

Positive Post



Greenwich University

A Publication by Department of Mass Communication & Media Studies and the Diplomatic Academy

Pakistan's standing in the global rankings

Overview

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

DEMOCRACY INDEX

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

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

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

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

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

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

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

PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

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

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

TERRORISM INDEX

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

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

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

ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

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

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

Positive Post is a strategic effort to project achievement and contributions of Pakistan. While showcasing Greenwich University's cultural diplomacy initiatives, it also encapsulates a compilation of different developments complementing Pakistan's socio-cultural, economic & Political outcomes

Historic February

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

February, 2011: Operation Madad is successfully executed.

9 February, 2017: 2017 Pakistan Super League began.

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

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

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PM unveils Rs38bn Ramazan package

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday formally unveiled the Ramazan Relief Package, worth Rs38 billion, which would benefit more than 12 million families — around 36m people — through direct digital payments.

Addressing a ceremony broadcast on national television, the prime minister highlighted that the government had discontinued the old distribution system last year due to the low quality of items and long queues at Utility Stores, which compromised the dignity and self-respect of deserving families.

“With the introduction of a digital system, direct cash payments were made to deserving families under a new cashless mechanism last year,” he said, adding that a third-party audit of Rs20bn allocated for 2025’s relief package confirmed the distribution process was highly transparent and free from corruption.

On the basis of that experience, the premier announced that this year’s package would be implemented with renewed commitment and improvements. Each deserving family will now receive an enhanced amount of Rs13,000, up from Rs5,000 last year.

The Rs38bn will be disbursed



through digital wallets and banking channels across the four provinces, as well as Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, representing a massive operational undertaking in terms of scale and logistics.

Kafalat programme

Out of the total allocation, Rs10bn has been earmarked for families already registered under the government’s Kafalat programme, while Rs28bn will assist those not covered by other sponsorship schemes.

The prime minister acknowledged challenges encountered with the digital system, including banks’

initial reluctance, the absence of a fully developed cashless economy in Pakistan, and operational hurdles faced by the State Bank. “This year, the same experiment is being repeated with better performance and improved key performance indicators,” he said.

Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Syed Imran Ahmad Shah emphasised that the digital banking system not only enhances transparency but also saves citizens’ time and protects their dignity.

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Secretary Aamer Ali Ahmad described the initia-

tive as a historic relief package rooted in compassion and empathy, in line with the spirit of Ramazan.

To ensure smooth implementation, the State Bank of Pakistan has issued a framework for transparent, speedy, and secure distribution. A helpline 9999, mobile application, and online portal have also been introduced to assist beneficiaries and address grievances.

PM Shehbaz thanked international partners for their support and expressed confidence that the initiative would become a landmark achievement.

He assured that the scheme’s progress would be reviewed periodically to ensure that assistance reaches deserving families efficiently, without discrimination based on party affiliation or political viewpoint.

He reiterated that this was the largest federal effort for Ramazan in terms of volume and challenges, and described the cashless digital approach as a major step forward in replacing the flawed old system with a more transparent and dignified mechanism for Pakistanis in need.

Courtesy: Dawn

Lahore lights up as Pakistani celebrities embrace Basant celebrations

Basant returns to Lahore after 17 years, bringing color and joy. Celebrities join the festivities, celebrating kite flying and cultural traditions across the city.

Basant has returned to Lahore after 17 years, and the city is alive with colour, music, and celebration. With government-approved SOPs in place, the iconic kite festival has transformed Lahore into a vibrant spectacle. Fireworks light up the skies, music fills the air, and people from across the country have travelled to take part in the three-day festivities. From the historic lanes of Androon City to newly developed neighbourhoods and open grounds, Lahore



is buzzing with energy as many experience Basant for the first time.

