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On APS attack anniversary, PM vows to continue relentless operation against terrorism

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday paying tribute to the martyrs of the Army Public School Peshawar tragedy, reiterated his government's resolve to maintain an uncompromising zero-tolerance stance on terrorism and continue relentless and full force anti-terror operations till the elimination of the scourge.

The prime minister, in his message on the APS attack anniversary, said that the great sacrifices rendered for Pakistan's bright future would never go in vain as the state, security institutions, and the people stood united and determined to eliminate terrorism and extremism. "Today, we pay tribute to the martyrs of the Army Public School Peshawar

tragedy, who sacrificed their precious lives for the future of our beloved homeland. This heart-wrenching incident was a great ordeal for the entire nation, which deeply saddened us but failed to break our resolve," he remarked. He said that the sacrifices of the innocent children, teachers, and staff of APS would always remain etched in the national conscience and only the elimination of terrorism from the country would be the meaningful justice for this heinous tragedy.

The prime minister said that the entire nation shared the grief of the martyrs' bereaved families, and saluted their patience and resilience. "Today, as Pakistan once again faces the menace of terrorism, with security personnel and innocent civilians.



ISLAMABAD: Activists of civil society lighting candle in memory of the APS martyrs outside NPC on the 11th anniversary of the Army Public School (APS) attack.

Bondi Beach shooters entered Philippines as Indian nationals, confirms Manila immigration

PEAK POINT



MANILA: The Philippines has confirmed that the two attackers involved in the Bondi Beach incident, Sajid Akram and Naveed Akram, visited the country in November on Indian passports. According to the Philippines Immigration spokesperson, the two men, a 50-year-old father and his 24-year-old son, arrived in the Philippines from Sydney on November 1.

They departed on November 28. The Australian police are currently investigating the reasons behind their trip to the Philippines and have already acknowledged that the attackers visited the country. According to Australian police sources, Sajid and Naveed Akram reportedly received military-style training while in the Philippines. Reports from Indian media suggested that Australian intelligence agencies have reached out to the Indian government to inquire about the attackers and to gather further information on their background. The Philippines Ministry of Defense has confirmed that local authorities are investigating the attackers' visit prior to the shooting incident at Bondi Beach. The Philippines has long faced issues with militancy in the southern parts of the country, especially since 2017 when ISIS-aligned militants captured Marawi City, leading to a prolonged five-month battle. Notably, India and Israel had initially used the Bondi Beach attack as an opportunity to spread misinformation.

Pakistan's vision for next UN chief: A 'strong and proactive' leader

PEAK POINT



UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan outlined its expectations for the next secretary-general of the UN, emphasizing independence, integrity and sound judgment to deal with growing global challenges. "Leadership for peace also requires a strong and proactive Secretary-General," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council on Monday. In November, the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council launched the process together, in line with General Assembly

resolution 79/327, which emphasizes transparency and inclusivity. Under the established procedure, candidates are nominated by member states or groups and are required to submit a vision statement, curriculum vitae and campaign financing disclosures.

The General Assembly president convenes publicly broadcast interactive dialogues with all candidates, while engaging closely with Member States throughout the process. As of mid-December, only Rafael Mariano Grossi – the Director-General of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – has been nominated by Argentina. In his remarks during the Council's debate on 'Leadership for Peace', Ambassador Asim Ahmad said that Article 99 of the UN Charter, which grants the secretary-general the power to alert the Security Council to any situation threatening international peace and security, must be used as an early preventive tool, not as a last resort.

Former Punjab CM Mian Manzoor Wattoo passes away



PEAK POINT

OKARA: Former Chief Minister of Punjab and senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Mian Manzoor Wattoo has passed away on Tuesday. According to sources, Mian Manzoor Wattoo had been suffering from a prolonged illness. The schedule for his funeral prayers will be announced later. Mian Manzoor Wattoo belonged.

