



Durable global peace cannot be achieved without the resolution of Kashmir and Palestine dispute

Speaker National Assembly
Sardar Ayaz Sadiq

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Dutch Ambassador, finance minister discuss ways to strengthen ties



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan on Tuesday called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb to discuss matters of mutual interest and explore ways for further strengthening the existing ties between Pakistan and The Netherlands.

According to press release issued by finance ministry, during the meeting, various aspects of the longstanding friendship and bilateral cooperation between the two countries were discussed. They identified priority areas like mining, IT, oil and gas, agriculture, dairy, and farm production for further business collaborations.

On the occasion, the minister highlighted the government's economic plan and reform agenda for promoting economic growth and ensuring fiscal sustainability. He mentioned the economic gains achieved over the last 14 months and reiterated the government's resolve to stay the course to move the economy on the path to sustained, export-led growth.

He also highlighted the challenges faced by Pakistan on climate front, and its efforts for climate financing and building capacity to ensure climate resiliency through sustainable solutions. Ambassador de Vries reciprocated the sentiments on strengthening bilateral ties and further expanding cooperation in various fields, including sports.

Mohsin meets Fazl-ur-Rehman to discuss matters of national interest

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the residence of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman on Tuesday. The two leaders engaged in discussions on matters of mutual interest and the overall political and economic situation of the country.

During the meeting, Minister Naqvi asked about Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman's health and conveyed his best wishes. He also expressed gratitude to the JUI chief for his pivotal role in the historic approval of the 26th Constitutional Amendment.

"Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman has consistently prioritized Pakistan's interests," said Naqvi, commending the JUI leader's contributions to the nation. Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman reiterated his commitment to serving the country, stating, "Our priority is Pakistan and its people." The meeting was also attended by Senator Kamran Murtaza, highlighting the significance of the gathering amid the country's ongoing political developments. DNA



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia H.E. Dr. Nasser bin Abdul Aziz Al Dawood calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

COAS General Syed Asim Munir reiterates the Pak Army's unwavering resolve to eliminate all threats to national security

Apex Committee approves comprehensive military operation against terrorist organisations operating in Balochistan including the Majeed Brigade, BLA, BLF & BRAS



VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chaired the meeting of the Federal Apex Committee on Tuesday, attended by the Federal Cabinet, Provincial Chief Ministers, General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), and senior government officials.

The agenda of the meeting focused on the "Reinvigorating Pakistan's Counter Terrorism (CT) Campaign". The participants were briefed on the evolving security landscape and the measures being taken to counter terrorism and other critical challenges, including general law and order situation, actions

against efforts to stoke sub-nationalism, religious extremism, tackling the illegal spectrum & crime-terror nexus, subversion and disinformation campaigns, among other issues.

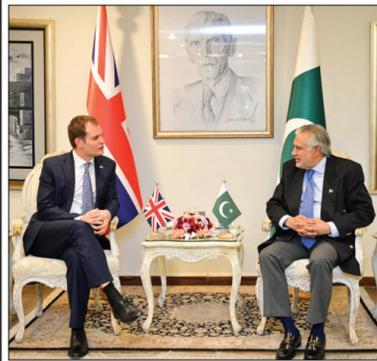
The Committee highlighted the necessity of a unified political voice and a cohesive national narrative to effectively address these multifaceted challenges. It was emphasized that political support across party lines and complete national consensus are critical to reinvigorating the national CT campaign under the framework of Vision Azm-e-Istehkam. Revitalisation of NACTA and the establishment of National and Provincial Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre was also agreed upon.

A whole-of-system approach was adopted, incorporating diplomatic, political, informational, intelligence, socio-economic, and military efforts to address these issues comprehensively. Specific emphasis was placed on strengthening collaboration between federal and provincial governments and between relevant institutions and ministries to ensure seamless execution of the CT campaign. It was decided to establish District Coordination Committees under the Provincial Apex Committees to ensure implementation of directions received from Federal and Provincial Governments. The forum demonstrated political resolve to dismantle ecosystem of illegal spectrum and crime-terror nexus.

The participants also approved a comprehensive military operation against terrorist organisations operating in Balochistan including the Majeed Brigade, BLA, BLF and BRAS who are targeting innocent civilians and foreign nationals to scuttle Pakistan's economic progress by creating insecurity at the behest of hostile external powers. COAS reiterated the Pakistan Army's unwavering resolve to eliminate all threats to national security and provide robust support to the government's initiatives aimed at ensuring peace and stability.

At the conclusion, the Prime Minister directed all stakeholders to pursue the outlined initiatives with vigor, ensuring their timely implementation. He underscored the importance of sustained, coordinated efforts to protect Pakistan's sovereignty, ensure the safety of its citizens, and reinforce economic and social stability.

Pakistan, UK underscore shared interest in trade, investment cooperation



ISLAMABAD: The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan) Hamish Falconer met Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar here wherein two sides reaffirmed the importance of strong bilateral relations underscoring the shared interest in promoting cooperation in trade, investment and climate action.

Both sides reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and discussed regional issues of common interest, according to a Foreign Office press release. Deputy Prime Minister Dar and Parliamentary Under Secretary Falconer noted the strong convergence between Pakistan and the United Kingdom on a wide range of bilateral and regional issues.

