



Pakistan, Philippines explore expanded rice trade under Prime Minister's directions



Sindh governor demands judicial inquiry into Gul Plaza incident



Economic stability achieved, focus now on sustained growth: Kayani

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Saturday 24 January 2026

Shaban 04, 1447 A.H VOI No: 06 Issue No. 01 Pages 4 Rs.20

5 killed, 10 injured in suicide blast at peace committee member's residence in KP's DI Khan

PEAK POINT
DERA ISMAIL KHAN: At least five people were killed while 10 others were injured in a suicide attack at the residence of a peace committee member near Qureshi Morr on Friday night, according to officials.

According to Dera Ismail Khan District Police Officer (DPO) Sajjad Ahmed Sahibzada, the explosion occurred during a wedding celebration at the residence of the peace committee chief, identified as Noor Alam Mehsud.

The participants were reportedly dancing to the

beat of a drum when the attack was carried out. The blast caused the room's roof to collapse, hampering rescue operations and making it difficult to reach those trapped under the debris.

"The explosion was a suicide blast," the DPO told Dawn. He said that an emergency had been imposed at the District Headquarter Hospital. In a statement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rescue 1122 spokesperson Bilal Ahmed Faizi said five bodies and 10 injured had been taken to the hospital.

He said that seven ambulances, a fire vehicle and a



disaster vehicle reached the site of the incident soon after it was reported, adding that a rescue operation was under way. Authorities cordoned off the area and launched an investigation into the inci-

dent. Initial reports said peace committee leader Waheedullah Mehsud alias Jigri Mehsud was among the dead. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi strongly condemned the blast

and sought a report from the KP inspector general of police. According to a statement, he also directed law enforcement agencies to investigate the incident and identify those responsible.

He said the responsible parties would be brought to justice. "The provincial government shares the grief of the martyrs' families. All possible assistance will be provided," he said.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi sought a report into the incident, according to a statement from his office. "All possible medical assistance should be provided to the injured in the Dera blast," he was quoted as saying, expressing grief over the incident. Earlier this month, armed assailants had killed four members of a peace committee in KP's Bannu district. In November 2025, seven people were killed when a peace committee office was attacked, also in KP's Bannu district. Police officials told Dawn that one among those killed was a 'good Talib' — a term used to refer to a former militant who has surrendered to the state — and the rest were his relatives.

Trump revokes Canada's invitation to join Board of Peace

PEAK POINT



WASHINGTON/OTTAWA: US President Donald Trump withdrew on Thursday an invitation for Canada to join his Board of Peace initiative aimed at resolving global conflicts.

Trump's aboutface follows Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he openly decried powerful nations using economic integration as weapons and tariffs as leverage.

"Please let this Letter serve to represent that the Board of Peace is withdrawing its invitation to you regarding Canada's joining, which will be, the most prestigious Board of Leaders ever assembled, at any time," Trump wrote in a Truth Social post directed at Carney.

Neither Carney's office nor the White House immediately responded to Reuters requests for comment on Thursday evening.

Last week, Carney's office said he had been invited to serve on the board and planned to accept. Carney received a rare standing ovation.

Parliament approves several bills, including unanimous resolution on Gul Plaza tragedy

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: A unanimous resolution on the Gul Plaza tragedy was passed in a joint session of Parliament with the agreement of both the government and the opposition. Meanwhile, despite strong protests from the opposition and objections raised by the President, several bills were also approved.

The joint session, chaired by Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, began 35 minutes late. During the session, several important legislative matters were discussed. Opposition members raised slogans and surrounded the speaker's dais in protest.

During the session, objections from the

President were read out regarding the Danish Schools Authority Bill and the Domestic Violence Bill. It was stated that the federal government should consult the provinces before establishing the Danish Schools Authority.

The Domestic Violence Bill was also termed ambiguous, with objections raised over the proposed punishments and calls for the bill to be reconsidered instead of being passed in its current form.

Human Rights Commission Amendment Bill passed. The National Commission for Human Rights (Amendment) Bill was presented by Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal

Chaudhry. PPP member Shazia Marri proposed an amendment, which was supported by the government.

Amendments moved by JUI were rejected, after which Parliament approved the National Commission for Human Rights (Amendment) Bill 2025.