Pakistan flags cross-border terror threats, seeks global support

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office spokesperson said Pakistan continues to face persistent threats from terrorist elements operating across its borders, with some groups receiving sustained support from hostile adversaries. The spokesperson said Pakistan is among the countries most affected by terrorism, having lost more than 90,000 precious lives due to terrorist violence, demonstrating the nation's unparalleled sacrifices for peace and security. He said these sacrifices are a living reminder.

Sydney attack exposes India as state-sponsored terrorism hub

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The recent terrorist attack on Sydney Beach has brought India's alleged role in state-sponsored terrorism to the global spotlight.

The international community bears witness to the fact that India, through a coordinated strategy, is promoting terrorism not only in the region but also across various countries around the world. Pakistan believes the fact that India has systematically promoted terrorism not only in the region but across the world, including countries such as Canada, the United States, and Europe. The Sydney incident is being cited as further evidence of India-backed terrorism on the international stage. Reports in global media have raised serious questions about the involve-

ment of the Indian government, particularly the on Indian passports before the Sydney attack.



intelligence agency RAW, in orchestrating such attacks. Australian security sources have indicated potential links between the attackers and Indian intelligence operatives. The primary attackers, Sajid Akram, 50, and his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram, were reportedly traveling internationally

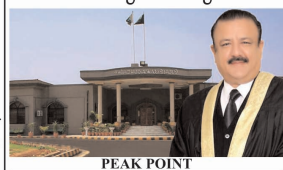
military-style training in southern Philippines last month, highlighting the premeditated nature of the attack. Both individuals also hold Australian citizenship.

International media, including Bloomberg, note that the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not issued any response regarding the Sydney attack, underscoring suspicions of direct involvement by individuals of Indian origin.

The Sydney incident resulted in multiple casualties, has sparked global concern over the threat of organized, state-supported terrorism. Pakistani authorities stress that such attacks underscore the urgent need for international accountability and vigilance against India-backed terror networks.

IHC rejects Justice Jahangiri's objections to CJ Dogar-led bench hearing fake degree case

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has dismissed two objections raised by Justice Tariq Jahangiri in the ongoing degree case, on Tuesday.

A four-page written order issued by a division bench headed by Chief Justice Sarfraz Dogar rejected Justice Jahangiri's objection regarding the formation of a two-member bench instead of a single-judge bench.

IHC stated that serious allegations had been made against a sitting judge concerning degree authenticity. Considering the sensitivity of the matter, the formation of a two-member bench fell within the administrative powers of the Chief Justice, the order added. The court emphasized.



SPORTS



Pakistan cricket in 2025: A year of highs and lows



PEAK POINT

LAHORE: The year 2025 proved to be a rollercoaster for Pakistan cricket, offering moments of hope and episodes of disappointment. Fans witnessed exhilarating victories in certain formats, while setbacks in key tournaments tested their patience.

ICC Champions Trophy
Pakistan began the year by hosting the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, marking the first ICC event on home soil since the 1996 World Cup. However, the team's campaign ended abruptly, Rizwan stepped down from captaincy as early defeats in the first two

matches saw Pakistan become the first team eliminated from the tournament.

Struggles against New Zealand

Following the Champions Trophy, Pakistan faced New Zealand in a challenging series. The team lost the T20 series 4-0 and was swept 3-0 in the One-Day International (ODI) series, further highlighting inconsistencies across formats.

Captaincy changes
2025 was also a year of uncertainty in leadership. Mohammad Rizwan stepped down from captaincy in both ODIs and T20s.

Salman Ali Agha was appointed T20 captain, while Shaheen Shah Afridi took over the ODI leadership, signalling a new direction for the team.

T20 cricket: A bright spot
Despite overall challenges, T20 cricket emerged as a strong suit for Pakistan. The team remained unbeaten at home and earned a place in the Asia Cup 2025 final.

