



# POSTIVE POST

A Publication by Department of Media, Art & Design and the Diplomatic Academy

## Pakistan's standing in the global rankings

### Overview

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

### DEMOCRACY INDEX

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

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

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

### HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

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

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

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

### PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

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

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

### TERRORISM INDEX

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

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

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

### ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

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

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

Positive Post is a strategic effort to project achievement and contributions of Pakistan.

While showcasing Greenwich University's cultural diplomacy initiatives, it also encapsulates a compilation of different developments complementing Pakistan's socio-cultural, economic & Political outcomes.

### February in History

**8 February 1940:** Azad Kashmir Government shifts its capital to Muzaffarabad.

**28 February 1985:** General elections held; Muhammad Khan Junejo becomes prime minister.

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

**February 18 1997:** Nawaz Sharif obtained a vote of confidence from the National Assembly. Controversial Eighth Amendment is repealed, which empowered the president to dismiss the prime ministers.

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

**18 February 2008:** Elections are held amidst tight security. PPP, PML-N, PML-N and ANP win 124, 91, 54 and 13 seats respectively.

**16 February 2009:** Pakistan government announces a truce with Taliban, accepting a system of Islamic law in the Swat valley, conceding the area as a Taliban sanctuary.

**28 February 2016:** Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy won her second Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Subject for A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness

**9 February 2017:** Pakistan Super League began.

## New National Assembly must be summoned by February 29, 2024

President Arif Alvi is duty-bound under the Constitution to summon a fresh session of the new National Assembly by February 29, as the National Assembly Secretariat (NAS) has made all arrangements to welcome the newly elected members.

Meanwhile, wheeling and dealing among mainstream political parties are underway after the Feb 8 general elections, with about 150 coveted positions, including the prime minister, up for grabs. And a statement by the PTI chairman that the party would not make an alliance with anyone may open the floodgates to horse-trading, analysts fear.

According to Section 91(2) of the Constitution, the president must convene the National Assembly's session after the official announcement of election results or issuance of its notification within 21 days.

"The National Assembly shall meet on the twenty-first day following the day on which a general election to the assembly is held, unless sooner summoned by the president," the section says.

Election of speaker, prime minister required to be held on March 1 and 2, respectively

A senior NAS official told Dawn that the president was duty-bound to call the session of the National Assembly within 21 days; otherwise,

the secretariat itself could announce the summoning of the session. He said the secretariat had made all necessary arrangements to start the new assembly's first session.

The official said that according to Section 98 of the Elections Act 2017 (amended in 2023), the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has to announce notification of consolidated results of elections within 14 days.

He said that after the announcement of the official results, independent MNAs would be given three days to join any party in the parliament they want and on the fourth day, the women members would be inducted on reserved seats.

He said on the first day of the National Assembly session, the incumbent speaker would administer the oath to new MNAs, and on the second day, the election of the new speaker and deputy speaker would take place. On the third day, the election for the office of the prime minister will be held.

Section 91(3) of the Constitution says: "After the election of the speaker and the deputy speaker, the National Assembly shall, to the exclusion of any other business, proceed to elect without debate one of its Muslim members to be the Prime Minister.

She expressed her gratitude for the mandate her party had been given by the people of Punjab, but said five years were not enough to address the massive challenges being faced in the country.

Says corruption and politically motivated vandalism are red lines for her would-be govt

Unveiling her game plan, the PML-N leader, daughter of ex-premier and party supremo Nawaz Sharif, vowed to make five IT cities in Punjab. "We will also bring foreign investment and give interest-free loans to the youth to launch their IT projects," she said.



According to Section 91(4), the prime minister "shall be elected by the votes of the majority of the total membership of the National Assembly, provided that, if no member secures such majority in the first poll, a second poll shall be held between the members who secure the two highest numbers of votes in the first poll and the member who secures a majority of votes of the members present and voting shall be declared to have been elected as prime minister, [and] provided further that, if the number of votes secured by two or more members securing the highest number of votes is equal, further poll shall be held between them until one of them secures a majority of votes of the members present and voting."

150 positions up for grab  
It has been learnt that more than 150 coveted positions are up for grabs based on which the political parties, which are in the bargaining position, could make their possible alliance. These positions include the office of president, as President Alvi has already completed his term but continues to hold his office until

new elections take place by the coming National Assembly.