Danish Schools Authority Bill approved amid protests

The Danish Schools Authority Bill 2025 was also presented. JUI Senator Kamran Murtaza read out the President's advice in the House, stressing the need to take provinces into confidence. He said the federation was interfering.

Nine killed as avalanche hits Chitral village

PEAK POINT

CHITRAL: At least nine people were killed when an avalanche struck the remote area of Seregal, Damil Arandu in Chitral, officials said on Friday. According to Deputy Commissioner Chitral Rao Hashim, the avalanche buried 10 members of the same family under snow and debris, resulting in multiple casualties. Rescue teams recovered the bodies of nine victims from the rubble, while one child was pulled out alive and shifted for medical care.

Tirah operation launched with consent of KP gov't: PML-N

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Opposition Leader in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Dr Ibadullah Khan has said that the Tira operation was launched with the consent and approval of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) provincial government, but the chief minister and provincial ministers are now misleading the public by opposing it. Talking to journalists at the Peshawar Press Club, on Friday Dr Ibadullah said the PTI leadership was singing a "different tune" in public despite having already endorsed the operation. He alleged that instead of opposing terrorism, the PTI government.

Death toll from Karachi's Gul Plaza inferno reaches 71; search in 'final stages'

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: The death toll of Karachi's Gul Plaza blaze crossed 70 on Friday as rescuers found more remains from the rubble of the gutted shopping centre.

Police Surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed issued an updated list of 71 deceased. The deadly inferno, which erupted on the night of January 17 at the mall and took nearly two days to be fully extinguished, has left the ground-plus-three-storey building in ruins, with some sections collapsed. As more bodies were recovered from different parts of the building, officials cautioned that the final toll can only be determined once the identification of the remains is completed. Meanwhile, officials expressed the hope to complete their search efforts



today. South Deputy Brigadier (ret'd) Wajid Sibghatullah Mahar, said rescue personnel were to continue their recovery efforts in "10 to 15 per cent" of the building's area that they had been unable to access before.

"There are some concerns that we have not been able to reach the ground floor, where the fire erupted. We hope to find bodies from there," the Rescue 1122 DG told the media. Defending Rescue

1122's efforts, Mahar asserted that the teams had modern equipment, the inferno had turned into a third-degree fire by the time rescue personnel reached the site.

The official further said that 15 to 20 people were rescued and evacuated when the blaze erupted.

"Either the fire safety system was not present in the building, or it was not activated," Mahar said. He revealed that the latest technology had been used over the past three days to aid the search process, in order to locate any individual who survived the blaze.

The Rescue 1122 DG added that based on the information so far, the fire erupted in a flower shop, from where it spread through the duct. However, he added, the police were still.

Hammad Azhar among 7 PTI leaders declared proclaimed offenders in May 9 case



PEAK POINT

LAHORE: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) has declared seven PTI leaders, including former federal minister Hammad Azhar and Zubair Khan Niazi, as proclaimed offenders in the Club Chowk GOR Gate attack case.

During the hearing, ATC Judge Manzoor Ali Gul issued perpetual arrest warrants for the absconding leaders, including Hammad Azhar, Zubair Khan Niazi, and five other accused: Akbar Khan, Masood Ahmed Subhani, Arsalan bin Basharat, Farooq Anjum, and Habib Ahmed. These warrants mean that the court has officially recognized the accused as deliberately avoiding the judicial process and has ordered their arrest without a fixed date.



SPORTS



Babar, Shaheen return to Pakistan squad for T20I series against Australia

Haris Rauf opens up on criticism, death overs



PEAK POINT

LAHORE: Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf has highlighted the crucial role of a captain in bringing out the best performance from players, saying national team members are equally hurt when Pakistan loses a match.

In a special interview, Rauf said he does not particularly favor Australian pitches but acknowledged that starting his cricket journey in Australia benefited his career. He added that understanding Australian conditions and culture played an important role in his development as a cricketer.

He credited Melbourne Stars captain Marnus Stoinis for playing a key role in shaping his Big Bash League career. Rauf said there is a clear difference between the conditions of the Big Bash League and the Pakistan Super League, describing the BBL as one of the top leagues in the world with elite players, while noting that the PSL is steadily growing and expected to attract more international stars after auctions.