Celebrities have joined in the excitement alongside the rest of

the country, fully embracing the festive spirit. Several well-known faces were spotted celebrating on decorated rooftops, enjoying the tradition of kite flying and the joy that comes with it. Imran Ashraf

was seen expertly flying a gudda, while Usama Khan and cricketer Hassan Ali celebrated the occasion with family and friends. Fiza Ali also marked the festival in classic Basant style, dressed in vibrant yellow.

Social media has been flooded with glimpses of these celebrations, offering fans a peek into how their favourite stars are enjoying the return of one of Lahore’s most beloved traditions. From colourful outfits to joyful gatherings, Basant has once again brought together culture, nostalgia, and celebration across the city.

Courtesy: Pakistan Today

Pakistan wins support for its 'solidarity boycott' of T20 cup tie with India

Pakistan's decision to boycott its T20 World Cup match against India has drawn widespread support from fans and administrators, who hailed the move as a long-overdue stand in a rivalry in which sport and geopolitics have collided.

The boycott deepened a long freeze in bilateral cricket between the nuclear-armed neighbours – who have not played a full series since 2012-13 and now meet largely at neutral venues – and dealt a blow to the ICC's marquee event, with India-Pakistan matches the biggest drivers of global viewership and revenue.

For many in Pakistan, however, the boycott was less about cricketing issues, and more about symbolism.

"Enough is enough," former Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Najam Sethi told Reuters, accusing India's board of politicising the ICC.

"It's time to challenge this duplicitous approach by exercising PCB's options in alliance with Bangladesh."

The government has not publicly detailed its reasoning, but Mosharraf Zaidi, a spokesperson for PM Shehbaz Sharif, linked the move to security tensions with India.

Nothing is more important than the memory of Pakistani citizens and troops murdered by Indian proxy terrorists over the weekend, Mr Zaidi said. "With funerals taking place today, this was the least that could be done."

The remarks followed coordinated attacks by terrorists across Balochistan province that left nearly 50 people dead over the weekend. India's foreign ministry, however, rejected the accusations, calling them "baseless" and accusing Islamabad of deflecting attention from its own internal issues.

The decision also sparked heated debate, on and off social media, with fans divided between calls for "self-respect" and warnings



that skipping the match could further isolate Pakistan in global cricket.

"I've always believed cricket can open doors when politics closes them. It's regrettable that Pakistan won't play India at the #T20WorldCup, but I stand behind my government's decision," former Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi wrote on X.

"This is the moment for ICC to lead and prove through decisions, not statements, that it is impartial, independent and fair to every member," he added.

Former cricketer Muhammad Hafeez also took to X to express disappointment at the development.

He stated that the current tensions began with "no handshake by the Indian [side]" — in a reference to the September controversy where the Indian team refused to shake hands with their rivals at the toss and after an Asia Cup match.

"Not [an] ideal situation for fans of cricket. Worried," Hafeez concluded.

Former Pakistan batsman Muhammad Yousuf was of the opinion that the government had taken a "tough but necessary stand". "Principles must come before

commercial interests. The 'selective' influence in world cricket needs to end for the game to truly be global. We play with pride, but we also stand for equality and justice in sports," he posted on X.

In another post, Yousuf expressed regret that Pakistan vs India "is one of the greatest sporting events in the world, yet it continues to suffer from political interference that damages the spirit and pride of the game".

"In such an unfair environment, choosing not to play becomes an act of principle — an eye for an eye response to protect the integrity of the sports," he asserted.

Similarly, former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif said ICC's "efficiency" in reacting to Pakistan's decision "seemed more of a panic".

"First, not welcoming Pakistan's selective participation and towards the end, requesting PCB to reconsider preserving cricket's ecosystem," he said about the ICC's statement.

Latif also questioned, "Where was ICC when Australia and West Indies forfeited their matches in 1996, England refused to travel to Harare and New Zealand to Nairobi in 2003?"

He said that Zimbabwe did not

participate in the T20 World in 2009 and were still compensated with the participation fee.