Although they fell to traditional rivals India in the final, Pakistan's junior teams shone, with the Rising Star Asia Cup title adding optimism for the future. Test and ODI performance

In Test cricket, Pakistan's performance remained underwhelming. Out of five matches, the team managed two wins but suffered three defeats. ODIs also offered limited success, with seven wins out of 17 matches, reflecting a need for greater consistency.

Individual highlights
Several players delivered notable performances. Test captain Shan Masood scored 442 runs, while Salman Ali Agha accumulated 830 runs across formats. In T20s, Sahibzada Farhan impressed with 771 runs, cementing his reputation as a key contributor for Pakistan.

Pakistan crush UAE by 70 runs to reach Under-19 Asia Cup semis



PEAK POINT

DUBAI: In a crucial Under-19 Asia Cup clash at the ICC Cricket Academy in Dubai, Pakistan defeated the United Arab Emirates by 70 runs to secure a place in the semifinals.

Chasing Pakistan's target of 242, the UAE managed just 171 in 37.5 overs.

Ayan Musab top-scored for the UAE with 77 runs, while Prithvi Madhu added 27, Yan Rai 13, Mohammad Ryan 12, and Adesh Suri 8. Despite their efforts, Pakistan's bowlers ensured the visitors fell well short of the target. Abdul Subhan was the standout with four wickets, supported by single dismissals from Mohammad Siyam, Momin Qamar, and Ahmed Hussain.

Pakistan had set a challenging total after winning the toss and opting to bat first. They scored 241 for nine in their allotted 50 overs. Ahmed Hussain led the innings with 65 runs, followed by Samir Manhas with 44 and Hamza Zahoor with 42. For the UAE, Yog Sharma took three wickets, while Naseem Khan claimed two.

With Pakistan's victory, the semifinal lineup is taking shape. From Group A, India has already advanced, while Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have secured their spots from Group B.

Shadab Khan stars with all-round show but Sydney Thunder fall short



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: In a pulsating Big Bash League (BBL) encounter at Ninja Stadium, Pakistan's Shadab Khan delivered a standout all-round performance for Sydney Thunder, but it wasn't enough to prevent the champions Hobart Hurricanes from clinching a tense four-wicket victory with just one ball to spare.

the order, helping Thunder post a competitive 180-6 after being sent in to bat.

His knock included a stunning six off Riley Meredith in the 19th over, creaming a near-yorker over deep point Shadab's partnership with Bancroft added crucial runs in the middle overs, but his dismissal in the final over – caught by Nikhil Chaudhary off Nathan Ellis – capped Thunder at 180.

With the ball, Shadab turned the game in Thunder's favour during the chase, claiming 2-36 in his four overs. Introduced in the sixth over, he bowled economically early on before striking twice in quick succession. In the 13th over, he deceived Ben

McDermott (38 off 24) with a well-disguised googly that crashed into the top of off stump, leaving the batter bamboozled. Two overs later, Shadab enticed Rehan Ahmed into a miscued loft, caught by Bancroft at long-on. These wickets reduced Hurricanes to 151-5, injecting life into Thunder's defence as the required run-rate climbed. Hurricanes' chase started explosively, with Mitchell Owen smashing 32 off 14 (six fours and a six) in a 48-run opening stand. Chaudhary's 41 off 31 anchored the middle, but Thunder's spinners – including Tanveer Sangha (1-26) and Chris Green (1-33) – applied pressure, leaving Ben

PSL 2026 to showcase 44 matches over 39 days



Australia's Cameron Green sold for record 252 million rupees in IPL auction

PEAK POINT

DUBAI: Australia all-rounder Cameron Green became the most expensive overseas buy in Indian Premier League history, with a winning bid of 252 million rupees at auction on Tuesday.

Green's name, in the first set of players in the auction in Abu Dhabi, triggered a bidding war with former champions Kolkata Knight Riders finally signing him for the 2026 edition.