Rauf also spoke about criticism faced by players, stressing that there is a clear line between criticism and disrespect, which some people tend to cross. He said he has always given 100 percent when representing Pakistan, with his primary role being to take wickets rather than contain runs.

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Senior players Babar Azam and Shaheen Shah Afridi have returned to the Pakistan team for the T20I series against Australia this month, as national selectors on Friday announced the 16-member squad.

The duo were left out of the squad for the three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka earlier this month, where all-rounder Shadab Khan made his comeback.

He will form part of a strong spin-bowling contingent along with Abrar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz and Usman Tariq, the 2022, also at Gaddafi Stadium. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said

in a statement today.

The matches will take place at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on January 29, 31 and February 1 and will begin at 4pm PKT.

Pakistan squad and player support personnel are expected to convene in Lahore on Jan 24 and will begin their preparations for the series the following day, PCB said today.

Meanwhile, Australia is set to arrive in Pakistan on January 28 and will play just their second series in the format on Pakistani soil after a solitary T20I in April 2022, also at Gaddafi Stadium.

A day earlier, Babar announced

that he would miss the remainder of the Big Bash League in Australia since he had been recalled to Pakistan for a national team camp ahead of the T20I series.

Australia announced their 17-player squad earlier this week and have rested five top players, including Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell, Josh Hazlewood, Tim David and Nathan Ellis.

16-member Pakistan squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad

Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq.

Player support personnel: Naveed Akram Cheema (team manager), Mike Hesson (head coach), Ashley Noffke (bowling coach), Shane McDermott (fielding coach), Hanif Malik (batting coach), Cliffe Deacon (physiotherapist), Grant Luden (strength and conditioning coach), Talha Ejaz (performance analyst), Syed Naeem Ahmed (media manager), Lt. Col. (r) Usman Anwari (security manager).

Pakistani cricketers fall victim to fraud, losing millions of rupees to cheats



LAHORE: Several Pakistani cricketers have fallen victim to a massive fraud, losing millions of rupees to a con artist. Eight current members of the national cricket team have been defrauded of approximately Rs880 million, while a former cricketer has

lost nearly Rs900 million. According to sources, the scam was orchestrated by a businessman who fled the country after embezzling the money. The cricketers were drawn into the investment scheme after observing the involvement of a former captain, with some players directly investing their money with the businessman. The fraudster initially paid them hefty amounts as "profit", tempting them to invest money. Later, he disappeared without notice along with the money. Attempts to reach him have been unsuccessful,

with some players receiving partial refunds. However, for the past two months, payments have ceased entirely.

The swindler, believed to be residing in the United States, had personal ties with several Pakistani cricketers. Victims have claimed that his phone is now off, and they are unable to establish any contact with him.

Despite the significant financial loss, the cricketers have not yet filed any formal complaints or approached the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) regarding the issue. However, PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has assured full cooperation with affected players.



SARGODHA: Players are participating in Mass Wrestling trials during the "Khelta Punjab Pink Games," held at the Sports Gymnasium organized by the Sports Department.



Parliamentary Secretary for Information & Broadcasting Barrister Danyal Chaudhry presides over Gordon College Annual Sports Gala in Rawalpindi.

PEC's first-ever interdepartmental table tennis tournament concludes as part of Golden Jubilee celebrations

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Engineering Council's (PEC) first-ever Interdepartmental Table Tennis Tournament 2026 concluded at the PEC Headquarters on Friday, marking a significant milestone in the Council's Golden Jubilee celebrations and highlighting PEC's growing focus on promoting sports and a healthy lifestyle among engineers. Organised under the patronage of Chairman PEC Engr. Waseem Nazir, the tournament was held from January 20 to 22 while the closing ceremony was held on January 23. Chairman PEC Engr. Waseem Nazir was the chief guest at the concluding ceremony, which was also attended by Registrar PEC Engr. Khadim Hussain Bhatti, heads of departments, senior officials and employees. Chairman Engr. Waseem Nazir, along with Registrar Engr. Khadim Hussain Bhatti, distributed

shields and cash prizes among the winners and runners-up, and certificates among all participants. In the men's category, Engr. Fahad Mustafa, Assistant Director (IT Department), clinched the title, while Engr. Mughira

Chairman also awarded certificates and prizes to match referees Engr. Ali Raza Asif and Engr. Omer, and to members of the organising team, including Engr. Haris Rasheed, Engr. Sadaf Bangash and Engr. Hassan Kamil, in



Jamal, Site Engineer (Project Management Unit), secured the runner-up position. In the women's category, Engr. Samar Naseem, Assistant Registrar (Global Linkages), emerged as winner, while Engr. Rida Nasir, Assistant Registrar (Global Linkages), finished as runner-up. The

recognition of their effective leadership and role in the successful conduct of the tournament. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman PEC Engr. Waseem Nazir said the sports tournament, organised for the first time in the Council's history as part of its Golden Jubilee celebrations.



