



"We are also fully engaged in various human rights fora in developing, monitoring and implementing international human rights norms. This reflects Pakistan's commitment to international human rights standards"

Speaker National Assembly  
Sardar Ayaz Sadiq

## Pakistan, China agree to further enhance bilateral cooperation in multiple sectors

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China on Monday agreed to further enhance bilateral cooperation in multiple sectors including security, education, agriculture, human resources development and science and technology.

In this regard, two sides exchanged documents of 13 accords at a ceremony held at PM House also witnessed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

The documents were exchanged after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Premier Li Qiang held the delegation-level talks wherein they discussed all aspects of Pakistan-China relations including economic and trade ties and cooperation under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Earlier, as Premier Li arrived at PM House, Prime Minister Shehbaz warmly received him at the formal welcome ceremony where he was given a guard of honor before proceedings for the meeting and delegation-level talks.

The two prime ministers, accompanied by their respective delegations witnessed the ceremony. Pakistan and China exchanged the documents of a Handing over certificate of Smart Classrooms Project inked by Economic Affairs Minister Ahad Khan Cheema, and Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao. Pakistan and China exchanged the minutes of 13th meeting of the CPEC Joint Coordination Committee and 7th Joint Working Group on Gwadar under CPEC.

Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal and Lou Zhaohui, Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency exchanged a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Promoting Cooperation on Livelihood Working Group of CPEC.

Both sides reached an understanding to strengthen cooperation in the fields of "Information and Communication", "Water Conservancy Facilities, Flood Control and Calamity Reduction", and "Security." The MoUs in this regard were exchanged by Economic Affairs Minister Ahad Khan Cheema and Luo Zhaohui, Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency.

Ahad Cheema and Luo Zhaohui also exchanged documents of Letters of Exchange on "Human Resource Development under the GDF" and "Assistance Program of Fire Fighting Vehicles to Islamabad."

Two countries exchanged an MoU on Jointly Supporting the Joint Laboratories inked by Secretary Ministry of Science and Technology Sajid Baloch and Ambassador of China to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong.

Pakistan and China also agreed on the "Co-production of TV Programs" and the document was signed by Secretary Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Ambreen Jan and Chinese Ambassador Zaidong.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanvir Hussain and Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, exchanged the documents of protocol on Quarantine Requirements of export of donkey meat to China. Announcement of the agreement on Currency Swap Agreement between the People's Bank of China and the State Bank of Pakistan was also made during the ceremony.



A red carpet welcome was accorded to Chinese Premier Li Qiang on arrival in Islamabad today for a four-day visit to Pakistan.

## PM terms Gwadar Int'l airport a gift from China; to serve as catalyst for economic prosperity, regional connectivity

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said that the completion of Gwadar International Airport showed Chinese leadership's commitment and dedication to support Pakistan's economic agenda and develop its backward areas.

Addressing a ceremony of virtual inauguration of the newly completed Gwadar International Airport here, the prime minister said that the landmark achievement was all about time-tested friendship between the two countries. He expressed the hope that the completion of this international airport would transform Gwadar's economy in particular and the economy of Pakistan in general.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang were at hands to unveil the plaque of Gwadar International Airport. The ceremony was attended by members of the both delegations, ministers, military leadership and senior officials.

The prime minister said that today, both sides had witnessed the signing and exchange of MoUs between the two countries in various fields of industry, commerce and agriculture.

"No doubt these MoUs will shape into agreements very soon through joint efforts of both countries. Once again, I thank you for your visit to Pakistan out of your busy schedule which is a reflection of your commitment to promoting friendship between the two countries," PM Shehbaz told the Chinese premier.

He further said that earlier today, the two sides held comprehensive discussions.

The prime minister also thanked President Xi,



the Chinese premier and the people of China for their generous gift in shape of Gwadar International Airport. He said "This gift is another feather in CPEC's cap" and assured his Chinese counterpart to work closely with him to complete the second phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the peace and security of the people of Pakistan and China.

Prime Minister Sharif further said that the completion of project reflected the untiring efforts of the Chinese and Pakistani engineers and workers who made it possible as world class airport. "It will be remembered as another gift by China," he added.

Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang, in his remarks, congratulated the Pakistani nation and the government on behalf of the Chinese government and his people on the completion of Gwadar airport which was a manifestation of the commitment of the Chinese and Pakistani engineers and workers and also thanked the Pakistani society for their support.

He said that it was a critical step for realizing the vision of regional connectivity and whatever they had achieved in the last many years,

demonstrated the strength of Pak-China friendship, adding the inauguration would significantly capitalize to promote shipping and port activities and enhance regional connectivity in the entire region.

Premier Li further said that as a symbol of deepening cooperation, "CPEC played a positive role in Pakistan's economic and social development and regional integration".

He said that it was all possible owing to the consistent efforts of both sides.

The Chinese prime minister assured that China would continue to work closely with the intimate Pakistani friends in building and benefiting together by pursuing the goals of high standards, sustainability and high quality of Belt and road initiative.

Li Qiang, referring to the Pak-China ties, termed them as of 'special relationship and friendship' and said that this all-weather strategic partnership was further deepening.

"The unique and unbreakable time-tested ironclad friendship stood the global changing landscape," he added. He reiterated to work hand in hand with the Pakistani friends to accelerate the mutual economic development in the future.

Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal, expressed his deepest gratitude to the Chinese premier for his inspiring input and dedication. He said the completion of state-of-the-art Gwadar International Airport underscored the strength of their bilateral ties, adding the airport was not only a symbol of economic prosperity but would also pave way for the regional connectivity. — VOM Report

## ML-1 project to initiate with help of China: Dar

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday said that Pakistan would initiate Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway project from Karachi to Hyderabad with the support of China.



The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is set to launch a railway project connecting Karachi to Hyderabad, he said while talking to a private television channel.

The up-gradation of Karakoram Highway (KKH), was also in progress, he said adding that talks for establishment of Economic Zones through CPEC-II, are underway.

Commenting on SCO in Pakistan, he said all the high dignitaries were participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) conference.

In reply to a question about trade talks with India, he said, If India wants to hold dialogue on trade and economic sector, Pakistan will also move forward. Dar said Pakistan had highlighted the issue of Palestine at all important international forums. He said Pakistan wanted an independent Palestine state and for this, all diplomatic efforts would be made to achieve the objectives. He further said that a relief fund has been established to help Lebanon and Palestine. To a question about terrorism, he said, terrorism issue had reemerged due to weak policies of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's last regime. Lauding the Pakistan Muslim League-N governments efforts, he said PML-N had made tremendous success on war on terror. Pakistan Armed Forces had rendered unprecedented sacrifices in fighting war on terrorism, he added.

To a question regarding the role of PTI, he said that PTI should welcome the SCO in Pakistan and added that economic progress and prosperity was the top priority of the incumbent government. To another question about foreign policy, he said Shehbaz Sharif's leadership has been steering Pakistan's foreign policy in the right direction, particularly focusing on strengthening ties with traditional partners.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, China reaffirm support to each other on core issues.

## Italian Navy Carrier Strike Group visits Karachi



KARACHI: The Italian Navy Carrier Strike Group comprising Aircraft Carrier ITS CAVOUR and Frigate ITS ALPINO, arrived in Karachi on a three-day visit followed by a bilateral exercise.

Upon arrival in Karachi, the Italian Navy ships were warmly welcomed by senior officials of Pakistan Navy and the Ambassador of Italy.

Following the arrival, an Italian delegation led by the Ambassador of Italy, Marilina ARMELLIN, along with Rear Admiral Stefano BARBIERI, Capability Director of the Italian Defence General Staff, called on Commander Pakistan Fleet, Rear Admiral Abdul Munib.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest including interoperability, avenues for future collaboration to enhance regional maritime security and defense cooperation were discussed.

Commander Karachi, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi also visited ITS CAVOUR and was briefed about the Aircraft Carrier's capabilities by Commanding Officer Captain Francesco FAGNANI.

The capabilities of Italian defence industries were also showcased in a Defence Industries Exhibition held onboard ITS ALPINO.

ITS CAVOUR also hosted a comprehensive brief for Pakistani media. During the media brief, Ambassador of Italy, Capability Director of Italian Defence General Staff, and Commander of the Carrier Strike Group endorsed the role of Pakistan Navy in regional maritime security and highlighted the importance of interoperability between the two navies.

## Pakistan all set to host two-day SCO meeting from today

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is all set to host meeting of the Council of the Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Islamabad on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will preside over the meeting.

The SCO member states will be represented by Prime Minister of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as the First Vice President of Iran and External Affairs Minister of India. Premier of the State Council of China Li Qiang will represent his country.

The Prime Minister of Mongolia as Observer State, and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan as Special Guest, will also participate in the meeting.

The SCO Council of Heads of Government meeting will discuss ongoing cooperation in fields of economy, trade, environment and socio-cultural linkages and review the performance of the Organization.

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will also hold important bilateral meetings with visiting heads of delegations on the sidelines of the meeting.

## Romina lauds US\$10 million boost to Pakistan's climate fight

MULTAN: The US\$10 million climate funding Pakistan secured just recently from ICIMOD would give much needed boost to an ongoing national effort aimed at addressing climate change impacts on communities and environment. Romina Khurshid Alam, the Coordinator to PM on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination said in a statement on Monday that the funding was approved by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) at its Adaptation Fund Board to help Pakistan counter climate challenges.

Romina termed it as an achievement of the federal government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and added that it reflected government's unwavering commitment to tackling the escalating threats posed by climate change and ensuring the nation's resilience against climate-related disasters. ICIMOD was an intergovernmental institution leading the global effort to protect Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) which it described as the pulse of the planet, and it's people,

resources and culture that define it. Romina Khurshid Alam said: "We're delighted to see this project get the go-ahead, which aligns perfectly with the Pakistan government's priority to address climate challenges and strengthen resilience in the face of increasing climate-related disasters."

The federal government's tireless efforts in securing international support for climate initiatives reflect its forward-thinking policies and dedication to protecting both the environment and the future of Pakistan. This \$10 million fund was a testament to the global recognition of Pakistan's strategic climate vision and the government's effective leadership in spearheading projects that will fortify the nation against environmental challenges. The funding would be utilized in executing "Sustainable Actions for Ecosystems Restoration in Pakistan" (SAFER) initiative, in next three and half years by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MOCCEC) in partnership with ICIMOD. APP

## Pakistan emerges as important player in region: Tarar

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said on Monday that Pakistan which faced isolation on foreign policy affairs in the past, had now emerged as a key player in the region.