Similarly, other desired positions include the office of the prime minister, speaker and deputy speaker of the National Assembly, four governors, federal ministers, state ministers, advisers to the prime minister, special assistance to the premier, dozens of parliamentary secretaries, and chairpersons of National Assembly standing committees.

Interestingly, the five-year term of half of the members of the Senate will also be over next month, and the election for about 50 vacant seats will take place, followed by the election of chairperson and deputy chairperson of the Senate.

The election of senators will also allow the political parties to accommodate themselves for future alliances.

Later, President Alvi in a message on Sunday congratulated the people of Pakistan for vehemently participating in 2024 elections.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Maryam Nawaz unveils development game plan for Punjab

PML-N candidate for Punjab chief minister Maryam Nawaz on Wednesday described corruption and politically-motivated vandalism as the 'red lines' that her government would never allow anyone to cross.

While presiding over a parliamentary meeting of her party at Jati Umra residence, Ms Nawaz pledged a new era of development in Punjab, vowing to deliver on every front, especially in the health, education and IT sectors.

Ms Nawaz will be the first woman chief minister, after securing a majority vote in Punjab Assembly in coming days.

In the health sector, she said her government would address the shortage of nurses and build training institutes for them. She would reintroduce health cards for free treatment of the poor and ensure "heart, kidney and liver treatment at all [major] hospitals".

She said government schools would be run on a public-private partnership basis. She vowed that she would try her best to ensure that all out-of-school children be brought back to schools.

She said Rescue '1122' service would be launched on motorways. Also, more Safe City projects would be



established in the province, she added.

Meanwhile, Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman has said he will summon the Punjab Assembly session upon receiving its requisition. He expressed the hope that the session of the Punjab Assembly would be held within the next few days.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Kakar urges IHC to refrain from exercising executive powers

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar on Wednesday asked the Islamabad High Court (IHC) not to exercise the powers vested in the executive and let them to take decision in the matter related to its domain. However, he said that the upcoming parliament can legislate for oversight on spy agencies.

PM Kakar appeared before IHC Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani in the Baloch missing persons case. Earlier, he had skipped the hearing twice but finally appeared in response to the notice issued to him.

Police closed nearby roads to traffic about half an hour before his arrival, and entry into the IHC was also restricted before the PM's arrival.

Says there is an armed insurgency in Balochistan, highlights security challenges

Clad in a dark suit, Mr Kakar entered the courtroom of Justice Kayani while the judge was hearing the case related to the arrest of Dr Shireen Mazari in November 2022. The caretaker PM took the front row and sat along with a court reporter. As the hearing in Dr Mazari's case concluded, Justice Kayani resumed

the hearing in the Baloch missing persons case.

A deputy attorney general signalled for him to approach the rostrum. Justice Kayani informed him that the case had been pending for about two years, and still, five persons could not be found.

Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan apprised the judge that out of 59 missing persons, the details of 54 had been shared with the petitioners and their counsel, Imaan Mazari.

PM Kakar told the court that armed clashes are going on in Balochistan between security forces and those who have waged war against the state.

He mentioned that civil society criticises the government if someone is picked up on suspicion of insurgency; however, they never condemn the insurgents.

Justice Kayani remarked that the court has no issue even if law enforcement agencies take someone into custody; however, it must be documented somewhere.

PM Kakar replied that the criminal justice system is on the verge of col-



lapse, and suspects take advantage of legal loopholes to go scot-free. He pointed out that about 90,000 innocent citizens have lost their lives in terrorist incidents.

The constitution provides the right to life, and the insurgents are involved in terrorism and racial profiling of the citizens. They don't abide by the law; therefore, they cannot be treated on par with law-abiding citizens, he added.

Justice Kayani remarked that the parliament can legislate to strengthen the criminal justice system.

Kakar said that the insurgents eliminated moderate and liberal-minded people who were against militancy, adding that the former chief justice of Balochistan High Court, Muhammad Noor Muskanzai, was

assassinated by the insurgents as he compiled a report against their wishes.

Justice Kayani informed him that the court has constituted a committee comprising directors general of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Military Intelligence, and the Intelligence Bureau and will seek a report from them directly. He observed that there is no institution above the law.