The deputy prime minister emphasized the importance of transforming the close relationship between the two countries into an enhanced strategic partnership, commensurate with the rich history of Pakistan-UK cooperation and in line with the aspirations of the 1.7 million-strong British Pakistani community.

Deputy Prime Minister Dar also briefed the Parliamentary Under Secretary Falconer on Pakistan's perspective on Afghanistan and the evolving situation in South Asia. He stressed that the resolution of longstanding disputes, including the core Jammu and Kashmir dispute, was critical to achieving lasting peace and stability in South Asia.

Parliamentary Under Secretary Falconer thanked the deputy prime minister for receiving him and underlined the importance accorded by the United Kingdom to its relations with Pakistan. He added that the UK was looking forward to working with Pakistan at the UN Security Council. DNA



AZERBAIJAN: Federal Minister for Investment, Privatisation and Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan held a meeting with Minister for Economy, H.E. Mikayal Jabbaaro.

Pakistan, Qatar discuss cooperation in field of IT, Telecom



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Qatar on Tuesday discussed matters of mutual interest, increasing cooperation in field of IT and Telecommunication, startups and cybersecurity.

During a meeting with the ambassador of Qatar to Pakistan Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater, Shaza Fatima Khawaja said that Pakistan and Qatar have deep friendly relations, adding that the two countries can jointly work in the field of IT and Telecommunication.

She said Pakistan wanted to further enhance ties with Qatar in the field of IT and Telecommunication, according to a news release.

Shaza Fatima said Pakistan aspired to work with Qatar in the cybersecurity field.

The signing of MoUs between the institutes of two countries in the field of technology is vital, she said, adding that IT companies of both coun-

tries can do joint ventures. She said the exchange of students and startups between the two countries will strengthen relations.

Shaza Fatima urged Qatar to further facilitate Pakistan's IT companies in getting visas and access to its market. The Ambassador of Qatar said that Qatar will fully cooperate with Pakistan in the field of IT and telecommunications. Special Secretary IT and Telecom Division Azfar Manzoor and DG International Coordination Syed Jawwad Ali Sherazi were also present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, addressing the launching ceremony of Digital Dialogue Pakistan, Shaza Fatima said that Digital Dialogue Pakistan is a transformative step in our journey towards inclusive, transparent and technology-driven governance.

"With Digital Dialogue Pakistan we are reimagining how governments and citizens engage, collaborate, and co-create solutions for the country's progress", she said. Shaza Fatima said this platform ensured participation from diverse stakeholders including policymakers, private sector leaders and ordinary citizens.

She said the present government is committed to leveraging technology for transparent governance.

Third Round of Pakistan-Kazakhstan Bilateral Political Consultations held in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Kazakhstan held the Third Round of Bilateral Political Consultations in Islamabad on Tuesday.

According to a statement issued by Foreign Office Spokesperson Muntaz Zahra Baloch, Additional Foreign Secretary (Afghanistan & West Asia) Ambassador Ahmad Naseem Warraich led the Pakistan side while the Kazakh side was led by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Alibek Bakayev.

The two sides comprehensively reviewed the bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Kazakhstan, including political relations, inter-parliamentary exchanges, economic & trade ties, connectivity, education, information technology, telecommunication, culture and tourism. Expressing satisfaction at the current trajectory of bilateral relations, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining the momentum in bilateral cooperation, and to collaborate closely at multilateral fora. It was agreed to enhance bilateral trade and economic relations and to expand collaboration in tourism and information technology.

Important regional and global developments, including the situation in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir were also discussed. SABAH

Pakistan, Germany agree to strengthen collaboration in renewable energy, other uplift projects

ISLAMABAD: German Ambassador Alfred Grannas called on Federal Minister for Power, Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari on Tuesday and both sides agreed to strengthen their collaboration in renewable energy and other development projects to ensure continued cooperation moving forward.

Ambassador Grannas expressed Germany's commitment to supporting Pakistan's energy sector reforms, said a press release issued here. He stated that financial and technological assistance would be provided to address key challenges in the sector, where possible.

The ambassador noted that innovations in artificial intelligence and battery storage facilities were helping reduce electricity costs. He acknowledged the important role of Germany's private sector in Pakistan's energy projects.

The minister shared Pakistan's target of having 88% renewable energy in the national mix by 2034. He explained that the country was working to create a competitive energy market which would allow more participants in electricity trading to reduce electricity prices in Pakistan.

Country was working to create a competitive energy market which would allow more participants in electricity trading to reduce electricity prices in Pakistan

Sardar Awais Leghari highlighted the investment opportunities available in Pakistan's power sector.

He encouraged German investors to take advantage of these opportunities.

The minister said that Germany is a valued development partner for Pakistan. He emphasized that strengthening business-to-business ties was essential for bilateral relations.

They expressed a shared commitment to advancing sustainable energy solutions and fostering long-term partnership opportunities. INP

Ahsan for 'National Curriculum Summit' to work out reforms on modern lines

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Tuesday said the Ministry of Education had been asked to hold a 'National Curriculum Summit' to work out necessary reforms and align the country's education system with the requirements of the modern era.