Talking to the media after the inauguration of the Media Facilitation Center at Pak-China Friendship Center, he said the present government had succeeded to end diplomatic isolation of the country and now high level delegations from many countries have been visiting Pakistan in the recent past.

"We are a very active player in the region, and we have to play an active role in the region", he remarked. He said recently Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim concluded a highly successful visit to Pakistan and both countries signed arrangements to enhance bilateral cooperation in various sectors.

Tarar said after his visit a high-level Saudi delegation led by a Minister arrived and inked many MoUs for Saudi investment worth 2.2 billion dollars in Pakistan.

He said that all economic indicators of Pakistan were positive with inflation decreasing to record 6.9 as compared to 32 per cent last year.

He said that foreign exchange reserves and IT exports had witnessed a surge and remittances during the first quarter of the current fiscal year had touched \$ 8.8 billion mark.

International financial institutions like International Monetary Fund and World Bank praised Pakistan's economy and renowned financial journals like Bloomberg had termed Pakistan stock exchange as the most emerging market in the region, he remarked.

He said that the Chinese Prime Minister had come to Pakistan after 11 years which was an honour.



The minister said China had always extended the hand of friendship to Pakistan, and after the recent visit of the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to China, the second phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor was launched. During this phase, he said business to business cooperation will be increased. Tarar said that during the tenure of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister, China

Pakistan Economic Corridor Phase-I was started under which a network of motorways was built, Gwadar Port made functional, many industrial and special economic zones were established and the energy sector was restructured to overcome load shedding. He urged the Chinese investors to set up industrial units in Pakistan as cost of production was low here. He assured that Pakistan will

provide all possible facilities to Chinese investors.

The minister said that the SCO Summit being hosted by Pakistan was the first big event being held after 27 years.

Terming it a big honour for Pakistan to hold the SCO meeting, he said Islamabad was beautifully decorated on the occasion of the summit. He said that people of Pakistan were very hospitable and resilient people who will give a warm welcome to all guests.

Attaullah Tarar appreciated the entire team of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting led by Secretary Information Ambreen Jan for providing state of the art facilities at the Media Facilitation Center.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was the eyes and ears of the government, which had the responsibility to defend the ideological frontiers of the country, he maintained. He also appreciated the role of Principal Information

Officer Mubasher Hasan for making best arrangements for foreign journalists covering the mega event.

Replying to questions of the media, he said hosting the SCO summit in Pakistan had restored the image of Pakistan at the global level. He said efforts were being made to highlight the diverse and unique culture and heritage of Pakistan on this occasion. "Our vision is to highlight our culture, progressive approach and peaceful thinking and remove misconceptions about Pakistan by portraying capabilities, resilience and brilliance of our people", he added.

To a question about a protest call of a political party on one side and patriotism on the other. He made it clear that no political leader or party was bigger than Pakistan. He termed Tehreek-e-Insaf's call was a show of irresponsibility and non seriousness as they had differences and many senior leaders had opposed it. APP

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## Two Americas, one election