PM Kakar urged the judge not to make decisions on matters that pertain to the executive domain. However, he stated that he would request the upcoming government and parliament to legislate for oversight of the spy agencies. Justice Kayani, on the other hand, remarked that the court would proceed strictly in accordance with the law and adjourned further hearing.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Nawaz pledges Orange Line train for Faisalabad

PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif has announced launching the Orange Line metro train project in Faisalabad if his party wins the election as the people of the city want to have the metro train service like that of Lahore.

He said Shehbaz Sharif had already announced the plan to launch a metrobus service in the city but he would give them the gift of metro train.

The former prime minister was addressing a public meeting at the historical Dhobi Ghat Ground in Faisalabad, one of the main industrial cities of Punjab. The ground has had a long political history, starting with the address of Quid-i-Azam on it in 1943 when the city was called Lyallpur.

Nawaz Sharif criticised the PTI for its failure to fulfil promises of providing jobs to 10m people or one bil-

lion trees tsunami and made a pledge that after coming to power, the PML-N government would provide every jobless person with employment. He said if his government had not been removed, he would have eliminated unemployment from the country. He asked Shehbaz Sharif to make Faisalabad a city with no jobless person in the next five years after winning the elections.

Takes dig at Imran for not fulfilling his election commitments; Maryam terms city's industry imperative for country's progress

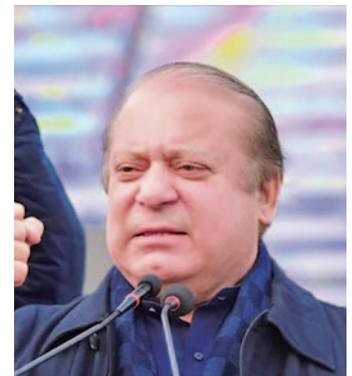
In a light way, the PML-N leader said two motorways (M-3 and M-4) bypass Faisalabad but if people of Faisalabad wanted another motorway, he would build another one passing all around the city. Taking a dig at Imran Khan, Mr Sharif said he knew how to fulfil promises he was making and added that he was

not like those who claimed that they would build 5m houses but could not provide a single one.

Praising his party's Punjab chief Rana Sanaullah Khan, who belongs to Faisalabad, Nawaz Sharif called him his faithful companion while Chaudhry Sher Ali (Abid Sher Ali's father) and Talal Chaudhry were also his old buddies. He claimed the real youth of the country was not with the PTI that had only 'nummy daddy youth' but the actual youth was with his party.

The PML-N supreme leader reminded his supporters of the rates of commodities during his party's tenure and announced that the same circumstances would return like his past tenure.

PML-N chief organiser Maryam Nawaz also praised Rana Sanaullah and Talal Chaudhry for standing by



the party in hard times. She lauded Mr Sanaullah for his political manoeuvres that removed their political rival out of the contest.

Both Nawaz Sharif and Maryam made short speeches on the excuse of the time shortage. Nawaz was in a light mood and cracked jokes too. He added Punjabi sentences too in his speech. Rana Sanaullah, Abid Sher Ali and Talal Chaudhry were on the stage when the PML-N leaders spoke.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Centre, provinces agree to deliver Rs600bn surplus

As part of efforts to regain some of the fiscal space lost under the 7th National Finance Commission to provinces almost 15 years ago, the federal government has signed agreements with the four provinces to deliver a cumulative fiscal surplus of at least Rs600 billion and refrain from creating further debt in operations of key commodities like fertiliser, wheat and other eatables until the close of this fiscal year in June.

This development has been reported to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by the Ministry of Finance to highlight the collaborative efforts to adhere to stringent fiscal discipline.

The first quarter of the fiscal year (July-September 2023) witnessed a modest combined surplus of Rs51bn from the provinces, with Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa actually overspending instead of making efforts for fiscal restraint and thus facing deficits of Rs29bn and Rs10bn, respectively. In contrast, Sindh and Balochistan reported surpluses of Rs19bn and Rs71bn.

However, over the next quarter (October-December), the federal government pushed the provinces under the IMF programme and was able to secure about Rs290bn surplus from the provinces Rs100bn from Sindh, Rs97bn from Balochistan, Rs49bn from KP, and Rs43bn from Punjab.