The big money for Green surpassed the previous overseas record of 247.5 million rupees paid by Kolkata in the 2024 auction for Mitchell Starc. But due to conversion fluctuations between rupees and US dollars — with India's rupee falling to a record low of over 90 to the greenback this month — Starc's value at the time was higher in dollars.

Green on Tuesday was bought for the equivalent of

\$2.77 million, compared to \$2.98 million splashed out for Starc.

Green himself has a capped salary of 180 million rupees (\$1.98 million) due to a new "maximum fee" rule, with the remainder going to

ing champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

He missed the 2025 edition due to a back injury but is currently playing in the Ashes against England.

The auction witnessed a few surprises, including



ABBOTTABAD: Advisor to Chief Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Taj Muhammad Tarang presenting prizes to winning students of various sports events in Abbottabad University of Science and Technology here on Tuesday.

the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

He becomes the third most expensive player in the IPL, after India's Rishabh Pant (270 million rupees) and Shreyas Iyer (267.5 million rupees).

Green, 26, has scored 707 runs in 29 IPL matches for Mumbai Indians and defend-

when Australia's Jake Fraser-McGurk and England all-rounder Liam Livingstone went unsold. Their names could reappear later, if the franchises demand.

The business value of the IPL was estimated at \$18.5 billion, according to US investment bank Houlihan Lokeny.



Experts emphasize effective implementation of national security policies

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Participants of a roundtable discussion emphasized the need for effective implementation of national security policies and developing a sustained narrative against terrorist violence. They were speaking at a roundtable discussion on the evolving counterterrorism response of Pakistan and the challenges of cross-border terrorism organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) in the backdrop of the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar in December 2014. President IRS Ambassador Jauhar Saleem termed the 2014 APS tragedy a defining moment in



Pakistan's history which paved the way for formulation of the National Action Plan (NAP) with a political consensus. He called for countering the terrorists' propaganda through a sustained counterterrorism narrative. Former National Coordinator NACTA Mr Ihsan Ghani Khan highlighted the gaps in implementation of various

good policy documents, including NAP. He maintained that tactical counterterrorism had a limited scope and needed to be bolstered by strategic counterterrorism that included well-thought-out policymaking and effective policy implementation. He added that since terrorism was a crime, the law enforcement mechanisms needed to be

strengthened through the revamping of the criminal justice system which was also the last point in NAP. Pakistan's former Special Representative for Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Ali Durrani also called for adopting a unified national narrative against terrorism. He urged the strengthening of the police force as first

responders in countering terrorism and called for better interagency coordination among various government agencies and departments dealing with counterterrorism. The Founder and Editor of The Khorasan Diary Mr Iftikhar Firdous said that even though APS was a tragedy in scale and scope, Pakistani policymakers needed to take even attacks targeting the school buildings and not the schoolchildren seriously because in doing that the terrorists were targeting symbols of education in the country. He called for better governance in the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to counter terrorism in those areas. The Executive Director of the Centre for Law and

Security (CLAS) Mr Rehman Azhar said that Pak-Afghan border has certain unique characteristics that need to be considered when devising border security strategies. He also called for implementation of NAP and an effective counter-narrative strategy against terrorism, especially in the two provinces most affected by it. In addition, he also called for seriously addressing the terror and crime nexus in the country. The Lead of the Afghanistan Program at IRS Mr Aarish U. Khan said that the coming into power of the Taliban government in Afghanistan had necessitated a fresh look at the drivers of terrorism in Pakistan's bordering areas with Afghanistan.