"ICC must realise they have been checkmated. Interesting times ahead?" he asked.

Indian Congress MP Shashi Tharoor also weighed in on the issue. "It is pretty disgraceful that sport has been politicised in this way on both sides... I don't think that [Bangladeshi cricketer] Mustafizur [Rahman] should have been denied his contract to play in Kolkata. It was most unfortunate. Intrusion of politics, I think the Bangladeshi reaction was an overreaction but it is also a reflection of the same and Pakistan is trying to show its solidarity with Bangladesh," he told reporters in New Delhi.

"This whole thing is spiralling out of control. I think we need to really need to come to an understanding that sports, especially a sport like cricket, which means so much to all the people, should be a means of bringing us together at least on the playing field, rather than allowing this to go on like this. I honestly think this is now a wake-up call for all concerned to contact each other on an emergency basis, the ICC could be the platform for it – just say, let's call off this nonsense... You can't go on like this forever," he said.

Courtesy: Dawn

Upcoming Basant wraps Lahore in festive colours City comes to life as citizens' anticipation builds, festival fever permeates its neighbourhoods

Zindaan-e-Lahore bursts into life with Basant 2026 as government approval restores the festival's magic, with drum beaters filling the air with rhythm, flower garland and yellow blossom vendors lining the streets, colorful kite designs soaring above, and boys' and girls' shirts glowing in vibrant Basant hues, reflecting the unstoppable festive spirit of the city. With the arrival of Basant 2026, Lahore is wrapped in festive colors as vibrant kites fill the skies and many clothing stores temporarily convert into kite-selling shops, attracting large crowds and constant movement in the markets, local news channels reported. The reports further noted that the revival of Basant has opened up fresh earning opportunities for laborers and daily wage workers, who are actively participating in the seasonal trade and benefiting from the lively Basant business across the city. An elder citizen commented that "It feels wonderful to see Basant returning after so many years, adding, it reminds me of my childhood when the whole city would be alive with kites and music." A middle-aged citizen said, "the markets are buzzing again, and it is great to see



families coming out together. Lahore truly feels festive once more." Young adult / Gen Z citizens excitedly commented that "this is the first time I am really experiencing Basant like this. seeing the colorful kites in the sky and the energy in the streets is amazing." A drum beater said, "Basant is back, bringing the rhythm of the city with it. Playing my drum in these crowded streets and seeing everyone dance and cheer is the best feeling, and it's great that the festival is giving us a chance to make a good livelihood while celebrating." While a flower garland vendor said, "Basant has brought a huge surge in business, especially with yellow flowers and gajra flying off the shelves like

never before. It is not just about the sales being part of Lahore's colorful celebration and seeing the joy on people's faces makes it truly special," reflecting how the revived festival is spreading joy, culture and economic activity across all sections of the city. On the other hand, shopkeepers reported a record sale of over 400,000 kites so far this year, with high demand for colorful and creatively designed kites of all sizes and shapes. SSP Lahore urged citizens to strictly follow safety SOPs to ensure a safe and joyful festival, reflecting how the revived Basant is spreading cultural vibrancy, economic activity and festive spirit across all sections of the city.

Meanwhile, the Punjab government has approved the preparation of permissible kite-making material in Lahore and four other districts, Faisalabad, Kasur, Sheikhupura and Multan ahead of Basant celebrations scheduled for February 6, 7 and 8. According to a spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department on Monday, the approval has been granted under the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Act 2025. However, the permission to fly kites has been given exclusively for Lahore on the specified dates. The spokesperson said that manufacturers in the four districts, besides Lahore, would be required to register with their respective deputy commissioners and complete online registration through the Punjab government's e-Biz portal. He further added that only registered manufacturers will be allowed to produce kites and kite strings strictly in accordance with the Kite Flying Rules. These manufacturers will be permitted to sell their products only to traders or sellers registered in Lahore.