Finance ministry tells IMF improved fiscal coordination with provinces will help meet their FY24 budget targets

The Ministry of Finance has now reported to the IMF that it had improved fiscal coordination with the provincial governments through updated MOUs, which will help guarantee their budget targets this fiscal year (FY24).

“Furthermore, the Punjab government has committed, through its MOU, to curtail its expenditure by Rs115bn for the remainder of FY24 to achieve the committed surplus associated with the FY24 budget,” the ministry said.

Also, it said the “provincial governments have agreed to rectify the



decade-long accumulation of commodity debts (created by provincial food departments outside the government’s fiscal perimeter) by implementing time-bound plans for the timely retirement of this debt”.

Additionally, the provinces have now committed to refraining from increasing their commodity debt and adopting a definition of provincial surpluses according to the Government Finance Statistics Manual (GFSM2014).

The manual is an IMF reporting template for all its members for various combinations of entities in a country involved in the functions of governments, including states, provinces, local or any sort of sub-national governments, including state-owned corporations and entities.

The IMF also recently confirmed that despite strong efforts by the federal government, additional measures were still needed to ensure the primary surplus goal of Rs400bn budgeted for the current fiscal year.

The Fund’s staff noted that while the federal government had contained spending, provincial current spending increased 57pc year on year, partly explained by the Punjab provincial government payment of Rs115bn related to commodity transactions, while development spending increased 61pc year on year.

“To ensure that provincial governments remain within their initial budget plans, the provinces have amended their (MOUs) signed with the federal government to include the estimated federal revenue, annual provincial revenue, and total expenditure plans, in line with the

agreed surplus,” the IMF confirmed. It added that the Punjab government had committed through a supplemental MOU to restrict its spending in the remainder of fiscal 2024 by Rs115bn to achieve a surplus of Rs336bn as committed in the MOU associated with this fiscal year’s budget.

As part of the effort, the government requested the IMF for technical assistance to strengthen budget preparation and execution and improve coordination and fiscal reporting with the provinces. This is expected to help critically strengthen the process ahead of the next year’s budget (2024-25).

The recently completed Climate-Public Investment Management Assessment (C-PIMA) also provides an action plan to strengthen public investment management to tackle climate challenges over the period ahead.

In addition, the four provinces have also signed up to a system of electronic procurement e-Pakistan Acquisition and Disposal System (e-PADS) of the federal Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) developed with the support of the World Bank to enhance transparency in all public procurement.

The e-PADS was launched early last year and since then, out of the 912 planned procurement contracts in the e-PADS system, 341 contracts have been completed.

The federal government is also working with the provinces to reduce electricity subsidies, including on tube wells, as it considers these subsidies primarily benefiting large agricultural users.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Sonam Bajwa, Ahsan Khan spotted in sizzling photo-shoot

As tensions between Asian neighbors Pakistan and India continue unabated, the actors of the two sides share great chemistry. The latest to join the list are Pakistani handsome hunk Ahsan Khan and Indian Punjabi diva Sonam Bajwa.



Both stars amassed huge followers on social media. Bajwa, undoubtedly one of the effervescent, and jovial showbiz stars, has won the hearts of millions, ruling the hearts of not only Indians but also co-workers across the border.



This time, Chakkar star collaborated with Sonam Bajwa for the Mushq brand, transcending borders, and blending cultural influences from neighboring nations. The snaps from their recent photoshoot unlock a new level of charm and allure of traditional attire.

The charismatic presence of Sonam and the vivid vibes of Ahsan Khan showcase the power of art and fashion.

*Courtesy: The Nation*

## Kashmir Solidarity Day being observed



The nation will observe Kashmir Solidarity Day with a renewed commitment to support the just struggle of Kashmiris for their inalienable right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The people and the government of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir observe Solidarity Day every year not only to renew their love and affection with the people of India-held Jammu and Kashmir but also to reiterate their commitment and dedication to the liberation of Kashmir from Indian subjugation.

People from different walks of life will hold demonstrations and form human chains across the country to infuse new spirit in the Kashmiris, who have been fighting for their freedom for decades.

President Dr Arif Alvi and caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar in their separate messages issued on the eve of Kashmir Solidarity Day, reiterated the nation's unwavering support for the Kashmir cause and the people of India-held Jammu and Kashmir.