"We want to take the national curriculum beyond the O and A level education system," he said while addressing the launch ceremony of the Model Assessment Framework at the auditorium of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE). He called for inviting experts from

both the private and public sectors to discuss educational reforms so that a 'comprehensive review' could be carried out to frame and implement a modern curriculum system in the country.

The Planning minister also expressed the desire to establish a state-of-the-art Teachers Training Center to improve the quality of education and produce manpower that meets contemporary needs, for which the Ministry of Education had already been given the task. He said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had initiated this project during its last tenure but could not complete it due to political instability. He added that the center, in collaboration with provincial education departments, would be best in South Asia, where students



could receive quality education focused on improving their critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and team-learning skills.

"It will be a paradigm shift from memorization-based education," Iqbal said, adding that the initiative would also reform the existing examination system. Ahsan Iqbal said memorization-based education was irrelevant in the

modern era, where innovation and creativity drive development.

He believed that the country could not achieve the required goals of progress and prosperity without improving education standards and developing human resources. "Today's era is not about muscle power; it's about brain power. Nations with superiority in brain power will succeed. The first step toward national progress is improving the education system."

Mentioning a recent report by Pakistan's District Education Performance Index (DEPIx), which evaluated 134 districts' performance, he regretted that not a single district was listed in the 'Very High' category. Only Islamabad was placed in the 'High' category, while 56 districts secured the 'Medium' category—32 from Punjab, 16 from Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and 8 from Sindh.

He said 77 districts fell into the 'Low' category, with 33 from Balochistan and 22 from Sindh. Looking at the overall performance, the minister said Punjab's score stood at 61.39 percent, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's at 54.47 percent, Sindh's at 51.55 percent and Balochistan's at 45.50 percent.

Ahsan Iqbal stressed that every country in the world today faced the challenge of aligning its education system with the needs of the modern age, due to the rapid changes taking place in all fields. "In the coming days, the pace of development will further accelerate, and we (Pakistan) need to prepare its next generations with the skills of intellect, modern education, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and team learning," he remarked.

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The mirage of safe water

HAMID MASOOD

The right to safe drinking water has been recognised as a universal human right. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also endorse this right through political commitment at country level in a measurable manner. The case of Pakistan in general and Punjab in particular is a precarious one where the nomenclature of multiple policy instruments alludes to a plethora of responsibilities and reporting instruments without making an express commitment to providing safe drinking water to the populace. The situation is further compounded by the inability of the legal apparatus to define meaningful pathways for exercising this right. The National Drinking Water Policy 2009 recognised access to safe drinking water as a basic human right and deemed it the responsibility of the government to ensure its provision to all the citizens. The policy committed to providing access to safe and sustainable drinking water supply to the entire population of Pakistan by 2025. This commitment was an important benchmark in the history of water governance and back then 2025 seemed far away. Ten years down the lane, we got the National Water Policy 2018 which in its 33 stated objectives used phrases like 'quality of fresh water resources', 'addressing drinking water demand', and 'setting national targets for drinking water'. However, the policymakers were wise enough to abstain from setting a deadline for provision of safe drinking water to the citizens. Though the planning principles of the policy also recognised access to affordable and safe drinking water as a fundamental human right of all citizens, it laid down for progressively providing access to clean and safe drinking water facilities while committing to its affordability and sustainability. In this purview, the federal policy did establish the contours of the right to safe drinking water – though access was made subject to non-committal progressive provision. Subsequently, the federal policy commitments were reflected at the provincial level where two sets of legislations defined the parameters of access to safe drinking water – the Punjab Water Act 2019 and the Punjab Local Government Act 2022. The former holds the water undertaker – a company, a local government or a statutory authority so appointed – responsible for the supply of wholesome water whereas the latter attributes the supply of drinking water as the responsibility of local government. Historically local governments have been responsible for water supply in the province but without any statutory provision for supply of safe drinking water. Legislations prior to the Local Government Act 2019 made no mention of drinking water and restrained to merely assigning the responsibility of water supply to different categories of consumers – household, commercial and industrial. Thus, the provincial governance framework acted blind to the citizens' need for safe drinking water but it did actively correspond to the Clean Drinking Water for All project of the federal government in 2004. With all its shortcomings of project design and coverage, limiting installation of one water purification plant per union council without ensuring maintenance, the initiative may be rated as the first serious attempt to address the right to safe drinking water. In contrast to this initiative, the entire portfolio of provincial and local water governance emphasises maintaining and increasing access to water supply without any consideration of safety for human consumption. The Punjab Water Act 2019 does make supply of water unfit for human consumption an offence on the part of the water undertaker and creates personal liability for the one authorising the supply of unfit water. It further holds the water undertaker responsible for the supply of wholesome water through means other than pipes where supply of wholesome water is not possible at a reasonable cost. However, even such provision has been made subject to reasonable costs which in case of Punjab are going to be mammoth. Basic human right to safe drinking water also resonates in SDG 6 of the UN SDGs that are centred on the principle of leaving no one behind. Pakistan as a signatory to the SDGs has committed to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030. However, in its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2019, Pakistan reported on select six SDGs which did not include SDG 6. Later on, the VNR of 2022 did report on all 17 SDGs and the reported data of Punjab for target 6.1.1 of SDG 6 set 2014-15 as the baseline year for proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services with a baseline value of 98 per cent. By 2019-20, the latest value for this target was reported at 99 per cent, thereby creating a sharp contrast between the proportion of population with access to safe drinking water and the proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services. It is evident that in the case of Punjab such service is highly unlikely to result in the provision of safe drinking water. The misleading nomenclature is of immense benefit to the prevalent mechanism of water governance and service delivery as it helps create a facade of service delivery improvement without tending to the rights of citizens. In the above context, if a citizen residing in Punjab decides to exercise his/her right to safe drinking water, then recourse is available – albeit inconsequential administrative compliance. Recent laws on safe water or policies of the distant past fall short of altering the administrative practice of promoting unsustainable water management and continued supply of unsafe drinking water. The 94 per cent proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services do not comprise even half the percentage according to the limited national sample by the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Sources (PCRWR) – out of a sample of 435 drinking water sources from 29 cities only 39 per cent were found safe. However, experts estimate that a major contributor to contamination is the water supply system making safe drinking water accessibility fall to merely a single digit across the country. A court may decree in favour of citizens but enforcement of that decision is likely to meet the same fate as that of the right to free and compulsory education. After all, how many and how much fines can courts impose on water undertakers in the province?