IT Parks Projects reviewed as SCO briefing deferred over absence of senior official

NADEEM TANOLI

ISLAMABAD: Progress on the Islamabad and Karachi IT Parks was reviewed during a parliamentary committee meeting, while a scheduled briefing by the Special Communication Organization (SCO) was deferred due to the non attendance of its head. Officials informed the committee that work on the Islamabad IT Park has reached an advanced stage, with approx-

imately 80 per cent physical progress reported. The Minister of State for IT noted that the project had seen a substantial acceleration over the past year, moving from around 23 to 24 percent completion to its current level. According to the project director, all 16 elevators have been installed, curtain wall work is nearly complete and finishing works are underway. Long lead imported items required for the facility have also arrived at the site. It

was acknowledged that the original completion target was not met, and a revised timeline has been set, with inauguration planned in the coming months. The committee chairman observed that the project has been under development for several years and stressed the importance of completing it within the current government's tenure so that attention can shift to other initiatives, including the Karachi IT Park. At the Karachi IT Park,

officials reported that the request for proposal is in its final stages. Delays were attributed primarily to financing negotiations with Exim Bank Korea, which have now progressed following a recent visit by the bank's delegation. The tender is expected to be floated shortly, with the contract award anticipated within months. The project team also briefed the committee on efforts to engage local companies through webinars to

ensure broad participation from Karachi's technology sector. Separately, the committee took up an agenda item regarding damage to SCO infrastructure caused by recent floods and the organization's proposed recovery strategy. However, the briefing could not proceed as the Director General of SCO did not attend the meeting. A representative informed the committee that the DG had another official commitment. The committee chair-

man noted that this was not the first instance of the SCO head's absence and observed that senior representatives from other institutions were present to brief the committee. As a result, the briefing was deferred and the matter postponed until the DG SCO appears in person before the committee. The meeting concluded with directions to maintain close oversight of the IT Parks projects and to reschedule the SCO briefing at a later date.

Opinion & Editorial



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Adapting to survive

BINA SHAH
RECENT catastrophic storms in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka caused severe floods, infrastructure damage, and loss of life; Pakistan experienced the same phenomenon in 2022. Experts warn us that Pakistan will bear the brunt of climate change in the future, even though we contribute less than one per cent of global carbon emissions. Is there any reason to hope, as our glaciers melt and our deltas die, that our children will have a future? There is, if we pay attention and take action now. Thanks to heightened awareness about climate change, government cooperation and civic involvement in the energy crisis, the government's reduction of tariffs on imported solar panels spurred national and community mobilisation which put us on the path to optimal solarisation. Today, despite our poor energy policies and our reliance on fossil fuels, Pakistan has become the world's fourth or fifth largest solarised nation. Eminent global health experts Dr Zulfikar Bhutta and Dr Jai Das are co-editors of the newly launched book *Climate Change and Water-Related Challenges in Pakistan: Tangible Solutions*. Its 12 chapters examine how climate stressors are "undermining freshwater resources, public health systems and livelihoods across Pakistan". A copy of the book should be provided to every lawmaker, policy wonk and politician in

Pakistan; it should be required reading in schools and universities. We cannot be educated enough about this battle. In the August 2025 landslide and deadly flooding in Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan, local shepherds alerted disaster management authorities of the coming floods, according to forestry and biodiversity professional Ajaz Ahmad. The government's planned early warning system for natural disasters will only succeed if it incorporates community-based indigenous knowledge. In fact, Dr Das argues that the wealth of ancestral wisdom in our rural communities should be a major part of the struggle against climate change in Pakistan. We can't be educated enough about the climate battle. Climate change disproportionately affects the vulnerable — women, children and the elderly, who are least able to defend themselves from heat or natural disaster. The 2022 floods in Sindh and Balochistan displaced 600,000 pregnant women in the region; many fled to higher ground and camped on floodbanks in the open, deprived of any meaningful antenatal or postnatal care. Women suffered sexual violence in relief camps; in some areas women were not allowed to leave their homes because of security. They gave birth to children in dark, damaged homes filled knee-deep with contaminated floodwater. Besides the threat to life and livelihood borne by entire populations, women