Dr Alvi said the right to self-determination is a cardinal principle of international law but regrettably, the Kashmiri people have not been able to exercise this inalienable right.

"Today, the IIOJK [Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir] is one of the most militarised zones in the world. Kashmiris are living in an environment of fear and intimidation," the President Secretariat's Press Wing quoted the president as saying in a press release.

The president said that the Indian

occupation forces were engaged in indiscriminate use of force against civilians and political activists and human rights defenders are facing arbitrary detentions and confiscation of their properties.

Dr Alvi reaffirmed that Pakistan would continue to lend unstinted moral, diplomatic and political support to the Kashmiri people till the realisation of their right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In his message, PM Kakar said that India's illegal and unilateral actions of Aug 5, 2019, in held Kashmir are a blatant violation of international law including the UN Charter, 4th Geneva Convention and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

"India has since been engaged in efforts to further entrench these illegal measures through a series of steps aimed at altering the demographic structure and political landscape of IIOJK," the prime minister said.

He said the Kashmir Solidarity Day is also an occasion to pay rich tribute to sacrifices made by Kashmiri brothers and sisters over the last 76 years.

Mr Kakar said that Pakistan had consistently maintained that a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute was possible only in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Pakistan will continue to extend its unstinted moral, diplomatic and political support for this just cause, the Prime Minister Office Media Wing quoted the prime minister as saying in a press release.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## PSL glitz returns to screens

Defending champions Lahore Qalandars and Islamabad United are all set to lock horns in the opening clash of the ninth edition of the HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) at the Gaddafi Stadium.

Both the teams have two titles to their name each. While the Qalandars have won back-to-back editions in 2022 and 2023, United clinched the inaugural season in 2016 and then in 2018.



The new edition's first ball will be bowled at 8.00pm after the conclusion of what is expected to be a colourful opening ceremony, which is set to start at 6.30pm.

Qalandars captain Shaheen Shah Afridi under whose captaincy the side won their first two titles after going trophy-less in the first six seasons and Islamabad United skipper Shadab Khan addressed pre-match press conferences.

Qalandars, United set to lock horns after star-studded opening ceremony "We have won back to back editions of the PSL and now we will try to clinch the title for the third consecutive time," Shaheen, who is also Pakistan's T20 captain, said.

Qalandars go into the season without the services of a major strike bowler in Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan, but Shaheen believed his team's squad was balanced.

"Though we do not have the services of Rashid Khan, our picks have been strong, we are satisfied with the combination," he said. "We will miss Rashid as he has played a pivotal role in our wins in last two editions."

Pakistan pace sensation Naseem Shah has also returned from injury to play his first season for United, who have also picked his brothers also pace bowlers Hunain Shah and Ubaid Shah, who was impressive for

Pakistan in the recent U-19 World Cup, in the emerging players category.

Shaheen expressed his happiness about Naseem's return, while also providing his views on his brothers. "He is back to play for Islamabad after recovering from his fitness problems and we all pray for his good performance so that he could come back in the Pakistan team," he said, while adding that he believed that Ubaid was quicker than Naseem.

Shaheen said he expected the Gaddafi Stadium crowd to stand behind the Qalandars while admitting he was looking to keep his pace restricted between 135-140 kmph mark.

The left-armed said he expected his fellow Qalandars pacers Haris Rauf and Zaman Khan to capitalise on their abilities, while noting that the team needed to bring out its best in all departments of the game.

Meanwhile, Shadab, who has also recovered from fitness problems recently after a long period, said he had come back in the PSL with a positive mindset.

About the return of Naseem, Shadab said the bowler needed to be given time to reach the top of his performance after what was a significant injury.

Shadab said the Qalandars were strong rivals to United and that they weren't an easy side to beat but added that his team was capable of performing well according to the situation. & his performances before his injury weren't up to the mark and the criticism hurled towards him was not unfair.

The former Pakistan vice-captain added, required unity among the players. Shadab, like Shaheen, also hoped the Lahore crowd would back the Islamabad outfit.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## All set to hold free, fair, peaceful polls on 8th, says minister

Caretaker Minister for Information and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi has assured foreign and national media that all is set to hold peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections on February 8.