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Jasir Shahbaz

When schools close, inequality widens

Whenever something happens in Punjab, the government's first response is to close educational institutions. In a province with the highest number of out-of-school children in the country, and where students are already lagging in learning, the disregard for education is shocking. Shifting classes online as a response to smog might seem like a win-win situation, but it is a deeply exclusionary policy, which considers neither the well-being nor education of the majority of students both inside and outside the classroom. In response to Punjab's severe smog problem, the provincial government recently announced the temporary closure of schools, transitioning instead to online education. The decision was earlier made for schools in Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad and Gujranwala but the orders for school closure were later extended to five more districts of Punjab, including DG Khan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Sargodha and Rawalpindi Divisions. The policy ostensibly seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of smog, which causes respiratory problems and other health issues, especially for vulnerable groups like children. However, in reality, this approach is both flawed and exclusionary, overlooking the unique circumstances of children from low- and middle-income families and failing to account for the inequities it perpetuates. While the intention of the policy may be protective, its actual impact disproportionately harms the students it aims to safeguard, particularly those already on the margins. If the government's chief concern is the well-being of children, then this policy's blind spot toward out-of-school children is glaring. Out of the 25.3 million out-of-school children, around 12 million are in Punjab. These children – who are already denied a basic right to education – are left entirely out of this well-being equation. They, too, face the smog each day without the luxury of staying indoors in insulated homes. While school closures might offer some protection to students who can stay home, it does nothing for these

children who continue to roam the streets or labour outdoors, vulnerable to the same respiratory risks as their peers in school. Without a policy addressing the conditions for all children, regardless of school enrollment, the government's approach remains incomplete and shortsighted. One of the most problematic assumptions underpinning this policy is that children will stay indoors when schools are closed. This perspective fails to consider the socioeconomic realities of many families, particularly those not from affluent backgrounds. Many parents, especially those in dual-income households, do not have the privilege of staying home to supervise children. For most of these families, professional childcare is a luxury they cannot afford. As a result, children – left on their own – are more likely to spend time outside, playing in the same polluted air the government hopes to protect them from. Even at home, many children from low-income families live in cramped spaces, often shared with extended family members. Expecting them to stay indoors within confined quarters, sometimes with poor ventilation, is unrealistic. The idea that children across socioeconomic backgrounds have the same ability to 'stay safe indoors' reflects an elitist viewpoint that fails to consider the physical and economic limitations faced by the majority. The government's decision to 'shift online' rather than entirely halt classes reveals an alarming disconnect from the actual educational landscape in Punjab. Pakistan's education system already grapples with a significant learning crisis, with many children years behind their expected learning levels. Schools have been closed for various reasons – ranging from political events to environmental hazards – without regard for the cumulative learning loss these disruptions create. A 2024 World Bank report already found that 8 out of every 10 children in Pakistan cannot understand a basic short text by the age of ten. By failing to maintain educational continuity, the government worsens this crisis, by adding another layer of inequality. Research has proved that keeping students for longer time or more days in school has a positive impact on their learning outcomes. Moreover, the reality of 'online educa-

tion' as a solution highlights stark inequities within the system. While elite private schools in Pakistan may have the infrastructure and trained teachers to transition smoothly to platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, this is not the case for most public schools and low-fee private institutions. As per a 2024 World Bank report, 42.4 per cent of students attend private schools. We have a misconception that private school automatically means an elite institution with state-of-the-art infrastructure and high fees, but a majority of private schools are low-fee schools, which neither have the infrastructure nor the teaching capacity to support online classes. I run Qadam Community School, which provides free education to around 250 students from low-resource families in Green Town, Lahore. Both during Covid and the current school closure we have not been able to shift to online classes, because of severe capacity issues with the students. Students from lower-income families are less likely to have access to devices, stable internet connections, or quiet spaces conducive to learning at home. For these students, 'online learning' is merely a theoretical construct rather than a feasible alternative. There has practically been no learning for students for the last two weeks. This policy, although seemingly universal, disproportionately impacts students from low-income families. Unlike their wealthier counterparts, these students lack access to the digital tools and home environments necessary for effective online learning. Furthermore, the assumption that parents or older siblings can provide learning support at home fails to consider that many families rely on all able family members to work. The added expectation that these family members can simultaneously serve as academic guides is unrealistic and unfairly places an additional burden on households that are already stretched thin. In the absence of targeted support measures – such as subsidies for internet access, digital devices, and support for low-income students – the policy creates an education gap that will be difficult to bridge once students return to school. The public discourse and policy discussions surrounding school closures