TOUQIR HUSSAIN

The upcoming US presidential election may arguably be one of the most consequential in the country's history. It is like a referendum on the future of democracy in America, if not on the country itself. A deeply divided nation faces challenging domestic issues and a complex geopolitical situation. And there is no national consensus on how to cope with them. The main issues in this election are: economy, immigration, women's reproductive rights, democracy and rule of law, the global role of the US and its foreign policy challenges like China and the ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East. It is a measure of the polarisation of society that each side has chosen its slate of preferred election issues on which it has an advantage. No wonder the campaign is marked more by attacks on each other's policies than spelling out policy alternatives. It is a campaign singularly lacking in specifics and a true national debate on issues, largely because of Trump's strategy to rely on lies, conspiracy theories and vicious attacks on the Democrats and Kamala Harris. In a report on October 9, The New York Times has tabulated these insults as follows. "Ms Harris is a 'lunatic', 'mentally disabled' and 'a Marxist, communist, fascist person'. Mr Biden, meanwhile, is 'crooked' and 'doesn't know he's alive'. Barack and Michelle Obama are 'nasty people' Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, is 'crazy as a bedbug'. Liberals 'want to destroy our country'." The polarisation did not start with Trump. He merely exploited it and made it worse as he found it beneficial to his political ambitions. The post-cold war hubris of the unipolar moment, the euphoria of the 'end of history', and liberal triumphalism's nexus with globalisation went on to create enormous world prosperity. But along with the prosperity came a new breed of global elite and concentration of wealth in the hands of what has become known as the top one per cent. While Republicans and Democrats, each tied to its base and special interests, vied for political power with the help of partisan media, sections of the population felt marginalised or short-changed. The price of this neglect: the 2008 financial crisis. Globalisation and exploitation by domestic elites joined the migration and refugee crisis in creating job losses, social discontent and cultural shocks, and brought class consciousness to the Western shores, first in Europe and then in the US where the lower classes, especially the white and the uneducated, felt victimised and excluded at the hands of forces they did not understand. Economic anxieties, aggravated by the threat to security from terrorism after 9/11, and by the perceived loss of identity among White Americans – incited by the shifting demographics and the rise of Black activism reflected in the election of a black president – prompted the discontented to look for scapegoats. This gave rise to xenophobia, especially Islamophobia, and instigated a sentiment of 'whites only' at home and 'America First' abroad. Trump successfully tapped into all this and nourished the nostalgia for the original identity of America and a yearning for some strongman who could be tough with the terrorists and with countries like China and Nato allies that were taking advantage of the US. Republican supporters, more radicalised than their Democratic counterparts, were particularly receptive to Trump's 'genius' for insurgent politics. This was where their grievances found a home which Trump effectively tapped into. His most powerful rallying cry was: "We are going to take our country back". Different people supported Trump for different reasons – and they may vote again, helping him possibly win – but one theme was common: they were all supporting him to overthrow a system that they felt had let them down. They thought they were launching a 'revolution'. Trump fomented their belief that politicians and politics had failed them. Kamala Harris, a traditional politician, will basically follow conventional politics and Biden's policies which reflect the mainstream Democratic agenda as modified to some degree on the one hand by the progressive wing led by Bernie Sanders, and on the other by the Trump rhetoric in support of the working class and attacks on China. Harris will favour higher taxes on the corporate sector, continue Biden's shift towards green energy and his industrial policy, child tax credit, healthcare and childcare not to mention the improvement of infrastructure. But she cannot achieve these objectives without Congressional support which would depend on a Democratic majority in the Congress which is uncertain. Democrats have a tough fight on their hands in maintaining their slim lead in the Senate. The dysfunctional politics of recent years during which each political party spoke for a different America and focused on laws that favoured its constituency – the so-called base – and the other party refused to cooperate, will make policy consensus difficult. Democrats and Republicans have been drifting apart and there is no meeting ground. There are no overlapping areas to facilitate cooperation. Elections, especially tight ones, are often decided by independent voters, not by the base of each party. The base is not enough. Right now, the independents are concerned by a lack of specificity in Kamala's policy prescriptions and the state of the economy, particularly high prices. Harris has another problem. The Muslim voters in some of the swing states, especially Michigan, are deeply unhappy with the Biden administration's support for the massacre in the Middle East. Kamala Harris has said little about foreign policy or given few specifics of her domestic policies but these like her foreign policy will be a continuation of Biden's policies. To Biden's credit, his policies have led to a robust economy. American employers added 254,000 jobs last month. The number was higher than the average monthly gain of 203,000 over the previous 12 months. The unemployment rate came down to 4.1 per cent. Whether it leads to better electorate sentiment remains open to question. The problem is that the general public sees the economy not the way economists look at it but in emotional terms, and inflation which continues – though at a lower rate – has evoked strong public emotions about the economy. A popular feeling triggered by inflation and high interest rates is that the economy is not working for most people. That gives Trump an advantage.

The writer, a former ambassador, is adjunct professor at Georgetown University and visiting senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore.



Humayun Akhtar Khan

## IT boost for economic growth

Total world trade in IT services crossed \$1 trillion in 2023 – and it is growing. IT services are now 14 per cent of all services trade, a big jump from 4.0 per cent in 2010.

A few economies dominate the trade. Ireland and India lead with \$236 billion and \$111 billion each in exports. In the second tier are the US, China, UK and Germany whose exports ranged between \$48 billion and \$90 billion. Buoyed by policy reforms and foreign funding, exports from Pakistan, though way behind others, have grown in recent years. They doubled from \$1.3 billion in 2019 to \$2.7 billion in 2023. Yet, there is a long way to go for our IT sector, considering its promise for an economy of our size.

The data above is from the World Trade Organization. They classify IT as telecom, computer and information services. Among these, computer services is key. It underpins digitalization and is at the base of 'New Age Industries'. Computer services includes software and its maintenance. The latter makes possible e-commerce and fintech transactions and also the use of AI and cloud computing. Telecom includes data and voice telephony as well as online data retrieval and processing. Information services include access to databases and news transmission. My recent columns focused on industrialisation for exports and jobs. Today's looks at how to boost our IT sector, which could transform our economy. Its real benefit comes in the shape of productivity gains in all areas. In turn, that raises the ability to produce and export higher-value goods and services. It also boosts the overall competitiveness of the economy. The IT industry must build on its still modest e-commerce and fintech success and gradually move up in value with new technologies. That would propel the economy forward.

Pakistan's IT sector has shown some promise recently. Between 2015 and 2022, it attracted about \$850 million in foreign funding. During this period our exports grew by an average of 24

per cent annually. Yet, the sector is small compared to many economies. During the same years, India and China attracted \$136 billion and \$837 billion in investment. And the high rate of export growth is on a small base.

Pakistan's IT sector consists of small firms. Over 80 per cent of the firms have exports of below \$100,000 annually, mostly in the low value-added applications. The whole IT ecosystem limits the industry's expansion. Access to finance, hiring of a skilled workforce, and connectivity are major hurdles.

As per the SBP, credit for the IT sector is "one of the lowest among emerging markets". This must change. A sector that mostly has small young firms cannot meet banks' collateral criteria. Banks have not transitioned into managing the risks of funding start-ups. The SBP recommends using a start-up's intellectual property or cash flows as collateral. Pakistan also does not have a robust system of credit scores. The government may either have a fund for credit guarantee or offer tax incentives for equity investors of IT start-ups.

Nor are our VCs sufficiently developed. In fact, financing from Pakistan plays a very small role in the IT industry. Foreign investors led the recent spate. But IT firms need funds at the idea stage. Even foreign equity takes interest in the later stages. Less than a quarter of financing is at the idea stage.