ISLAMABAD: Mr.Musa Ahmed Naqvi, CEO of Amaon Travel International & Syed Ali Abidi, Country Manager, Fly Baghdad Airline for Pakistan are exchanging the documents of signed GSA agreement in connection with the flight operation between Pakistan & Baghdad.

PNCA to host large-scale outdoor installation exhibition 'In the Meantime'

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) is set to unveil a groundbreaking outdoor installation and sculpture exhibition titled "In the Meantime: An Installation Garden," marking a significant moment in Pakistan's contemporary art landscape.

The opening ceremony of the exhibition is scheduled for February 06 (Friday) at PNCA.

The exhibition is likely to be inaugurated by Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division



(NH&CD).

Curated by Noor Fatima, the ambitious exhibition will transform the PNCA lawns and amphitheater into an immersive landscape where art, nature, and public space converge.

Islamabad-based civil society rejects mandatory nicotine pouch standards; calls for immediate halt in the public interest

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Leading national civil society networks, child rights organizations, and public health experts have firmly rejected the government's move to introduce mandatory standards for nicotine-containing, tobacco-free oral products. They warn that this initiative risks institutionalizing nicotine addiction while undermining child protection and public health priorities. The rejection has been issued by the National Secretariat of the Child Rights Movement (CRM); Syed Ishtiaq Gilani, Chair of the National Action and

Coordination Group (NACG) Pakistan working to eradicate violence against children; the Civil Society Mechanism SAIEVAC, the apex body of SAARC; the All Pakistan NGOs Alliance (APNA); the Trans Rights Movement (TRM); and the Pakistan Climate Change Alliance (PCCA), among others. Collectively, these platforms represent a wide cross-section of Pakistan's civil society, united in opposing a policy they believe prioritizes commercial interests over the rights, health, and future of children and young people. Civil society leaders emphasized that converting a voluntary technical

standard into a mandatory framework does not constitute health protection. Rather, they argue, it normalizes the use of a highly addictive substance in a country already grappling with serious enforcement gaps and increasing youth vulnerability. The groups cautioned that framing nicotine pouches as regulated consumer products—without robust age-verification mechanisms, marketing bans, flavor restrictions, taxation, retailer licensing, and cessation support—creates conditions for expanded nicotine use rather than prevention. "From a child rights perspective, this move is

deeply concerning," said Mehwish Kayani, National Coordinator of the Child Rights Movement (CRM). "The state has a constitutional and moral obligation to protect children from addictive substances. Any policy that legitimizes nicotine products in the market undermines this duty and must be withdrawn." Public health experts echoed these concerns, noting that technical standards focused on ingredients and labeling cannot replace comprehensive public health regulation. "Nicotine is not a neutral commodity; it is addictive and harmful, particularly for adolescents," said Ms.

Sehrosh Mustajab, Public Health Expert. "Without strong population-level safeguards, making such standards mandatory risks increasing initiation and dependence, especially among youth." Tobacco and nicotine control advocates further warned that the current policy direction reflects a shift from demand reduction to market management, potentially reversing hard-won gains in tobacco control. "Pakistan should be advancing toward a nicotine-free future, not formalizing new nicotine markets," stated Qamar Naseem of the National Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco &

Nicotine Control. "Public health must take precedence over profit, exports, or industry pressure." Public interest groups have issued a clear call to action, urging the federal government to immediately halt and reverse all steps toward making nicotine pouch standards mandatory. They further demand that health policy be fully insulated from industry influence and that any future consideration of nicotine products be led by independent public health authorities, grounded in child rights, prevention, and evidence-based health policy.