Courtesy: The Express Tribune

Pakistan likely to attend 'Board of Peace' meeting

Pakistan has been invited to the first proposed meeting of US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" (BoP) on Gaza, scheduled to be held in Washington on Feb 19, and is likely to attend, diplomatic sources told Dawn.

Islamabad received the invitation as part of outreach to countries that have already joined the board, which was launched by President Trump late last month. The meeting is expected to focus on giving formal shape to the board, including its structure, mandate and secretariat.

"This will be a key meeting aimed at giving a shape and structure to the board," one diplomatic source said.

Asked whether Pakistan could be approached to contribute troops to a proposed international stabilisation force for Gaza, the source said such discussions were pre-

ture. "That would come later. First we have to give shape to the board, form a structure, set up a secretariat and define its direction," he added. Another source said it was "still too early" for any discussion on troop contributions.

Pakistan is among the 14 countries that signed the charter of the Board of Peace on Jan 22 on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, becoming a founding member of the body.

The board was initially proposed in September 2025 and formally established last month. Under its charter, the US government serves as its official depository. President Trump has designated the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace in Washington as the board's headquarters.

The White House has proposed holding the first peace board



meeting at the US Institute of Peace in Washington, according to an Axios report citing a US official and diplomats from four participating countries.

The plans, which include a fundraising component for Gaza's reconstruction, remain at an early stage and could still change.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to meet President Trump at the White House on Feb 18, a day before the planned board meeting.

Trump, who will chair the body, has said the Board of Peace will aim to resolve global conflicts — a claim that has alarmed many experts, who fear the initiative could undermine the United Nations and existing multilateral mechanisms.

While several Middle Eastern allies of Washington have joined the board, many of the US's traditional Western allies have so far stayed away, reflecting unease over both its structure and mandate.

Courtesy: Dawn

Kazakh president accorded warm welcome

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif warmly received Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev upon his arrival at the Nur Khan Airbase as the two nations seek to further bolster their bilateral ties.

The Kazakh president, accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising senior cabinet ministers and other high-ranking officials reached Pakistan on his maiden state visit from Feb 3 to 4. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar and federal ministers were also present to welcome the Kazakh president.

Children clad in traditional dresses and carrying national flags of both countries welcomed the Kazakh president. A 21-gun salute was presented to the visiting dignitary.

During the visit, President Tokayev is expected to meet with his Pakistani counterpart, hold talks with PM Shehbaz, and address the Pakistan-Kazakhstan Business Forum.

The Foreign Office, in a statement,

said the visit would provide the two sides an important and timely opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review of bilateral relations, discuss new avenues for broadening cooperation, particularly in trade, logistics, regional connectivity, people-to-people contacts, and explore collaboration at regional and international forums.

The visit reflects the strengthening bonds between Pakistan and Kazakhstan, their mutual commitment to transforming historic and cultural affinities into robust cooperation, and their common desire for peace and progress in the region, it added.

According to a handout issued by the President's Secretariat, President Zardari will confer the Nishan-i-Pakistan, the country's highest civilian award, on the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan presidents; the latter is expected to visit the country sometime this month. Libyan delegation

Separately, PM Shehbaz on Tuesday reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to fostering friendly rela-



tions with Libya and emphasised the importance of continued engagement and dialogue.

The development came as a high-level delegation from Libya called on PM Shehbaz at the Prime Minister's House.

The delegation comprised Libyan Prime Minister Dr Osama Saad Hamad, Libyan Arab Armed Forces Commander-in-chief Field Marshal Khalifa Abu-al-Qasim Haftar and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Lieutenant General Saddam Khalifa Haftar.

Mr Dar and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir were also present during the meeting, according to a press release issued by the PM Office's media wing.

"During the discussions, both sides exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral relations," it read.

"The [participants of] meeting reflected the shared desire to enhance cooperation in areas of common concern and to promote peace, stability, and development at regional and international levels," it added.