Pakistan must encourage venture capital that can nurture start-ups with early or 'angel' funds. In a field that thrives on innovation, Pakistani promoters are largely on their own to fund their business in the early stages, before they access credit. Global practices show that technology venture capital in a country grows with tax and regulatory incentives. The government of Pakistan may offer low capital gains tax, incentives for leveraged buy-outs and tax incentives for private projects in new technologies. The latter include cloud computing, AI and blockchain.

Another top challenge for firms is to find skilled workers. Many qualified young professionals entering the IT workforce do not come up to the industry's standards. Some estimates show that just ten per cent of new graduates can be hired. Their ability is below the digital skills needed. For a sector whose main input is skilled

people, Pakistani investors are at a big disadvantage.

As per the HEC, in 2022 about 210,000 students were enrolled in information and communication technologies in Pakistan. That compares unfavourably with 3.5 million in China and India. Even if we set the numbers aside, the quality of the graduates is a bigger challenge. We must urgently interest leading world trainers in improving software skills in Pakistan. They may do so through bootcamps or by training our teachers. MOOCs could also be an option. I understand that Huawei is recently begun a major effort in this regard. It is for us to ensure that our trainees come up to or exceed Huawei's standards.

Digital connectivity too is a major concern 'both in terms of access and usage', per the SBP. It is stifling the sector's growth. As a percent of per capita income, the price of equipment and internet services are high in Pakistan compared to India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and much higher than in advanced economies. World Bank data shows that 33 per cent individuals in Pakistan had access to the internet in 2022. This figure was 43 per cent for India, 45 per cent for Bangladesh and 50 per cent for Sri Lanka. As multiple high tax rates contribute to prices and lower usage, the government must correct the situation.

The World Bank highlights Pakistan's restrictive digital trade policy, with tariffs, data flow controls, and limited content access. Pakistani firms also face hurdles in domestic and international markets. The government must address foreign compliance, enhance intellectual property protection, reduce power costs, and upgrade IT infrastructure to compete regionally.

These are major barriers to the growth of our IT industry. They lead to low use of IT services. Coupled with a lack of digital literacy, they curb demand and limit market size. For our IT industry to scale up, it is important to expand the domestic market. Here firms may test their new ideas before exporting.

The government must play its part in boosting the size of the home IT market. It is an easy win. More demand would boost the IT industry and make it more competitive globally. Besides, it would enable the government to better serve the citizens. The government must also intervene with

policies that drive IT consumption by domestic businesses and individuals. Likewise, industrial growth, if it happens, will increase demand for IT services to the benefit of both sectors.

Across the board in all indicators, Pakistan compares poorly with other countries. In 2021, Pakistan ranked 97th out of 113 countries in the ADB's Index of Digital Entrepreneurship Systems. We are especially behind others in the category of institutions, skills and finance.

Pakistan ranked 92 out of 100 countries in the Global Skills Report 2023 published by Coursera in 2023. This is so even though Pakistanis are at the top in the surge for those seeking professional certificates from Coursera. They have to pay for the certificate. Also, at about 650,000, it is the top country for STEM enrollment with Coursera. This shows a huge national demand to learn and grow. The government must capture this spirit of our young people and invest to improve basic learning outcomes. Pakistan ranks low on global technology and e-government indices, with poor performance on the UN's E-Government Development Index and UNCTAD's Frontier Technology Readiness Index. Unlike Pakistan, Azerbaijan's Technopark law offers tax and residence benefits for IT companies, a model Pakistan's SEZs could emulate for growth.

According to the SBP, Pakistan is far behind peer economies in online checking of account balances. The overall account ownership and mobile money account ownership are also low compared to regional averages and income groups. Pakistan's low rank, 116 out of 152 nations, in UNCTAD's Business-to-Consumer E-commerce Index, 2020, also shows us lagging. This index tracks individual access to the internet and secure services.

To increase exports, Pakistan must move aggressively to IT-enabled services. This will expand the market for our architects, engineers and accounting firms. Also, freelance teachers, medical aids and IT workers will access more users.

The opportunities for Pakistan to transform the economy through IT are limitless. It is for us to realise them, and it is possible to do so with will and leadership.

The writer is chair and CEO, Institute for Policy Reforms. He has a long record of public service.

Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect The Asian Telegraph's point-of-view

## Today in History

### History of Pakistan



On May 2, 2011, a U.S. military operation in Pakistan killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaeda network. The assault, carried out by a small team transported by helicopter, was launched after U.S. intelligence located bin Laden living in a walled compound in Abbottabad, a medium-sized city near Islamabad. Bin Laden's presence

in Abbottabad threatened to add new tension to the often-troubled security alliance between the United States and Pakistan. Pakistani officials had often denied claims that bin Laden was hiding out in Pakistan, possibly abetted by Islamic militants in the remote and rugged areas on the Afghan border. After bin Laden's death, the news that he had in fact lived in a large com-

pound in an affluent area near the Pakistan Military Academy, one of the country's most prestigious military institutes, raised questions about how his presence could have escaped the notice of Pakistan's security forces. Zardari and the PPP-led governing coalition entered legislative elections in May 2013 with low approval ratings because of widespread discontent over corruption

and weak economic development. The main beneficiary was Nawaz Sharif, whose reputation as a businessman and economic reformer helped the PML-N win considerably more seats than its closest challengers, the PPP and Inuran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI; Pakistan Justice Movement) party, positioning Sharif for a third term as prime minister.