“More than ample resources are available to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections,” he added at a press briefing here.

Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, special secretary to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Zafar Iqbal Hussain, principal information officer Dr Tariq Mehmood Khan and Executive Director General (External Publicity Wing) Ambreen Jan accompanied the minister.

He said 92 international observers from different countries would monitor the elections.

These observers, he added, belong to the European Union, Commonwealth, Russia, Japan, South Africa, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands, Hungary, Sweden, Azerbaijan, and Germany.

Mr Solangi said good arrangements were in place to ensure the security and integrity of the process, providing security to polling stations in a three-tier system, with police taking the main responsibility. He said civil armed forces and the armed forces would serve as second and third tiers of

security.

When asked as to how swiftly the deployed troops could respond in case of any untoward incident, the caretaker minister drew a somewhat strange analogy between fingers and time and responded, “In terms of minutes, probably in less than the number of fingers on your hands”.

Answering a question about the elections being allegedly “one-sided with military holding the charge”, Mr Solangi said, “We are a free country. The media is free. They have been venting their dissent. They have the right to criticise any judgement of courts. As far as verdicts of the courts are concerned, the caretaker government has no comment. We do not control the courts.”

Regarding the alleged victimisation of PTI leaders and workers before elections, the caretaker minister called the allegations “baseless and absurd”.

Some PTI activists were arrested in connection with their involvement in May 9 violence or other criminal acts, he said, adding that they had options, including moving the courts against any frivolous charge.

**Fifth largest democracy**

Just four days were left in a major electoral exercise, he said, recalling that the country had the first adult franchise on Dec 7, 1970. “We have been holding these elections in different circumstances and continuity of democratic process goes on. I am



glad to say and declare that we have become the fifth largest democracy in the world as we enter this process,” he said.

The minister said 336 National Assembly seats, including 266 general seats, were up for grabs. He said the total number of voters in Pakistan was 128.58 million out of which 69.26m were male voters and 59.32m were female voters.

He said there had been speculations about the upcoming elections, citing the severity of weather, security situation, or some other issues including the recent Pak-Iran tension. “But we have been consistent from day one as chief spokesman of the government I have held this position consistently that elections will be held on time as per the schedule announced by the ECP,” he said.

About law and order and terrorism, the minister said these issues were not new for Pakistan, as the nation had been fighting terrorism for past many years. He recalled that the 2008 and 2013 general elections were conducted despite security threats.

“Since 2021, with the change of guard in Kabul, terrorist groups of various hues and colors having safe sanctuaries in a neighboring country have become more active,” he said. Pakistan has been taking actions against terrorists and “peaceful elections will be ensured at all costs. Our battle-hardened security forces are fully prepared for the elections,” he maintained.

Responding to a question, the minister said that the caretaker government took important steps to improve the economy. The initiatives taken during the caretaker set-up were in the background of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to attract investment, he explained, adding that various economic agreements were signed with friendly countries under the SIFC.

He said when the caretakers came to power in August last year, the US dollar was not available in the open market for even Rs350 to Rs400, but the steps taken by the government stabilised currency.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Pro-Palestine banners barred at PSL games

Upon entering the Gaddafi Stadium to attend the Pakistan Super League match between home side Lahore Qalandars and Quetta Gladiators on Monday night, Faryal was stopped at the venue’s gates by security personnel.

“They acted like I’m carrying a weapon with me,” Faryal wrote on X, after expressing her anger and frustration on the social media platform.

As a matter of fact, the match-goer had no weapon on her. What irked the guards on the entry gate was that she was openly in possession of a banner, on which was printed the slogan “Palestine Will Be Free”.

“This is not allowed inside,” they told Faryal, as she narrated to Dawn a day

later. “This is a political message, it is controversial and may hurt some people. If you want to go inside, you’ve to leave it here.”

How the guards behaved, Faryal said, “scared my younger siblings who were accompanying me and I chose not to argue”.

What the guards did was their job; abiding by one of the terms and conditions printed behind the PSL tickets; “Posters, banners, or placards, depicting religious, political, or racial discrimination in the form of text or pictures are strictly prohibited.”