The Libyan leadership appreciated Pakistan's role and expressed interest in expanding collaboration between the two countries.

The meeting concluded with an understanding to maintain close contact and explore avenues for future cooperation.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan's strategic clout in focus at Munich conference

After Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir discussed "global and regional security dynamics" with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a senior US diplomat has highlighted Pakistan's key role in Washington's global strategy.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Mike Waltz highlighted Pakistan's role in Washington's global and regional diplomacy.

"We could walk around the world Kashmir and India and Pakistan where we faced a very serious nuclear escalation," he said during the Munich Security Conference, underlining enduring US concerns about strategic stability in South Asia.

Ambassador Waltz also linked Pakistan to multilateral diplomacy. "The United Nations Security

Council created the 'Board of Peace' unanimously with countries such as Pakistan, our friends in the UK, France and others," he said.

He further highlighted Islamabad's role in Washington's engagement with Muslim-majority nations. "having our goal of a network of friends Muslim-majority nations such as Turkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia involved," he said.

In another reference to regional coordination, he added: "the President [Donald Trump] convened the countries of the region and the Muslim-majority nations, namely Pakistan, Turkiye and Indonesia." Earlier, during their meeting, Field Marshal Munir and Secretary Rubio focused on "matters of mutual interest, including global and regional security dynamics and counterterrorism cooperation", said a statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).



The meeting took place on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, where Field Marshal Munir also engaged with European and international military leaders to discuss pressing security challenges.

In his talks with German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, the Chancellor's foreign and security policy adviser Gunter Sautter, and Chief of Defence Carsten Breuer, Field Marshal Munir discussed contemporary security threats, bilateral defence cooperation, and the need to promote global peace and security through multilateral dialogue.

The CDF also held talks with Renato Rodrigues de Aguiar Freire, chief of the joint staff of the Brazilian Armed Forces, and Rodolph Haykal, commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, focusing on measures to enhance bilateral defence collaboration and address regional security challenges.

According to the ISPR, the visit and accompanying engagements were aimed at strengthening Pakistan's defence ties and expanding cooperation with partner countries on key security issues.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Libya to deepen defence ties

Weeks after signing a more than \$4 billion arms deal, Pakistan's armed forces and Libya's eastern military pledged to continue their engagement and collaboration.

"During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on matters of mutual interest, with particular focus on security dynamics in respective regions and professional cooperation," the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement.

The ISPR said Field Marshal Khalifa Abu al-Qasim Haftar, commander in chief of the armed forces of eastern part of Libya, called on Field Marshal Asim Munir, chief of army staff and chief of defence forces, at the General Headquarters. Mr Haftar was accompanied by Osama Saad Hammad, prime minister of Libya's eastern-based parallel government. The statement said the discussions

underscored the importance of continued engagement and collaboration between the two armed forces, with Field Marshal Munir reaffirming Pakistan's support for peace, stability and institutional development in Libya.

Field Marshal Munir, Khalifa Haftar discuss regional security dynamics, military cooperation

Mr Haftar's visit to Pakistan comes roughly six weeks after Islamabad and Libya's eastern military finalised a major defence agreement during Field Marshal Munir's visit to Benghazi in December. The deal, signed with Saddam Haftar, Khalifa Haftar's son and deputy, is valued at over \$4bn and is among Pakistan's largest-ever weapons export agreements.

Under the agreement, Pakistan is to supply 16 JF-17 Thunder



multi-role fighter jets, co-developed with China, along with 12 Super Mushshak basic trainer aircraft and other unspecified equipment for air, land and naval forces. The deal also includes provisions for training, capacity building and potential joint manufacturing, with deliveries expected over the next two and a half years.

Analysts see the reciprocal visit as a signal of follow-through on the December pact for translating the agreement into concrete timelines for deliveries, training and broader military cooperation.

It also projects the relationship between the two sides as a long term strategic partnership rather than a one-off commercial transaction.