To be continued.....

## Showbiz

### Nicole Kidman, Salma Hayek's awkward moment circulates online

Nicole Kidman and Salma Hayek go viral for tense exchange at Paris Fashion Week

Things seemingly has got a little uncomfortable between two megastars Nicole Kidman and Salma Hayek at a show in Paris Fashion Week, according to a clip that appeared over the weekend. In the video, the Babygirl actress is seen pushing Hayek's hand away while posing for photographs. When the photographer asked for "one more" photo of the two, the Eternals actress tried to turn Kidman towards the camera, per the viral video. However, the Big Little Lies star pushed Hayek's hand away and moved on to greet Katy Perry, who was also in attendance. The 57-year-old actress gave Perry a kiss and had a dialogue with the Frida actress before she walked away.



Although it was not completely discernible what Kidman and Hayek said to each other, the latter was heard saying, "Yes please. Advice," to which Kidman appeared to reply, "You don't need it." Hayek then said, "I do," but Kidman walked away. The Teenage Dream singer, who was present throughout the brief conversation, then posed with Hayek. This outing marked Kidman's first public appearance since her mother's demise in early September. The Australian actress wore a black turtleneck dress with tights, stilettoes, and black shades, as she let her blonde straight hair down, while Hayek wore a black dress with a deep neckline, and styled her hair in a sleek bun.

## Tech

### Nasa to explore possibility of life on Jupiter moon with Europa Clipper mission

An imposing National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) probe is due to lift off on Monday on a five-and-a-half-year journey to Europa, one of Jupiter's many moons, to take the first detailed step toward finding out if anywhere else in the solar system could support life. The Europa Clipper mission will allow the US space agency to uncover new details about the moon, which scientists believe could hold an ocean of liquid water beneath its icy surface. The liftoff is scheduled for "no earlier than" Monday, from Cape Canaveral in Florida aboard a powerful SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket, Nasa said in a statement. "Europa is one of the most promising places to look for life beyond Earth," said Nasa official Gina DiBraccio at a news conference last month. The mission will not look directly for signs of life but will instead look to answer the question: Does Europa contain the ingredients that would allow life to be present? If it does, another mission would then have to make the journey to try and detect it.



"It's a chance for us to explore not a world that might have been habitable billions of years ago," like Mars, Europa Clipper programme scientist Curt Niebur told reporters last month, "but a world that might be habitable today, right now." The probe is the largest ever designed by Nasa for interplanetary exploration. It is 30 metres wide when its immense solar panels — designed to capture the weak light that reaches Jupiter — are fully extended. While Europa's existence has been known since 1610, the first close-up images were taken by the Voyager probes in 1979, which revealed mysterious reddish lines crisscrossing its surface.

## WHO greenlights Bavarian Nordic's mpox vaccine for ages 12-17

WHO greenlights Bavarian Nordic's mpox vaccine for ages 12-17 Children, adolescents and those with weakened immune systems have been particularly vulnerable to mpox. The World Health Organisation has okayed Bavarian Nordic's mpox vaccine for young persons, aged between 12 and 17, as they are particularly believed to be vulnerable to outbreaks of the viral infection that has triggered global concern. In a statement on Monday, the WHO said it gave prequalification to the Jynneos vaccine for use in teenagers on October 8. The WHO declared mpox a global public health emergency for the second time in two years in August after a new strain of the virus spread from the Democratic Republic of Congo to its neighbouring states. The United Nations agency approved the use of the vaccine in September as the first shot against

Children, adolescents and those with weakened immune systems have been particularly vulnerable to mpox

mpox in adults, making it easier for badly hit African countries to access the vaccine. Children, adolescents and those with weakened immune systems have been particularly vulnerable to mpox, a disease that typically causes flu-like symptoms and skin lesions filled with pus. WHO's latest decision comes after the EU approved the drug for the vaccine for adolescents in September. The Danish biotech firm is also preparing to conduct a clinical trial to assess the

vaccine's safety in children aged two to 12, potentially extending its use. The trial, partially funded by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, is expected to start in October. The US Food and Drug Administration has also approved Bavarian's shot, but only for use in adults 18 years and older, although it granted Emergency Use Authorisation for its use in adolescents during the mpox outbreak of 2022. Another mpox vaccine, LC16, made by Japan's KM Biologics, can already be given to children, according to the Japanese regulator, although it requires a special kind of needle. Bavarian Nordic did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the prequalification. Confirmed cases of new mpox strain have been detected in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sweden, Thailand, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.



## Health



## AJK govt always supports Kashmir freedom struggle, says Ch Anwar

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Prime Minister (PM), Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq has reiterated his government's all out support to Kashmir cause of self-determination.

The AJK PM said this while addressing an All-party conference held in Poonch Division's Rawalakot city under the aegis of Jammal Islami Azad Jammu and Kashmir late Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that the basic purpose for establishing base camp was to strengthen the freedom movement and liberate the Indian occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The ideological basis of a nation is something that one cannot compare with that of development", the PM said, adding that AJK had progressed beyond imagination since 1947. He said that the people of Azad Kashmir enjoyed every kind of facility.

"We are providing electricity to our citizens at three rupee per unit and 40 KG flour at 2000 rupees", the PM said. "Do the people in Indian occupied Kashmir enjoy same rights and privileges as people of Azad Kashmir do?", the PM asked.