are overwhelmingly dominated by high-income families, who can more easily adapt to these abrupt changes. These are the voices that dominate social media, news discussions, and government advisory boards. As a result, the government's policies appear to cater to this small segment of the population rather than address the broader, more diverse realities faced by the majority of children and families. For school closure policies to genuinely protect the well-being of all children, they need to reflect the real lives of children and families across socioeconomic divides. This means acknowledging the vast number of out-of-school children who face the same risks from smog and pollution, investing in accessible and effective digital learning solutions, and providing resources for low-income families who cannot simply 'keep children indoors' or guide them through online learning. If children's health is indeed the priority, why hasn't the government introduced measures to combat the root cause of the smog problem, such as stricter emission controls, better traffic management, and an expansion of green spaces in urban areas? If education continuity is valued, why hasn't there been a nationwide investment in digital infrastructure to support online learning for all students? Why not allocate funds to low-income families to secure internet access and devices? Addressing these issues requires genuine investment and commitment, not temporary fixes that push the problem down the road. Punjab's current approach to school closures due to smog may seem like an act of compassion, but it leaves the vast majority of children underserved and unprotected. True well-being and educational equality will require policies that recognise and address the socioeconomic divides that shape every aspect of children's lives. For now, this policy remains a short-term fix that ultimately neglects those who need support the most, leaving already vulnerable children further behind in their education and exposed to the very risks it claims to mitigate.

The writer is a teaching fellow at the School of Education, LUMS and patron of the Qadam Community School. He tweets/posts @lahoremarquee

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



Pakistan is one of the most populous countries in the world. Infant mortality remains high relative to most countries and the life expectancy remains low, but both measures have steadily improved since the mid-20th century. About

three-fifths of the population is under 30 years of age. The birth rate is higher than the world's average, while the death rate is lower. Life expectancy is 68 years for men and 72 years for women. The overwhelming demographic fact of Pakistani history is the enormous

shift of population during the country's partition from India. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan, and about eight million immigrants (muhajirs)—then roughly one-fourth of the country's population—arrived from India, bringing their own language (mostly Urdu), culture, and

identity. Most settled in Sindh province, but muhajir pockets can be found throughout the country. The major demographic shifts in the postindependence period have been movements within the country (largely to urban areas).

To be continued.....

Showbiz

Usher spills the beans about youthful look in his 40s

Usher shares what's the secret behind his youthful appearance



Usher has recently spilled the beans about his youthful look in 40s. Speaking to PEOPLE, the rapper said, "Skating has always kept me young." "And it's something that I feel is a necessity for youth nowadays," continued the 46-year-old. The R&B superstar explained, "Everybody spends so much time scrolling. We want you to roll, come out, get active, come and have a good time." Reflecting on skating, Usher noted, "It's a form of self-care." The musician mentioned, "The freedom and expression, I really feel like it's a language when you get deeper into the cultures of skating for rhythm, period. And people need to understand how fun this really is." Usher wants them to hit the rink, too. "There's no judgement here," he says. "You fall, you get back up. We invite the entire family to come."

On November 16, Usher introduced Flipper's World Roller Boogie Palace, a first-of-its-kind full-service skating rink residency at The Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas along with pal Liberty Ross. "This is kind of a victory lap for Las Vegas," he told the outlet. Usher further said, "It really all started with my residency and we had a second residency and we played the Super Bowl. We went to Paris. Now coming back with this tour, I'm in the flow, having a good time, enjoying and doing things that I really love." Meanwhile, Usher wanted the roller-skating novices to hit the rink, too. "I can still remember as a kid performing in rinks. It's always been the grounds for culture," he remarked. Usher added, "There's no judgement here. You fall, you get back up. We invite the entire family to come."

Tech

'Vague' net zero targets could push global warming past 2°C: experts



Scientists have raised alarms over 'vague' net zero policies, warning they could allow global temperatures to rise beyond 2°C despite climate action efforts. The warning was issued during UN climate talks in Azerbaijan. Natural carbon sinks—forests, oceans, and soils—currently absorb half of human-made carbon emissions. These systems are essential for stabilising temperatures after emissions are cut, but some nations are using

them to offset current fossil fuel use, risking long-term climate targets. Myles Allen, an Oxford scientist who pioneered net zero science, stressed that natural sinks cannot address both past and future emissions simultaneously. He highlighted Russia's approach, where vast forests are used to offset rising fossil fuel consumption, as an example of flawed implementation. The researchers advocate for "geological net zero," ensuring that every tonne of CO2 from fossil fuels is captured and permanently stored underground. This shift is critical as only 0.1% of emissions are currently handled this way, with the target set at 100% by 2050. Experts also noted that unclear rules could mislead the world into thinking it is on track for 1.5°C warming while actually heading past 2°C. Predictions for 2024 indicate record-high carbon emissions and the hottest year in history, underscoring the urgency of clear and effective climate strategies.