Faryal’s message, however, was in line with Pakistan’s stance regarding Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Pakistan has consistently advocated for a two-state solution as the key to enduring peace in the Middle East, with a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question anchored in international law and in line with relevant United Nations and OIC resolutions.”

Despite the government being clear in its view on the issue, the Pakistan Cricket Board’s (PCB) decision to disallow spectators from carrying a message regarded as more of a humanitarian appeal in context of the loss of innocent lives including those of minors in the ongoing Israeli aggression on Palestine’s Gaza Strip appears to raise questions.



While pro-Palestine protests have been a regular feature in European football Celtic’s Green Brigade affirming their support for the cause as recently as on February 17 during their Scottish Premiership match against Kilmarnock and also during the recent Asian Cup, their voice has muted in the world of cricket.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## SIFC okays FBR reforms, 2030 canals vision

The apex committee of Special Investment and Facilitation Council (SIFC) on Friday reviewed various initiatives being steered through the council and gave principle approval for Strategic Canals Vision 2030 and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) reforms.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar along with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Syed Asim Munir presided over the ninth SIFC's apex committee meeting, which was attended by federal cabinet members, provincial chief ministers and top government officials. The caretaker premier claimed to have accomplished major economic milestones and expressed the hope that the incoming elected government would ensure the continuity of policies set by the SIFC.

An official statement issued by the PM Office said, "The prime minister appreciated the role of SIFC, ministries, departments and affiliated stakeholders in accomplishing the major economic milestones as part of the interim government and setting the pace for future endeavours."

Progress on the ongoing projects and policy initiatives were shared during the meeting, as relevant ministries presented plans for subse-

quent endeavours to attract investment.

The SIFC apex committee appreciated the contribution made for improving macro and micro-economic conditions and the 'whole-of-government approach' in realising the envisioned dividends.

It commended the steps taken to build a sustainable ecosystem for nurturing latent potential and attracting investments, with emphasis on cross-sectoral policy interventions, human resource development, infrastructural uplift and strengthening of domestic dispute resolution mechanism. It appreciated the progress on the level of economic engagements with friendly countries and underscored the need to efficiently realise investment commitments into economic dividends.

Speaking on the occasion, COAS Gen Syed Asim Munir assured firm resolve of Pakistan Army to support the government's initiatives for economic stability of the country and socioeconomic well-being of its people.

### Mind games

Earlier, caretaker PM Kakar at the launch of PM's National Mind Sports Initiative highlighted the importance of sports, particularly mind



games, in fostering both physical and mental development of youth.

He said chess helps to instill discipline in individuals' thought processes, adding that every student should have access to this game. He highlighted the positive impact of such mind games on mental well-being and said the youth engaged in such healthy activities would become successful professionals. These games promote cognitive activity and critical thinking among players, he said.

He also acknowledged the contribution of Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Fawad Hassan Fawad to launch this initiative. Under this project, the minister said, the facility of mind games would be provided at 10,000 public schools across the country.

"We are going to take it across all the public schools in Pakistan, and we are also engaging the corporate sector and inviting the private

schools to have this in every single school in the country," he added.

The minister said some 100 schools in Islamabad would be given the facility during the first month.

The minister also recalled the tremendous performance of late Mir Sultan Khan, a native chess player from Sargodha, who won the British Chess Championship in 1929, 1931, and 1932.

President of the International Chess Federation (Fide) Arkady Dvorkovich said besides being a mind game, chess was a lot of fun too. He said this game was very important for a country like Pakistan, having millions of young minds. He vowed that the federation would support this initiative and train schoolteachers, who would then train children.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Army chief backs efforts towards 'healing' alliances

As political parties make their moves to secure alliances and assurances to form governments in the Centre and Punjab after the elections, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has said the nation needs "stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarisation".

In a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), which seems to endorse political efforts towards forming a coalition among various political actors, the army chief said: "Political leadership and their workers should rise above self-interests and synergise efforts in governing and serving the people, which is perhaps the only way to make democracy functional and purposeful."

He said as the people reposed their

combined trust in the Constitution, it was "incumbent upon all political parties to reciprocate the same with political maturity and unity. As we move forward from this national milestone we must reflect on where the country stands today and where our rightful place should be in the comity of nations".

"Pakistan's diverse polity and pluralism will be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose," he added.