He said that there was no need to adopt an apologetic tone when it comes the issue of Kashmir, adding that infidels could never be our friends. "We are all guilty if we fail to our voices against the injustices meted out to the people of Kashmir and Palestine", he added. "If political parties are weak, we are all responsible for it", the PM maintained. He said that the AJK government had no enough budget to fulfill the demands that were accepted in the wake of recent public protest.

## SCO Summit: City streets shine with lights, decorations

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has finalized all administrative arrangements, with final touches in place, and the city is ready to welcome the delegates of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. Meanwhile, the streets, buildings, and public spaces have been carefully prepared for the international event. According to the spokesman of ICT administration, in preparation for the SCO meeting, the city has been fully decorated. Before the guests arrive, streets have been adorned with lights and decorations, giving the city a fresh look. Major highways now feature green spaces and crescents, adding a touch of nature to the urban landscape.

As part of a beautification drive, various statues have been installed at key intersections. Government offices, private business centers, and buildings have also been revamped, ready to greet the visiting dignitaries. Private businesses, including plazas, petrol stations, and restaurants, are prepared to accommodate the needs of international guests during the summit. At night, the city offers an even more impressive view, with lights illuminating the skyline and key areas across the city. APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar cutting the ribbon during inauguration ceremony of Media Facilitation Centre at Pak-China Friendship Center ahead of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit 2024, in the Federal Capital. ONLINE

## Parliament strengthening rights of citizens: Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said the Parliament of Pakistan was actively engaged in further strengthening the rights of citizens in the country. Speaking at the 135th General Assembly of the Inter Parliamentary Union Assembly Geneva, he said the creation of an independent National Commission on the Status of Women and a National Commission on Human Rights through acts of Parliament were major achievements.

Over past ten years, the parliament has enacted around two dozens bills to safeguard the rights of women and children, he added. The Speaker said the presence of an all parties Women's Parliamentary Caucus, consisting of 87 women parliamentarians, has ensured a balanced gender perspective in the legislative work of the Parliament. However, legislation alone cannot prevent

violations of rights if society at large is not made aware of the protection offered by laws and if the laws are not effectively enforced, he added.

"Accordingly, we have established a comprehensive Human Rights Action Plan that focuses on access to justice, strengthening human rights institutions, human rights education, and implementation of UN Treaties and Conventions. An array of specific measures has been taken to operationalize this plan."

He said these measures include the launching of a dedicated, free of cost helpline for legal advice on human rights violations, and the establishment of funds to provide financial relief to victims of human rights violations. At the international level Pakistan has ratified seven core international human right treaties. "We are also fully engaged in various human

rights fora in developing, monitoring and implementing international human rights norms. This reflects Pakistan's commitment to international human rights standards."

He said gross violations of human rights are occurring in every part of the world. Ominously, situations of human rights violations are spiraling into outright conflict within and between countries.

"We, as parliamentarians, have an obligation to ensure that the cycle of human rights violations and conflicts is broken."

"Most importantly, we need to ensure delivery of the fundamental rights of people, as enshrined in every democratic country's constitution."

Sardar Ayaz said if parliaments failed in this primary task then outright violations of rights were inevitable and conflicts become unavoidable.

## Australian Envoy Hails Cooperation With Pakistan in Dairy Sector



ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins has said that cooperation between Australia and Pakistan is growing in the dairy sector. During an exclusive interview with a local TV channel, he said that 1500 Australian cattle will be imported into the province of Punjab in the next few months. The High Commissioner added that Australia

is providing assistance to Pakistan to enhance agricultural productivity.

He stressed the significance of supporting small rural landholders, saying this ultimately improves their livelihoods.

He reiterated that Australia will continue to collaborate with Pakistani universities, small farmers, and researchers.

## Sherry Rehman hails SCO summit as "Significant Honor" for Pakistan



ISLAMABAD: A prominent leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Sherry Rehman Monday expressed her enthusiasm about the SCO summit, considering it a significant honor for Pakistan and

believed that this pivotal event would not only bolster regional ties but also stabilize the country's foreign policy as international trust in Pakistan grows.

In an exclusive talk with a private news channel, she emphasized the significance of the SCO Summit in restoring confidence and strengthening diplomatic ties for Pakistan, which were damaged in the previous regime.

"The SCO Summit presents a crucial opportunity for Pakistan to deepen its economic ties with member states, particularly China and Russia and position itself as a hub for trade and transit, facilitating greater economic integration within the region," she added.

"By actively participating in the SCO, Pakistan can enhance its geopolitical and economic standing, strengthen security cooperation and

promote regional connectivity," she mentioned. "The SCO framework provides a platform for Pakistan to engage in diplomatic dialogues, address bilateral and multilateral issues and amplify its voice in international forums," she said.

"India's participation in the SCO Summit alongside Pakistan is a significant development where India can get opportunity to discuss issues on table talks," she added.

Responding to a query, Sherry Rehman expressed optimism about the upcoming SCO summit. "India's participation alongside Pakistan presents an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and cooperation," she highlighted.

She noted that during the previous conference, India missed the chance to engage constructively with Pakistan.

However, Rehman hoped that this time around, India would demonstrate maturity and engage in mutually beneficial discussions.

Sherry also emphasized that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party should demonstrate maturity and understand the significance of the SCO summit. "The SCO summit, founded by China and Russia in 2001, focuses on key areas such as political, economic, international security, and defense matters," she added.