Health

Pakistan's polio cases hit half-century mark in 2024

ISLAMABAD: The number of poliovirus cases in Pakistan has risen to 50 this year, officials announced on Tuesday, as the country continues its fight against the disease that leaves children paralysed. Health officials said that the latest case was detected in a 20-month-old girl from Tank district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has recorded a total of 11 cases in 2024, the health officials said. "Tank is a severely poliovirus-affected district. It has recorded two polio cases and numerous environmental samples have also been detected here,"

they added. Balochistan has recorded the most cases so far with 24, followed by Sindh at 13, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 11, and one case each reported in Punjab and Islamabad. Pakistan is one of the last two countries in the world where the wild poliovirus continues to spread. This persistence is largely attributed to obstacles such as insecurity, misinformation, and community reluctance, which hinder vaccination efforts. Health authorities emphasise the importance of

parents ensuring their children participate in the frequent polio vaccination drives organised by the government. Polio, a highly contagious viral disease, predominantly affects children under five, particularly those with weak immunity or inadequate vaccination coverage. The virus attacks the nervous system, potentially leading to paralysis or even death. While no cure exists for polio, vaccination remains the most reliable defence against this debilitating disease, according to health experts.



NDMA sends another relief consignment to Gaza, Lebanon, Syria



ISLAMABAD: National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Tuesday sent its 20th shipment of humanitarian aid, containing essential relief supplies, to assist war-affected populations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. The 17-ton shipment comprised rice buckets, powdered milk, canned food, family packs, sleeping bags, medical support kits, and a generator.

Following the directives of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, NDMA, in partnership with Al-Khidmat Foundation, sent the aid consignment via chartered flight from Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, to Damascus, Syria. The send-off ceremony held at Jinnah International Airport was attended by senior officials of the government and representatives of the Al-Khidmat Foundation.

This 20th consignment was dispatched for the people of Syria and refugees from Lebanon, prior to this, the Government of Pakistan sent 12 aid consignments to Palestine, six shipments to Lebanon, and one consignment to Syria with a total volume of 1,739 tons. The Government of Pakistan continues to send relief supplies based on the needs of the war-affected populations of Lebanon and Palestine. On instructions of Prime Minister, a special account named the "Prime Minister's Relief Fund for Gaza and Lebanon," for collection of donations from the public to aid their brothers and sisters in Gaza and Lebanon who are facing war emergencies.

Pakistan, ADB sign \$500 mln for climate resilience

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Tuesday signed a US\$500 million loan agreement for the Climate and Disaster Resilience Enhancement Program (CDREP).

The agreement was signed after the approval of Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahmad Cheema, according to a press release issued by the Economic Affairs Division (EAD). Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Dr. Kazim Niaz and ADB Country Director, Ms. Emma Fan signed the Loan Agreement. The ceremony was attended by senior officials from the government and ADB. Cheema, while giving consent regarding the agreement, said that signing the agreement underscores Pakistan's commitment to prioritize climate change initiatives and scaling up disaster risk financing using a risk-layered approach. Secretary Economic Affairs and ADB Country Director said that this program was designed as a programmatic approach and aims to strengthen Pakistan's capacity for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management, addressing the country's vulnerabilities to natural disasters and climate impacts.

The core objective of the program is to enhance institutional frameworks for disaster risk management by improving disaster risk mapping, response coordination, and gender-sensitive public investments.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with JUI Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman at his residence. (Story on page 1)

Durable peace cannot be achieved without resolution of Kashmir, Palestine dispute: Ayaz

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Tuesday said that durable global peace cannot be achieved without the resolution of Kashmir and Palestine dispute. He said this during a meeting with Minister/Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development, United Kingdom, Himesh Falconer along with UK Parliamentary delegation who called on him at the Parliament House.

Ayaz Sadiq expressed concern over the grave human rights violations in these regions, stating that without addressing these issues, regional stability would remain elusive. The Speaker stressed that Parliament of Pakistan represents all political parties and the incumbent Parliament has active opposition that plays a constructive role on matters of national importance.

He affirmed his impartiality as Speaker, ensuring a balanced approach in managing parliamentary proceedings.

Ayaz Sadiq has said that Pakistan is committed to fostering regional peace and stability in the region. He also said that Pakistan has long standing and historic ties with the United Kingdom.

The Speaker said that by enhancing and promoting parliamentary and economic cooperation these ties can be further strengthened. He emphasized that close interaction and cooperation between the parliaments of both countries could play a pivotal role in bolstering bilateral relations.

The Speaker mentioned that Pakistan has rendered immense sacrifices in the global war on



terror and it has always strived for regional peace.

He also highlighted initiatives of the Parliament, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Secretariat established in 2014, which actively works toward achieving sustainable development goals in Pakistan.

Additionally, he mentioned the establishment of a parliamentary caucus to protect the rights of women and children, playing a vital role in addressing discrimination against women and promoting gender equality.

Furthermore, the Speaker underscored Pakistan's minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions while being one of the most affected countries by climate change. He called for greater international collaboration to address this pressing challenge.