Opinion & Editorial



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Impoverishing expenditures

ZAFAR MIRZA
Dr Miftah Ismail and I co-wrote a column in these pages on Jan 9 explaining how people in Pakistan are "eating less" today than in 2018-19, despite spending more on food.

The piece created considerable ripples. Dr Faisal Bari, a senior economist, subsequently wrote about the "difficult times" people are enduring and referred to our analysis. Other economists have echoed similar concerns in recent weeks. Khurram Hussain wrote about the "end of stability" on Jan 15, while Akbar Zaidi stated plainly on Dec 19, 2025 that the economy is "in decline." Fahd Husain captured the public mood succinctly when he wrote "V for victory and H for hunger", again referring to our findings.

The concerns about the economy are reinforced by the recent press conference of S.M. Tanveer, a senior leader of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and a prominent industrialist. He revealed that 140 to 150 textile mills have permanently shut down, while several other major companies are "on a ventilator" due to the mind-bogglingly high cost of doing business in Pakistan.

This, he warned, is resulting in rising unemployment and the collapse of the manufacturing sector, and he aptly described the current so-called stability as stagnation.

Who, then, would invest in Pakistan in such an environment?

Unsurprisingly, earlier this week the State Bank of Pakistan reported a sharp 43 per cent decline in foreign direct investment during the first six months of the current fiscal year (FY26), compared to the same period in FY25. The bottom line of all these deeply troubling voices is clear: regardless of official claims, the economy is hitting ordinary people extremely hard. Daily life has become a struggle for millions. What is being presented as economic stability increasingly resembles economic strangulation for poor and near-poor households.

Catastrophic health expenditure has been rising steadily.

After reading Dr Faisal Bari's article, I found myself reflecting on the story of Iqbal, a driver, and his economic misery. Earning Rs65,000 per month — including tips and overtime — he once managed to get by. However, inflation and rising utility bills have made it nearly impossible to make ends meet. He first stopped eating lunch to save money. Then, the recent diagnosis of a liver ailment in his wife, who already suffers from diabetes and hypertension, pushed the family into a debt trap. It is unclear whether, or how, he will ever escape it.

In health economics, this situation is described as catastrophic health expenditure,

which for blue-collar workers can quickly turn into impoverishing health expenditure.

Financial hardship due to out-of-pocket (OOP) health spending occurs when direct payments at the point of care reduce a household's ability to meet basic needs. The World Health Organisation defines catastrophic health expenditure as OOP health spending that exceeds 10pc of a household's total budget, although higher thresholds are also used. Impoverishing OOP spending refers to health expenses that exceed a household's discretionary budget or leave it with no discretionary income once health payments are made. Those affected fall into two groups: households pushed further into poverty and those newly driven below the poverty line.

In Pakistan, OOP health expenditures remain alarmingly high, accounting for about 47pc of total health spending. According to the Household Integrated Economic Survey, the average household spends 3.34pc of its income on healthcare. More worryingly, catastrophic health expenditure has been rising steadily.

The proportion of the population spending more than 10pc of household income on expenditure on health increased from 3pc in 2010 to 4.5pc in 2018-19 and 5.4pc in 2021-22. Given the current inflationary pressures, the latest figures are likely to be even higher.

Courtesy The News

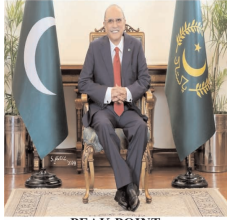
The colours of the self: a quest for inner truth

SADIA PASHA KAMRAN

Congratulations! You have successfully added another 'red flag' — ruby pink to be precise — to the already awkward aura and an archetypal contentious personality of a desi middle-class artist. Frankly, what's with dyeing the cap pink? Not that I have any objections to it. Guess, gone are the days of Red, Green and Black caps. If you feel like pink, Pink it is. Let's catch up on that later. For now, felicitations are also due for the solo presentation at the prestigious Kunsthalle Krems Museum, Austria (22.11.25 — 06.04.26). The works here are a mix of activism, introspection and a touch of the unconventional, raw emotion, mysticism and social critique, with that whole "don't mess with me" aura — the beard, the knuckles with studded rings and an open-buttoned shirt exposing tawiz, bravery or virility. I can pretty much contextualise the entire show within your usual quest of identity, spirituality and an effort to make sense of all the ambiguity and obscurity — the real, the surreal and its many forms of manifestation. I am also enjoying the duality of the title 'Between the Two Worlds' connoted as a 'Third Space' — a site of cultural hybridity, as described by the curator. Allow me to add to its more popular implication of post-colonial identity, third space, neither fully part of this physical world nor fully part of the afterlife, can be a liminal realm, a spiritual in-between where souls exist before entering the physical body. What is this quest? The wise would say, everything you seek is inside you. The philosopher-poet of the East, Iqbal, suggested, Apne mann mein doob kar pa ja suragh-e-zindagi, i.e. if you seek awareness, consciousness, or God, the ultimate reality, you look inward. This is what you do: try out all the colours in your closet until you find one that best matches your perception of Him and yourself and this world. After all, each colour is His — He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden, and He knows everything.