were deprived of sexual and reproductive health services, subjected to increased amounts of domestic violence. A survey in Dadu showed that three years after the floods, 25pc of the women surveyed were still ill with anxiety and depression. Yet in a small pilot-tested community intervention outlined in Das and Bhutta's book, *Lady Health Workers* created support groups and spaces where flood-affected women could talk among their friends and peers, express their frustrations. The result: a measurable decline in mild-to-moderate depression among the women in the study. Building climate-resilient health systems is the battle fought also by Dr Mehreen Mujtaba, associate professor in the department of climate change at the Health Services Academy in Islamabad. In 2014, she presented a case study from Pakistan on gender-focused adaptation at the WHO Global Climate and Health Summit in Brazil. With the help of Pathfinder International, the government trained Climate Champions in Pakistan, female community leaders who would act as first responders in times of natural disaster and raise awareness in more normal times. In Sindh and KP, about 750-800 girl students and women, fluent in local languages, taught local people about safe nutrition, disease prevention, and helped women find access to safe shelters and safe deliveries.

Courtesy Dawn

Iqbal Rabbani's blood-stained shirt

SHAZIA TASNEEM FAROOQI

December 16 - a day forever etched in the collective consciousness as a moment of profound national rupture. Yet, for countless families, particularly those of the Urdu-speaking community caught in the devastating aftermath of 1971, this date is not just a historical marker; it is an annual, visceral commemoration of personal agony, and for me, embodied by a single, blood-stained white shirt. This is the story of my family, and the painful memory of my eldest brother, Shaheed Iqbal Rabbani, whose fate became a silent testimony to the atrocities that followed the conflict. Iqbal was just a boy, a teenager brimming with the quiet dreams that define youth. Of course, we are Urdu-speaking, a cultural identity which, in the chaotic and brutal post-war climate, became a perilous label. Like so many, my brother too vanished, swallowed by the widespread violence and reprisal that swept through the newly independent landscape. My family waited. They stood sentinel against the empty space he left at the dinner table, clinging to the desperate, fragile hope that he would return. But he did not. Instead, what came back to them was not a body to mourn, but a chilling, mute artefact: his favourite white shirt. That shirt, once a symbol of his style and innocence, was now stiff with dried blood, but the stains were patterns of a horrific finality, a crimson that defied simple description. For my family, the stains looked like red rose petals under a crimson sun, an agonisingly beautiful, yet profoundly terrifying, image. This shirt was a silent, powerful symbol of atrocity, cruelty, and brutal, indiscriminate violence. It spoke of the final, terrifying moments of a life cut short, a young body subjected to unspeakable brutality in the name of vengeance and retribution.

Courtesy Tribune

Hollow increase

THE FBR claim that the growth in tax return filers in recent years signifies a broadening of the tax base is belied by the increasing numbers of 'junk filers', who pay zero taxes. The fact that nearly two out of every five persons filing their returns this year declared 'nil taxable income' shows how misleading it is to equate the rise in the number of tax returns with the expansion in the tax net. This also clearly indicates that the addition in the number of actual taxpayers has been far less than claimed by the FBR. The practice of nil-filers is witnessed across three main categories: individuals, associations of persons, and the corporate sector. The corporate sector, which is the most documented segment of the economy, tops the list, with over 75pc of registered firms declaring zero taxable income. Likewise, close to half the AOPs are nil filers. Nil returns are submitted either to disclose a one-time transaction or to take advantage of lower tax rates for active filers. The growing trend of junk filing may outwardly create a positive perception, allowing both political authorities and the tax bureaucracy to claim increasing compliance and thus lessen the public pressure on them to broaden the tax net. However, what it actually underscores are the deep structural flaws in tax policy.

Aurangzeb underscores Pakistan's drive for stronger regional connectivity, trade diversification



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Tuesday underscored Pakistan's commitment to proactive economic diplomacy aimed at deepening international partnerships, diversifying trade and connectivity routes, attracting sustainable and investment-led growth, and positioning the country as a reliable, competitive, and forward-looking partner in an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving global economic landscape.