"Elections and democracy are means to serve people of Pakistan and not ends in themselves. The nation needs stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarisation which does not suit a progressive country of 250 Million people.

Elections are not a zero-sum competition of winning and losing but an exercise to determine the mandate of the people."

"Political leadership and their workers should rise above self-interests and synergise efforts in governing and serving the people which is perhaps the only way to make democracy functional and purposeful," the army chief said.

The COAS congratulated the entire nation, caretaker government, Election Commission of Pakistan, political parties and all winning candidates on successful conduct of elections. "The free and unhindered participation by Pakistani people to exercise their right of vote demonstrated their commitment to democracy and the rule of law as enshrined in Constitution of



Pakistan," he said.

Gen Munir praised the personnel of law-enforcement agencies for creating a safe and secure environment for the electoral process, despite overwhelming odds.

*Courtesy: Dawn*

## Tennis ace Aisam-ul-Haq appointed PTF President Historic win marks Aisam-ul-Haq as first active tennis player to assume presidency of PTF



Pakistan's tennis champ Aisam-ul-Haq emerged victorious in the recent election held at the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) headquarters in Islamabad, securing the position of president.

In a closely contested battle, he defeated his opponent, Major General (retd) Asghar Nawaz, with a narrow margin of 8-7.

This historic win marks Aisam-ul-Haq as the first active tennis player to assume the presidency of the PTF. His election brings a unique perspective to the leadership,

blending his on-court experience with administrative responsibilities.

Aisam's term as president is set for four years, succeeding Salim Saifullah Khan in this significant role.

Joining Aisam in the leadership team are Lt. Col. (retd) Ziauddin Tufail, who was elected as the secretary, and Arif Qureshi, who assumes the role of treasurer.

Together, they are poised to contribute to the development and advancement of tennis in Pakistan under the new leadership of the PTF.

*Courtesy: Saama.tv*

## Famous poet Ali Zaryoun sets to start showbiz journey with 'murshid role'

Famous poet Ali Zaryoun will be seen in the role of 'Murshid' or saint in his debut film 'Daghabaaz Di'.

Zaryoun is popular among the masses with his poetry becoming famous especially among the young lot.

taken, director Wajahat Rauf said "Ali Mian you are a one-take actor", which is good to hear for any actor.

In a social media post, he also shared a picture with Mehwish Hayat, in



In 'Daghabaaz Di' Mehwish Hayat and Ali Rehman are playing the lead roles directed by Wajahat Rauf, while the teaser of the film based on a romantic and comedy story has been released in theaters on Eid-ul-Fitr.

Ali Zareon has recently said that his character is very interesting and the audience will like it when they watch the film.

Ali said this is his first film while mentioning that after the scene was

the caption of which he said that this picture was taken after the end of the scene at Sakhi Hasan graveyard.

In the caption, the poet wrote "After completing the scene of the film, we went to the grave of Jun Sahib, recited Fatiha and informed about the two letters written to Jun Sahib, which I did not send because the address was not known however, Mehwish said that he is and will remain an unforgettable poet.

*Courtesy: The Nation*

## Kashmir Solidarity Day - 5 February 2024

On the occasion of "Kashmir Solidarity Day 05 February 2024", the Embassy of Pakistan, Kuwait organized an event to express solidarity with the people of Kashmir in their just struggle for freedom and right to self determination. The event was attended by a large gathering of notable Pakistani community members from all walks of life.

A documentary highlighting the current situation and human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K) was played before the audience.



The participants including members of the Kashmiri diaspora voiced their concerns on the plight of Kashmiri brethren; highlighted the unprecedented restrictions on freedom of speech, fake encounters, enforced disappearances, and other methods of subjugation. They urged that the international community must play its due role to pressurize the Indian government to adhere to the United Nations Security

Council (UNSC) resolutions and resolve the dispute in accordance with the wishes of Kashmiris.

Messages from the President, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were also read out before the audience.

Ambassador, in his concluding remarks, reiterated that Pakistan values the sacrifices of thousands of Kashmiris in the pursuit of freedom and right to self



determination. He affirmed that Pakistan will continue to raise voice for the Kashmir cause at all international fora till the attainment of their basic right to self determination and freedom in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions.

*Courtesy: arabnews.pk*

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