Courtesy Dawn

President for reaffirming education as national priority, empowering youth



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has urged all stakeholders to reaffirm education as a national priority and to empower the youth as partners in building a skilled, enlightened and resilient Pakistan.

"Pakistan's future is closely linked with its youth. As a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a large young population, we must ensure that education nurtures curiosity, competence and character. It should enable young people to think critical-

ly, act ethically and contribute positively to their communities," the president said in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Education.

Extending his sincere greetings to the students, teachers, parents, scholars and all those engaged in the pursuit of education and learning, the president said this year's theme, "The Power of Youth in Co-Creating Education," highlights the importance of recognising young people not only as learners, but as thinkers, innovators and responsible citizens whose ideas strengthen educational systems and democratic societies.

The constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education under Article 25-A reflects our shared commitment to this fundamental right, he said adding that in a rapidly changing and interconnected world, education must combine academic excellence with practical skills, digital literacy, ethical values and respect for diversity.

He said efforts to strengthen higher education, promote research and innovation and expand digital learning reflect this evolving vision.

Measures such as expanded access to higher education, merit-based student support, improved access to technology are helping young people engage meaningfully with the knowledge economy, he added. President Zardari emphasized that technical and vocational education and training play a vital role in equipping youth with employable skills and affirming the dignity of labour. National skills development initiatives are preparing young people for emerging technologies while aligning training with international standards, opening pathways for employment, entrepreneurship and global engagement. "Inclusive approaches that extend opportunities to women, madrasa students and youth from underserved regions promote social cohesion and ensure that progress is shared more equitably," he said.

Pakistan, Philippines explore expanded rice trade under Prime Minister's directions



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan held an important meeting with Dr. Emmanuel R. Fernandez, Ambassador of the Philippines to Pakistan, on the special directions of Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, with a focus on enhancing Pakistan's rice exports to the Philippine market. During the meeting, the Commerce Minister conveyed the Prime Minister's keen interest in identifying priority markets for Pakistan's rice exports and formally requested the Philippine leadership to consider additional procurement from Pakistan, said a release issued here on Friday. He highlighted that Pakistan is currently on a strong

agricultural output trajectory, with ample surplus rice stocks available for export, while maintaining consistent quality standards. Jam Kamal Khan noted that global market dynamics have evolved with the re-entry of major suppliers, intensifying price competition. To address this, the Government of Pakistan has developed a mechanism to ensure benchmark price competitiveness, including financial bridging where required, so that Pakistani rice remains competitive while assuring buyers of quality and quantity. He emphasized that if Pakistan is able to closely match prevailing market prices, there is strong scope for expanding bilateral rice trade through institutional engagement between relevant authorities of both countries. The Commerce Minister further informed the Ambassador that, on the Prime Minister's instructions, Pakistan has identified the Philippines as one of the key partner countries for rice exports. He stressed that timely coordination between both sides would help materialize mutually beneficial arrangements, particularly in view of upcoming procurement tenders in the Philippines.



Askari Bank's PDA branch Peshawar was inaugurated, Chief guest Mr Shah Fahad, DG Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) inaugurating the branch alongwith Mr Raja waheed zaman, Regional General Manager North.

'Diplomatic win': Ahsan Iqbal defends govt's decision to join Trump-led Board of Peace

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal defended on Friday the government's decision to join US President Donald Trump-led Board of Peace, saying that Pakistan being at the "centre stage" along with its brother Muslim countries to contribute towards peace in Gaza and Palestine was a "diplomatic win".