If fully implemented, the sale would represent the first export of JF-17 fighter jets to an Arab country, placing Pakistan more firmly within Libya's eastern military orbit and signalling Islamabad's intent to expand its defence footprint despite international sensitivities surrounding Libya's prolonged conflict.

Courtesy: Dawn

Pakistan, Uzbekistan aim to take trade to \$2bn mark

Pakistan and Uzbekistan signed a protocol aimed at materialising their commitment to boost bilateral trade to \$2 billion, as Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev arrived in Islamabad on a two-day official visit.

The protocol was signed following talks between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Mirziyoyev, marking a key step towards implementing an understanding reached in February last year to significantly scale up trade ties. An earlier agreement in 2023 had set a target of \$1 billion in bilateral trade.

Trade between the two countries, however, currently stands at about \$434m, according to official figures, despite steady growth in recent years.

Under the newly signed protocol, Islamabad and Tashkent will establish a joint working group tasked with formulating a detailed action plan to identify priority sectors and remove bottlenecks to trade and economic cooperation. The working group will prepare a five-year roadmap covering a wide range of economic activities.

Speaking at a joint press stakeout, PM Shehbaz said the signing of the protocol reflected both sides' resolve to translate political goodwill into concrete economic outcomes.

"Today's signing is a manifestation of our shared commitment to enhance and expand our economic relations," PM Shehbaz said, adding that Pakistan and Uzbekistan would work closely to meet the \$2bn trade target. He said cooperation would span sectors such as agriculture, pharmaceuticals, textiles, leather and footwear, tourism and information technology.

"Today's signing of this protocol is a great manifestation of our commitment to work together and enhance and expand our economic relations in the fields of agriculture, pharmaceuticals, textiles, leather, footwear, tourism, IT and so on and so forth," Uzbek president said.

PM Shehbaz also said the inaugural meeting of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council was held during the visit, describing it as a structured mechanism that "heralds a very bright future"



for bilateral ties.

He reiterated that both sides were aligned on regional connectivity initiatives, including the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway project, which he called a potential "game changer" for the wider region.

President Mirziyoyev echoed the emphasis on economic cooperation, describing Pakistan as a reliable and close partner in South Asia. He welcomed the creation of the joint working group and said sustained engagement would be key to achieving the agreed trade targets.

During the visit, President Mirziyoyev also expressed interest in deepening defence and industrial cooperation. He toured Global

Industrial and Defence Solutions (GIDS) facility in Rawalpindi, where he was received by Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir and briefed on Pakistan's indigenous defence production, industrial capabilities and technological innovations.

Officials said the GIDS visit underscored the two countries' shared interest in expanding collaboration in defence technology, knowledge exchange and potential joint ventures, as part of a broader effort to strengthen strategic ties. The Uzbek president's visit has also seen the signing of 28 agreements and memoranda of understanding across sectors ranging from trade and agriculture to defence cooperation and transport.

Courtesy: Dawn

PM pledges \$1bn investment in AI sector by 2030

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the government would invest \$1 billion in the country's artificial intelligence sector by 2030 to build a future-ready digital economy and empower the country's youth.

Addressing the inaugural session of Indus AI Week, PM Shehbaz stressed the investment would help establish a robust AI ecosystem across Pakistan.

"Pakistan is absolutely ready to accept the challenge and work with our global partners, with great commitment and dedication," he said.

In a move to equip the population with modern knowledge, the prime minister announced that an AI curriculum will be introduced in all federally run schools. Additionally, 1,000 fully funded PhD scholarships in AI will be offered to students from across the country by 2030. The government also plans to launch a nationwide programme to train 1 million non-IT professionals in AI skills to boost productivity and improve livelihoods.

Highlighting priority sectors, the

prime minister said AI interventions would focus on agriculture, mines and minerals, industry, commerce, trade and youth empowerment.

