintaining law and order. with respect to the 23rd meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government." It added that the exact number of troops and their areas of deployment will be determined by Islamabad's administration in coordination with event stakeholders.

Courtesy: Dawn

Tributes paid to TV actor Saleem Nasir



The 35th death anniversary of renowned TV actor Saleem Nasir was observed on Saturday. Saleem Nasir was born on November 15, 1944, in Nagpur, India. He gained recognition for his acting talents early on, beginning his professional career with the film *Zaib-un-Nisa* in 1976. His famous plays are *Aakhri Chataan*, *Nishan-e-Haider*, *Ankahi*, *Dastak*, and *Aangan Terha*. Two of his most famous roles were Sultan Jalaluddin in the serial *Aakhree Chataan* and Captain Sarwar Shaheed in the drama series *Nishan-e-Haider*. He was posthumously honoured with the President's Pride of Performance award. He died on October 19, 1989 in Karachi.

Courtesy: The Nation

Saudi firm to buy stake in Reko Diq

Saudi Minister for Investment Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdul Aziz Al Falih said that a Saudi firm was set to buy a stake in Barrick Gold's Reko Diq gold and copper mine in the coming weeks.

"I think there are essentially no limits to what Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can do in the economic sphere, just like there are no limits to our friendship, to our bonds, to our historic relations," Mr Al Falih, who arrived in Islamabad on a three-day official visit, said while speaking at the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Business Forum in the federal capital.

He confirmed that the two countries were presiding over 27 "organic agreements" and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) worth around \$2 billion, which would be signed throughout the day.

"We want to support Pakistan in continuing its economic stabilisation. Without Pakistan reaching its economic stability, it's very difficult to do things together," the minister said, praising Pakistan's efforts in the last two years as "quite im-



pressive".

"I am glad we have a newly formed venture called Manara between PIF and Ma'aden our national champion in mining and they are eager to start a number of initiatives, but the first one we hope to conclude in the next few weeks will be for them to enter into the Reko Diq project with state-owned enterprises of Pakistan," he told the gathering.

"And Barrick Gold was working in Saudi Arabia and sees our partnership as an additive to the project," he said, adding that he saw the move as "sort of a pilot project that we hope will be multiplied many times over".

Manara Minerals Investment Company, backed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, plans to invest at least \$1bn in the Reko Diq project, controlled by the Canadian mining firm.

Mr Al Falih also expressed his satisfaction regarding trade between the two countries, noting that it had increased by 80 per cent, from \$3bn in 2019 to \$5.4bn.

Recalling an investment package agreed upon in April during PM Shehbaz's visit to Saudi Arabia, the minister said his country was "committed to and extremely encouraged" by the Saudi crown prince's announcement "committing the front end of Saudi investment to Pakistan, which is \$5bn".

"I think these numbers, in my opinion, are only the tip of the iceberg," Mr Al Falih emphasised.

In his address, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb expressed optimism about Pakistan's prospects, stating the country was at a good place on the economic front and was open to business.

"Over the last 12 to 14 months, we've made tangible progress in terms of macroeconomic stability," Mr Aurangzeb highlighted.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar noted that Pakistan's new economic programme, backed by the International Monetary Fund, represented a "shift from past policies by moving away from easy stimulus", a Foreign Office statement said.

The deputy PM underscored Pakistan's potential in mining, information technology, agriculture, and renewable energy sectors, inviting Saudi investors to participate in these lucrative opportunities.

Courtesy: Dawn

Opening of antiquities section at Badshahi Masjid ordered

Senior Member of the Board of Revenue (SMBR) Punjab Nabeel Javed has ordered for immediate opening of the antiquities section at Lahore's historic Badshahi Masjid to the public, ensuring greater access for both local and international visitors to Pakistan's national, historical and Islamic heritage.

During an inspection of Badshahi Masjid and Iqbal's Mausoleum, the SMBR emphasised the importance of enhancing public facilities and preserving the sites' architectural charm. He was accompanied by Secretary of Auqaf,



Tahir Ali Bukhari, Administrator of Badshahi Mosque, Mr. Muhammad Ali, and Director of Conservation and Planning, Mr. Najm-ul-Saqib.

Nabeel Javed ordered the replacement of worn-out tiles at Iqbal's Mausoleum, noting that previous tiles were imported from India and similar replacements may be

sourced internationally if not available locally. Additionally, he mandated the installation of a modern sound system within seven days to facilitate continuous Quranic recitation at the mausoleum. Further directives included the waterproofing of Badshahi Mosque's building, improvements to drainage, electrical systems and lighting of the minarets. A "camping wall" is also to be constructed to prevent water ingress, and pointing repairs would be carried out on the rooms surrounding the mosque.

Courtesy: The Nation

Babar Azam steps down as captain of Pakistan cricket team

Pakistani cricketer Babar Azam announced his decision to step down as the captain of the Pakistan cricket team, Dawn.com reported.

In a post on X, Babar said: “I have decided to resign as captain of the Pakistan men’s cricket team, effective as of my notification to the PCB (Pakistan Cricket Board) and Team Management last month.

“It’s been an honour to lead this team, but it’s time for me to step down and focus on my playing role.”

He said captaincy had been a “rewarding experience” but it added a “significant workload” on him.

“I want to prioritise my performance, enjoy my batting, and spend quality time with my family, which brings me joy.

“By stepping down, I will gain clarity moving forward and focus more energy on my game and personal growth,” he said. Azam added that he was grateful for the unwavering support and belief in him.



“Your enthusiasm has meant the world to me. I’m proud of what we’ve achieved together and excited to continue contributing to the team as a player.”

Babar Azam had returned to the captaincy of the men’s cricket team in March after the PCB announced that he would lead the Green Shirts in ODIs and T20s as part of a “strategic move”.

He was first made the T20 captain in 2019, before taking charge of the Test and ODI teams in 2020.

Babar stepped down from the post in No-

vember last year, after Pakistan’s dismal showing in the Asia Cup and the 50-over World Cup. Shaheen Shah Afridi had replaced him as the T20 captain and Shan Masood had assumed the role as the team’s Test skipper.

However, when it came to reassuming the mantle of captaincy, sources told Dawn at the time that Babar Azam had conveyed some tough conditions to the PCB, seeking supreme authority as captain and a two-year stint in the top spot.

Moreover, the right-hander had asked the PCB not to hold him accountable for the Pakistan team’s performance in the T20 World Cup.

He recently dropped out of the top 10 of the International Cricket Council’s (ICC) ranking for Test batsmen after nearly five years.

The former skipper, who has suffered a rare rough patch in the format, is currently ranked at number 11 among batters.

Courtesy: The Nation

Sonia Majeed becomes first Asian female to receive two prestigious titles

According to the report of Global Times Media Europe, Sonia Majeed, the owner of a beautiful voice and an international award-winning famous singer, was awarded a golden visa by Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on which she received so many greetings, flowers and appreciations by her fans from all over the world. Congratulatory messages are being received and still receiving.

Sonia Majeed said that she is thankful to her fans who sent her congratulations. It should be remembered that Sonia Majeed is the first Asian Pakistani female singer living in Dubai who has won several national and international awards for her



singing. Her singing is much loved and appreciated. “I always played my valuable role in the field of art and culture, she has gained worldwide fame due to her excellent performance,” she said.

Sonia is also very much known for her social work towards the women’s and children around the globe. She has been working with United Nations program for many causes as mostly as the Voice Ambassador, Peace ambassador and Goodwill Ambassador. Sonia Majeed thanked all the fans family and all her music lover for getting her at this stage she is really gratified and humbled with such love and gratitude. Says in press release

Courtesy: The Nation

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