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was among the leaders and senior officials of 19 countries, including Pakistan, who gathered in Davos on Thursday and put their names

to the founding charter of the Board of Peace — a move that has been denounced by the opposition. Trump had originally proposed establishing the board when he announced his plan last September to end the onslaught in Gaza. It was originally meant to oversee peace in Gaza after Israel's two-year onslaught on the Palestinian enclave, but the board's charter envisions a wider role in resolving international conflicts.

The matter was debated in a joint session of Parliament today, which was



summoned by President Asif Ali Zardari a day earlier, and was presided over by National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq.

Arguing in defence of the government's decision to join

the board during the session, Iqbal said this "diplomatic win" should be celebrated. He began his speech by recalling nuclear tests by Pakistan in 1998. "We set an example of Pakistan's liberty

and sovereignty when the then-US president called five times [...] Pakistan was being pressurised from the world, but we took the decision [to conduct the tests] with courage," he said.

Amid noisy protest from the opposition benches, he asserted, "We don't need to be taught about Pakistan's defence and integrity. We are the defenders of Pakistan's freedom and sovereignty."

He went on to emphatically state that with the PML-N in power, "there can be no danger to Pakistan's integrity and sovereignty."

Iqbal said the government and armed forces had proved during a four-day conflict with India in May that anyone intending to harm the country would get a befitting reply. "So nobody can taunt that we are cowards and negligent."

The minister said it was very easy to deliver speeches on Palestine in the House, adding that "our hearts have been wounded by the cruelty" that had been witnessed in the Palestinian enclave.

"But Muslim countries took a collective initiative to end that bloodshed.

Pakistan, Somalia agree to boost security, border management and counterterrorism cooperation

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Monday met a high-level Somali delegation led by Somalia's Interior Minister Ali Yusuf at the Ministry of Interior on Friday.

Minister Naqvi welcomed his Somali counterpart upon his arrival. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations and avenues for enhanced cooperation between Pakistan and Somalia. The two interior ministers agreed to strengthen collaboration in training, border management, and disaster management, while also adopting a joint strategy against terrorism and extremism. They further decided to deepen cooperation in internal security, counterterrorism, and overall security coordination.

Both ministers stressed the need for improved coordination



to advance shared interests in various sectors. Somalia's Interior Minister expressed a strong desire to benefit from Pakistan's experience, noting that Minister Mohsin Naqvi's initiatives for Islamabad's infrastructure development were "commendable."

Minister Naqvi assured his counterpart of Pakistan's full support to Somalia in policing and counterterrorism. He added that Pakistan would extend complete cooperation to Somalia across multiple sectors, including counterterrorism. He also announced visa facilitation for Somali.

Economic stability achieved, focus now on sustained growth: Kayani

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Finance and Revenue Bilal Azhar Kayani on Friday informed the Senate that the government had successfully steered the country away from default, restored economic stability, and was now focused on achieving sustainable growth and creating jobs.

Responding to a calling attention notice moved by Senator Ali Zafar, the minister strongly criticised the economic policies pursued between 2018 and 2022, saying repeated policy failures during that period had pushed millions of Pakistanis below the poverty line and brought the country to the brink of default. He said the past PTI-government changed four finance ministers,



while an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme was initially rejected, later accepted on weak terms, and eventually sabotaged for political reasons. Bilal Azhar Kayani alleged that when the PTI-led government realised it was losing power, it deliberately undermined the IMF agreement despite being aware that such actions could push the country towards default. The minister said the present government, after assuming office took difficult but necessary decisions to revive.

PML-N govt believes in giving opportunities to youngsters on basis of merit: Rana Mashhood

PEAK POINT

LAHORE: Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan has said that PML-N government believes in giving opportunities to youngsters purely on merit.

He said this while addressing Prime Minister's Youth Laptop distribution ceremony at Lahore College Women University (LCWU) on Friday.

He said that in 1997, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif as Punjab CM eliminated 'boti mafia' cheating culture and always emphasized on promoting merit. He said that credit goes to PML-N government for introduc-



ing country's first youth policy understanding that the country's progress was linked with promotion of education. He said, "After laptop initiative, the Punjab Education Endowment Fund has been started which is benefiting millions of deserving students in pursuing their education."

He further said that there were millions of students who after completing,