Parliamentary Whips of various political parties, present during the meeting, also emphasized the importance of Pakistan-UK diplomatic relations.

PML-N Chief Whip, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry highlighted the significance of Pak-UK friendly ties.

MNA Syeda Shehla Raza expressed deep concern over human rights violations in Kashmir and Palestine.

MNA Malik Muhammad Amir Dogar thanked the UK for its aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MNA Syed Amin-ul-Haq described Pakistan-UK relations as historic. MNA Noor Alam Khan emphasized Pakistan's sacrifices in the fight against terrorism and urged global acknowledgement of these efforts.

Himesh Falconer thanked the Speaker for the warm reception and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to its longstanding ties with Pakistan.

He announced £108 million aid package to tackle climate change induced challenges in Pakistan, highlighting that a partnership on this issue is mutually beneficial. The minister pledged continued UK support for Pakistan in strengthening its democratic institutions and fostering economic and social cooperation.

The UK Parliamentary Delegation, accompanying the UK Minister, comprised British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriot, Personal Assistant to the Minister, Calum Matthews, Political Counsellor, Zoe Ware, Deputy Political Counsellor, Mark Bailey, and Principal Political Adviser to the High Commissioner, Saqib Riaz.

Khawaja Asif emphasizes integration of public & private sector to enhance the efficiency & volume of defence production & exports

Says Pakistan offers enormous opportunities for profitable investments, joint ventures & trade in all sectors including defence

KARACHI: The 12th edition of defence exhibition and seminar, IDEAS 2024 began at Expo Center, Karachi on Tuesday.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of IDEAS, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif emphasized integration of public and private sector to enhance the efficiency and volume of defence production and exports.

Khawaja Asif said Pakistan offers enormous opportunities for profitable investments, joint ventures and trade in all sectors including defence. The Minister said Pakistani defence products are competing at the international market. He added that though we are exporting some high-tech defence products to over 60 countries, but the volume of export is not at par with its actual potential. Khawaja Asif said the 12th edition of IDEAS with a participation of start-ups and leading engineering and tech universities of Pakistan as well as defence experts and manufacturers from across the world will prove to be a milestone in development of Pakistan's defence industry.

Khawaja Asif said a defence ecosystem is being launched through the platform of IDEAS for providing connectivity between the academia, industry and public-private sectors in defence production.

He expressed the government's commitment to continue to create a business-friendly environment for investment in human capital and professionals in this industry. Talking about the geostrategic environment, the Defence Minister said today's increasingly complex security environment needs greater cooperation and collaboration at regional and extra-regional level to overcome the multifaceted challenges posed by it. He called for responsible use of modern technology in confronting geo-strategic challenges to make the world a better and safer place.

Khawaja Asif said Pakistan being a responsible state has always committed to play role for international peace, stability and order. He said reciprocity, mutual interest and international norms are guiding principles that govern Pakistan's relations at bilateral and multilateral levels. About the geostrategic transformation of South Asia, the Minister said cooperation and active engagement of regional players is imperative to achieve regional peace, security and socio-economic development. He said Pakistan believes in meaningful dialogue on the basis of equality to resolve bilateral issues and advance peace and harmony in the region.

Khawaja Asif said Pakistan in collaboration with its partners remains steadfast to its unflinching commitment to peace and stability in the world. The IDEAS 2024 has been organized to showcase a wide range of modern and traditional defence equipment, weapon systems and vehicles. Global defence experts are showing deep interest in the IDEAS 2024 exhibition. Defence production and exports are amongst the priorities of Special Investment Facilitation Council. SABAH

Ethiopian ambassador lauds Governor Sindh for youth empowerment initiatives



ISLAMABAD: Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary of Ethiopia to Pakistan, Dr. Jemal Bekir Abdula on Tuesday met with Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori and discussed different means to enhance bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Both sides discussed matters of common interest including needful initiatives to increase bilateral cooperation in aviation, economic, education, health, science and technology sectors. The meeting was also attended by Ibrahim Tawab, Honorary Consul of Ethiopia in Karachi, said a press release, issued here. Ambassador Jemal briefed the Governor Sindh about the second phase of Home Grown Eco-

nomics Reforms Programme of Ethiopia, which is aimed at addressing macroeconomic imbalances, increasing productivity, creating ease of doing business, and also a conducive environment for Foreign Direct Investment through domestically designed policies.

The ambassador also highlighted enormous business, trade and investment opportunities in its major economic sectors including agriculture, agro-processing, manufacturing, mining, tourism and ICT. Jemal lauded the role being played by the Governor Sindh for empowering the youth of Pakistan by equipping them with modern technologies that enabled them to become global citizens.

On the other hand, the Governor Sindh briefed the ambassador about the courses and trainings of modern skills being imparted to the youth in the Governor House for enabling them to get respectable and profitable livelihoods.

Tessori said the Government of Pakistan is committed to the Look Africa and Engage Africa policy, appreciating the Ethiopian Airlines role in connecting his country with the whole continent of Africa with a market of over 1.4 billion people.

Chinese, Pakistani militaries to hold joint anti-terrorism exercise

BEIJING: The Western Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army will send troops to Pakistan to participate in a joint anti-terrorism exercise from late November to mid-December, the Ministry of National Defense announced Tuesday. Coded "Warrior-VIII," the exercise will focus on joint counter-terrorism clean-up and strike operations. The two sides will engage in multi-level and mixed training across various specialties, and organize live troop drills in accordance with the actual combat process, the ministry said.