In two separate interviews with Azerbaijan's leading news agency, Report Information Agency

(REPORT), and Russia's prominent news agency, RIA Novosti, the Finance Minister outlined Pakistan's economic priorities, investment outlook, and expanding engagement with regional and global partners, underscoring the government's focus on macroeconomic stability, trade expansion, and sustainable investment-led growth.

In his interview with REPORT, the Finance Minister emphasized that Pakistan's long-standing and strong government-to-government relations with Azerbaijan are now translating into tangible economic outcomes, with trade and investment flows gaining increasing importance.

He highlighted that Azerbaijan has publicly expressed an appetite to invest close to USD 2 billion in Pakistan, with energy, oil and gas, as well as minerals and mining identified as key priority sectors for collaboration. He noted that discussions are underway on several projects, including a potential oil pipeline investment being explored by

SOCAR, describing these engagements as progressing and reflective of growing investor confidence in Pakistan.

Senator Aurangzeb further stated that any financial support or lending arrangements from Azerbaijan would be structured to facilitate trade and investment rather than aid, stressing Pakistan's preference for sustainable financing models linked to productive economic activity.

He explained that such financing could take multiple forms, including placements with the central bank or project-linked financing to support Azerbaijani investors entering Pakistan.

The Finance Minister also highlighted Pakistan's interest in learning from Azerbaijan's advances in digital services, technology-led service centres, artificial intelligence, fintech and cybersecurity, noting that Pakistan is steadily moving towards a digital economy with enhanced payment systems and digital infrastructure.

Shaza Khawaja spotlighted in GovInsider for driving Pakistan's digital reforms

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's digital transformation journey received a major international endorsement, as GovInsider featured Pakistan's Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, in its prestigious "Meet the Women in GovTech 2025" series. The GovInsider put the spotlight on the country's digital transformation and highlights a Pakistani woman at the forefront of the government's drive, said a press release issued here Tuesday. GovInsider, one of the world's most influential publications covering government innovation and public-sector technology, followed by global policymakers and technology experts, highlights only initiatives that show real impact and clear progress. Ms. Khawaja's interview marks



an important moment for Pakistan, indicating growing international attention to the country's efforts to modernise government services, expand digital access, and develop a technology-driven economy under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Digital Pakistan vision, it further said. In her interview with GovInsider, Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja explained Pakistan's approach to digital transformation. She described Pakistan's digital reform process as practical.

National gemstones policy finalized to enhance exports

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Tuesday chaired a meeting to review and finalize the National Gemstones Policy, aimed at unlocking the vast untapped potential of Pakistan's gemstones sector.

During the meeting, specialized working groups on Import-Export, Banking and Finance, and Return & Refund Policies presented their recommendations for inclusion in the policy framework, said a news release. Haroon said that, following extensive consultations with experts, the policy and quality standards have been aligned with international benchmarks.

In line with the vision of Prime Minister, the policy focuses on accelerating growth, promoting value addition, and transforming the gemstones industry into a competitive export-oriented sector.

He emphasized that there is a strong consensus that Pakistan can emerge as a leader in the global gems and jewelry market.

Highlighting existing challenges, the SAPM noted that the gemstones sector currently suffers from high wastage, limited value addition, and declining exports.

Due to unscientific extraction and processing methods, up to 50 percent wastage occurs at various stages. Despite enormous potential, gemstone exports have remained limited to \$ 5-7 million in recent years.

Haroon Akhtar underscored that, following stakeholder consultations, formalization and documentation of the entire gemstones value chain has been made a top priority of the policy.

To stimulate growth, the government will provide targeted financing, streamlined facilitation, and smart incentives for the sector.

Under the National Gemstones Policy, a new Statutory Authority will be established to act as the custodian of the policy, facilitate businesses, and ensure effective inter-agency coordination.