## CM greets Chinese Prime Minister

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif warmly welcomed the arrival of Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang to Pakistan.

In her statement, the CM said, "We heartily welcome Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang from the core of heart on behalf of the Punjab government and its people. The visit of the Chinese Prime Minister to Pakistan is deemed as the beginning of a new chapter of mutual friendship."

The CM said the relations between China and Pakistan are the guarantors of world peace, prosperity and development of the region. The credit for the warmth and cordial relations between Pakistan and China goes to the PML-N Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is playing a vigorous role in strengthening and stabilizing Pakistan-China relations, she mentioned. The launching of CPEC during the regime of PML-N gives an undeniable proof of Pakistan-China friendship, she noted.

The chief minister added with the arrival of the Chinese Prime Minister, the CPEC projects will accelerate and thousands of employment opportunities will be generated. The mutual friendship between Pakistan and China is built on a solid foundation of trust and respect. Pakistan and China's mutual cooperation in every hour of distress and difficulty has become a part of history. Pakistan and China are moving together towards a prosperous and peaceful future. Pakistan-China friendship is getting further stronger with each passing day. APP

## Faisal Tirmizi inaugurates Pakistan pavilion at GITEX Global 2024

DUBAI: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Faisal Niaz Tirmizi on Monday inaugurated the Pakistan Pavilion at GITEX Global 2024 at the Dubai World Trade Centre. In his remarks, Ambassador Tirmizi expressed his pride in GITEX Global's recognition of Pakistan as the "Tech Destination of the Year 2024," a recognition of the country's impressive advancements in IT-related services and products.

Consul General Hussain Muhammad, Trade & Investment Counsellor Ali Zeb Khan and senior government officials from Pakistan were also present on the occasion.

Ambassador Tirmizi highlighted the substantial growth of Pakistan's IT exports to the UAE, which have risen by 34%, reaching \$265 million. He also noted that Pakistan's global IT exports now exceed \$3.2 billion, with the potential for continued growth.

The ambassador acknowledged the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT), Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), Pakistan Software Houses Association (PASHA), and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in organizing and showcasing Pakistan's IT industry at the exhibition. "Their joint efforts have made it possible for Pakistan to present its full spectrum of capabilities at GITEX



Global, the world's largest IT exhibition", highlighted Mr. Tirmizi.

He also commended the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Minister of State for IT & Telecommunication, Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja, for their vision in driving the country's IT sector forward. "Pakistan, with the third-largest English-speaking population and the second-largest provider of freelance IT services globally, is uniquely positioned to expand its IT exports", underlined Mr. Tirmizi. Ambassador Tirmizi encouraged business leaders and IT professionals to visit the Pakistan Pavilion, where 24 exhibitors are showcasing innovative technologies and services. He emphasized that GITEX Global provides an unparalleled opportunity for Pakistani IT experts to connect with their global counterparts and explore potential collaborations. APP



KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is addressing the inauguration ceremony of Benazir Hari Card at Chief Minister House. APP

## BISP strives to help families achieve self-reliance

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid Monday said BISP was making significant efforts to help families achieve self-reliance through equipping the beneficiaries with skill based training. "We aim to focus more on the technical education of children from BISP-registered families," she said during an important meeting with the Sindh Education and Literacy Minister, Syed Sardar Ali Shah, at his office in Karachi. The discussion focused on the skill development of BISP beneficiaries, the allocation of campsites in schools during BISP's quarterly payment disbursements, and the promotion of technical and vocational education in the province.

Secretary of School Education, Zahid Ali Abbasi, BISP Sindh Director General Zulfiqar Ali Shaikh, and other senior officials were also present on the occasion.

During the meeting, Chairperson BISP emphasized that the program is working on various initiatives related to skill development and technical education to enable beneficiary families to become self-sufficient through technical training. She added that BISP and the government of Sindh can collaborate on providing technical training under this flagship initiative.

Provincial Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah praised BISP's efforts and commended the Chairperson for her dedication. APP

## 27 more Palestinian students arrive in Pakistan

LAHORE: Twenty-seven more Palestinian students arrived in the country to acquire medical and dental education on Monday.

Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan President Dr Hafeez ur Rehman, Vice President Air Marshal (Retired) Arshad Malik, Health Services Chairman Prof Dr Zahid Latif and government officials warmly welcomed the students at Lahore airport.

Dr Hafeez ur Rehman said that in the first phase, 192 Palestinian students were coming to Pakistan through different flights. He said that the students would continue their medical and dental education in universities of Pakistan, adding that the Alkhidmat Foundation, Global Relief Trust and Doctors of Rehman would extend cooperation for the purpose. He thanked the government of Pakistan, Palestinian Embassy and medical colleges and universities which helped the students continue their education. "After meetings with Palestinian Embassy officials, the



government of Pakistan and different colleges and universities, we were able to bring the students to Pakistan. The students will be provided with all possible facilities including education, food and residence," he added. "The Alkhidmat Foundation contin-

ues a relief and rescue operation in Gaza from the first day of war. It is providing facilities like food, medicines and shelter there. It has also set up schools," he said, adding that cooperation was also being extended to Palestinian students in

Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and other countries.

Earlier, officials of the Pakistani Embassy in Egypt and representatives of the Alkhidmat Foundation saw off the Palestinian students at Cairo airport.