According to China Military Online, this year's exercise is the eighth joint exercise of the series between the Chinese and Pakistani militaries, with the aim to consolidate and deepen practical exchanges and cooperation, as well as enhance the capability for conducting joint counter-terrorism operations.

The last joint exercise in this series was held in 2019. APP

Salik directs to establish Pakistan House in Karbala, Religious Affairs Directorate in Iraq

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Tuesday held a meeting with the Pakistani Ambassador to Iraq, Muhammad Zeeshan Ahmed to deliberate on measures to facilitate Pakistani pilgrims travelling to Iraq.

The minister emphasized that the Pilgrim Management Policy, approved by the federal cabinet in April 2021, was designed to ensure the provision of maximum facilities for pilgrims. Highlighting progress on bilateral arrangements, he informed that a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Iraqi government has already been forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Chaudhry Salik directed the expeditious finalization of the MoU to enhance the welfare of pilgrims. He further instructed the immediate establishment of the Pakistan House in Kar-



bala, as well as a Directorate of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony in Iraq.

Reiterating the government's commitment, the minister said that every effort would be made to address the needs of pilgrims and facilitate their journey. During the meeting, the Pakistani Ambassador suggested increasing the number of community welfare attachés in Iraq to better serve the expatriate and pilgrim community.



ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome on Tuesday called on Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar.

Higher education in the region, terms it backbone of socioeconomic development: AJK President

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu and Kashmir President (AJK), Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry here on Tuesday inaugurated Rs. 144.206 million Academic Block-II Natural and Applied Sciences building at the state-run Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST) at the varsity's Jarikas Campus.

While addressing that event, he said that the newly constructed two-story building consisted of classrooms, state-of-the-art laboratories, conference hall and offices for teachers, chairperson and Dean.

He expressed the hope that the construction of the new facility would provide the students of the Jarikas campus ample opportunities to get

modern education. The President said that the higher education and technical expertise stand as the backbone of socioeconomic progress and prosperity of any region.

All possible resources would be utilized to align university education with modern needs and job markets so that the students can have better opportunities to achieve quality education, he added.

Earlier, the Vice Chancellor Mirpur University of Science and Technology Brigadier (Retd) Dr. Muhammad Yunus Javed briefed the President of the use and salient features of the newly constructed academic block.

Efforts afoot to tackle water quality issues with Korean government's help: Romina

BAKU: Coordinator to Prime Minister on Climate Change Romina Khurshid Alam on Tuesday said that her ministry started a new \$4.4 million project 'Enhancing Water Quality Monitoring System to achieve SDG 6 in Islamabad, Punjab and KP' with the help of KOICA Pakistan to monitor drinking water quality in close collaboration with Punjab and KP provincial governments, PCRWR and Pak-EPA.

The PM's climate aide remarked while addressing an important event 'Clean Water and Climate Resilience: Transforming Pakistan's Water and Agricultural Landscape' held here in Baku on the sidelines of COP29 Global Climate Summit at Pakistan Pavilion. She said this project will benefit over 62 million people in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab & Islamabad.

The project includes significant upgrades to water-quality testing laboratories, encompassing the procurement and installation of advanced laboratory equipment, minor infrastructure enhancements to ensure a safe working environment, capacity-building initiatives for laboratory staff and the WASH Cell of the MoCC, the introduction of a Manage-

ment Information System (MIS) for improved coordination, and the provision of 8 vehicles transformed into water-quality testing laboratories for the Government of KP and 1 vehicle for PCRWR.

She said climate change adversely affects water quality globally, exacerbating challenges of shrinking water availability, its contamination and affecting ecosystem health. Coping with the common water-related chal-



lenges requires collaboration and cooperation among countries.

Romina said, "Global heating has increased temperatures of water bodies including lakes, rivers and oceans worldwide, reducing oxygen levels and threatening aquatic ecosystems. Warmer waters are also more prone to

algal blooms, including toxic cyanobacteria, which harm aquatic life and contaminate drinking water sources," She said, "Today, global community, particularly those living in global south are faced with rapidly deteriorating water quality but also its declining availability due to climate change-caused shifting weather patterns, depleting rainfalls, declining groundwater levels and debris-loaded floodwater runoff that turns the river

Because, poor water quality, when consumed directly or through food source, only increase the prevalence of waterborne diseases, which are often amplified by extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. Heavier rainfall increases runoff, which can carry pollutants like pesticides, fertilizers, and industrial waste into freshwater sources. This contaminates drinking water supplies and promotes eutrophication in lakes and reservoirs. Besides, prolonged dry periods concentrate pollutants in shrinking water bodies, leading to higher salinity, reduced dilution of contaminants, and poor water quality, she highlighted.

"Enhancing water quality reduces health risks, especially for vulnerable populations. Because, contaminated water exacerbates waterborne diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, and typhoid, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations in developing regions," she highlighted during her address and hastened to add that warmer conditions accelerate the proliferation of harmful bacteria, viruses, and parasites, posing risks to human health, especially in untreated or poorly managed water systems. APP