The policy also proposed the establishment of a National Warranty Office, along with commercial desks at airports to support gemstone exporters.

President Zardari administers oath to FTO

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, Tuesday, administered the oath of office of the Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) to Zafar ul Haq Hijazi at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

"Zafar ul Haq Hijazi is a Chartered Accountant and Fellow Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan, with more than four decades of experience in taxation, corporate and capital market regulation, audit oversight, financial management and advisory services.

He has previously served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and Chairman of the Audit and Oversight Board of Pakistan,"

President Secretariat Media Wing said in a press release. During the meeting, President Zardari underlined the importance of raising public awareness about the role of the Federal Tax Ombudsman in facilitating taxpayers.

He advised the ombudsman to make effective use of modern technology to improve the timely disposal.

UHC central to Pakistan's health, population reforms: Mustafa Kamal

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Health Syed Mustafa Kamal on Tuesday said that achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) was a cornerstone of the government's national development strategy, as Pakistan stood at a critical and challenging demographic juncture.

The Minister emphasized that policy commitments must be translated into tangible and measurable health outcomes for all Pakistanis.

He was chairing a joint meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Health and Population Council and the Universal Health Coverage Country Platform, organized by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and



Coordination with the support of the British High Commission and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The meeting aimed to harmonize national, provincial and development partner investments, with a focus on evidence-informed strategic and programmatic reforms, while ensuring coherence across health and population programmes and initiatives. The minister said the prevailing demographic situation was impacting every aspect.

Chief Minister Sohail Afridi praised Chairman Sikandar Hayat Khan for WSSC Bannu's

UMAR DIAZ

BANNU: A detailed meeting was held between WSSC Bannu Chairman Sikandar Hayat Khan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi regarding WSSC Bannu. The Chief Minister and the Chairman discussed the performance of WSSC Bannu and the required developmental funds. Chief Minister Sohail Afridi praised Chairman Sikandar Hayat Khan for WSSC Bannu's excellent performance over the past three months. He stated that all necessary resources will be utilized to truly transform Bannu into a "Bannu Gul" (a flower). The provincial government will soon



release billions of rupees in funds to WSSC Bannu for projects related to the city's beauty, cleanliness, clean water supply, and other development initiatives. A survey has also been conducted to improve Bannu City's drainage system. Chief Minister Sohail Afridi assured Chairman Sikandar Hayat Khan of providing funds and other support for Bannu.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari administering the oath of office to Mr Zafar ul Haq Hijazi as Federal Tax Ombudsman at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Tajik ambassador briefs Aleem Khan on cultural troupe's Pakistan visit

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Pakistan, Sharifzoda Yusuf Toir, on Tuesday called on Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan and briefed him on the upcoming visit of a 75-member Tajik cultural troupe to Pakistan.

During the meeting, the ambassador informed the minister that the troupe would visit Pakistan at the invitation of the Prime Minister and has been

accorded the status of state guests.

He said it is the largest Tajik cultural delegation to visit Pakistan to date.

The delegation, comprising artisans, singers, artists and dancers, will showcase Tajik culture through performances and exhibitions. Cultural stalls will be set up, and performances will be held at Lok Virsa and the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) in Islamabad, followed by events in Lahore.



Aleem Khan welcomed the delegation and underscored the strong cultural and brotherly ties between Pakistan and Tajikistan.

He said cultural exchanges play a vital role in strengthening people-to-people contacts and promoting mutual understanding

between the two countries. The minister assured full cooperation to ensure the successful conduct of all planned activities during the

visit.

The federal minister also appreciated Ambassador Sharifzoda Yusuf Toir's fluency in Urdu, terming it a reflection of his affection and attachment to Pakistan.

The Tajik cultural troupe will remain in Pakistan from December 16 to December 24.

The delegation will be led by Tajikistan's Minister of Culture and former deputy prime minister, Matlubakhon Sattoriyov.