He noted that with a population of around 240 million and nearly 60pc of young people there is an urgent need to equip them with modern techniques.

Addressing concerns among IT professionals about rapid technological change, he assured them that government programmes would help transform IT technicians into AI experts, unlocking "unprecedented gains" in agricultural yield, quality and efficiency, as well as industrial growth and women's empowerment.

PM Shehbaz pointed to ongoing digital reforms as evidence of the nation's readiness, citing the digitisation of the Federal Board of Revenue, improved revenue recovery through data-driven systems, and the use of modern scanners and digital instruments at ports to curb smuggling.

"We are recovering lost revenues through technology and offering quality training to our young men



and women in agriculture, commerce and trade," he said.

Recalling initiatives under the leadership of his brother, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister said the current push toward AI builds on earlier reforms.

He highlighted a laptop distribution programme for high achievers in Punjab, the establishment of e-libraries in remote areas, e-stamp papers and the digitisation of land records in partnership with the World Bank.

He also noted that Pakistan's first Safe City project and first IT university were established in Lahore. "We have learned from the past, and today Pakistan is ready to join the world in AI interventions," he said.

Minister for IT Shaza Fatima Khawaja said Indus AI Week

aimed to strengthen coordination between universities, governments and international companies, underscoring Pakistan's full commitment to a digital revolution.

She said the Pakistan Digital Authority was preparing a nationwide digital master plan to guide future transformation.

Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal noted that the world had entered a moment where intelligence itself has become a factor of production, with nations competing on ideas, talent, data and technology rather than commodities. He described AI as a bigger disruptor than electricity or the internet, noting that Pakistan's engagement with technology began over two decades ago with early IT policies, the creation of the Nadra and large-scale investment in advanced human capital.

Courtesy: Dawn

Sharmeen's Patakha Pictures announces open call for 2026 Edition of 'Claim the Frame'

After the successful completion of its last cycle in December 2025, Patakha Pictures, the funding and mentorship initiative launched by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, announced an open call for the 2026 cycle of its acclaimed filmmaking mentorship program, Claim the Frame. Created to nurture the next generation of storytellers, Patakha Pictures, launched in 2022, has supported 69 filmmakers to date, whose films have collectively won over 25 awards and screened at more than 70 international festivals. The program was founded to amplify women's voices in cinema and strengthen Pakistan's independent documentary landscape. In 2024, Patakha Pictures made a special exception to include both men and women from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its newly merged districts

expanding access to emerging filmmakers in underrepresented regions. For its eighth edition, Patakha Pictures and SOC Films are once again partnering with the Scottish Documentary Institute and the British Council to bring Claim the Frame to women filmmakers across Pakistan. This year, the program will select four pairs of women filmmakers aged 18 and above. Applicants must apply in pairs through a single application form. The initiative is seeking bold, resilient filmmakers who are ready to shape authentic narratives and create meaningful social impact through documentary storytelling. Claim the Frame welcomes short documentary projects that explore themes exploring women empowerment, art, identity, culture, and music. Selected fellows will receive fund-



ing and five months of structured mentorship, working closely with international mentors and the SOC Films team. The fellowship includes weekly online sessions and an in-person edit week in Karachi. The cycle will culminate in a closing ceremony where fellows present their film trailers and connect with professionals from the documentary filmmaking community. The 2026 fellowship will run from July to November

2026, with final selections announced in June 2026. Selected participants must commit to the full duration of the program. The deadline for submission is 20th March 2026. Applications must be submitted via email at patakhapictures@gmail.com. For more details and to access the application form, visit: <https://bit.ly/PatakhaPictures-ClaimTheFrame-Applications>.

Courtesy: The Nation

Green thumbs celebrate diamond jubilee of flower show

With seasonal and perennial flowers and all plants blooming in favourable weather, it was a befitting celebration of spring as the 75th Annual Pakistan Flower Show 2026, organised by the Horticulture Society of Pakistan (HSP), commenced at the A.K. Khan Park at Seaview.

The diamond jubilee of the biggest flower show of the country, which has grown as Pakistan grew, is a landmark occasion.

Up on the big screen, the HSP shared many historical pictures of the initial flower shows, especially the very first one held in 1950 at Gandhi Gardens (now the Zoological Gardens) with the legendary horticulturist A.K. Khan, also known as 'Baba-i-Baghbani Pakistan [father of horticulture in Pakistan]'. A.K. Khan founded the Pakistan Agriculture Society in 1948 but renamed it later as the 'Horticulture Society of Pakistan'. Visitors take pictures with the stars of the show, the colourful flowers.

Remembering A.K. Khan, Qudisia Akbar, the host at the prize distribution ceremony, lauded the efforts of his family, especially his youngest son Salman Khan, who now holds the torch that his father had lit. "Salman is the backbone of the HSP but he insists on remaining in the background as he refuses to hold any post within the organisation," she said.

Speaking on the occasion, HSP president Naushaba Khalil Sattar said that the HSP was "a voluntary organisation that promoted horticulture, improved the environment and made the city green". She also said that they have grown and expanded over these years. They have also branched out in the form of some 14 affiliated clubs and societies, such



as the Ladies Horticulture Club, Amateur Gardeners Club, The Tree Club, Cactus and Succulent Society of Pakistan, Pakistan Bonsai Society, Floral Art Society of Pakistan's Gardenia Chapter, Jasmine Chapter, Indus Sogetsu Study Group and Ikebana International Karachi Chapter.

"The HSP office which has been built on a piece of land leased by the Defence Housing Authority, holds lectures, gardening classes, etc, besides offering free technical advice and help to its members," she added.

The chief guest, Senator Javed Jabbar, also applauded the HSP's efforts of "serving nature selflessly with consistency, sincerity and devotion" in the face of adversity where farmlands are destroyed to make way for housing societies. Later, he gave away shields to all

the winners of HSP competitions for the best gardens of residences, companies, educational institutions, mosques, parks and even roadside walks.

The Flower Show itself comprised rows of stalls representing nurseries with all kinds of local and imported plants which were a source of attraction for many. There were also stalls selling flower pots and garden furniture along with stalls that dealt in pesticides and fertilisers to help grow healthier plants. For the very first time, the Karachi University Garden Department also had its presence at the Flower Show.

The Ladies Horticulture Club had a 'Garden of the Future', which showed the effects of climate change with a dry stream lined with plants that can survive on little water, as explained by the



Club's President Durdana Soomro, who was also very proud of their vertical garden. Also in one corner of the stall there was a rush for purchasing the bottled organic jams, jellies, marmalade and pickles made by Fathiya Abdul Qadir, a senior member of the Club, who grows all fruits and vegetables used in the preserves in her home garden.

Among the other societies, the Indus Sogetsu Study Group stall had done something very interesting by selecting pictures or paintings which they depicted through an arrangement of leaves and flowers. Salima Feroz, the president of Indus Sogetsu Study Group, had selected a painting by artist Tariq Saadat from Lahore about Basant, which her colourful arrangement complimented. A group member, Salma Ansari, had also taken a picture of the burning Gul Tower to pay tribute to the shopping plaza that completely burned down last month, resulting in huge loss to life and property. She had painted cactus to show the fire and she used dried woody Buddha tree seed pods with the nuts to show treasures going up in flames.

There was also the Gardenia Society with its huge arrangements. President of the Society, Fehmida Hashmi, said that their pavilion and the arrangements there were based on the theme of 'Nature Unfolds'. Each arrangement portrayed a story in itself. Shahimah Sayeed's arrangements, which looked like complete forests or the seabed, deserve special mention here.

The 75th Annual Pakistan Flower Show 2026, which concludes on Sunday, also has Friday reserved for students, who can enter the Show free of cost on the day.

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