

**Effective governance rooted in strong Parliament, says Speaker**



**Pakistan turns from default risk to global case study, targets \$1tr economy by 2035: Ahsan**



**Pakistan yet to deploy AI agents; inclusive tech policy needed amid climate risks: Musadik Malik**

Founded By: (Late) Rehmat Khan      ABC CERTIFIED      Email: editor.peakpoint@gmail.com      Executive Group Editor Arif Mehmood Khan  
 Website: www.peakpoint.pk

**PEAK POINT ISLAMABAD**

Friday 27 February 2026      Ramazan 09, 1447 A.H      VOI No: 06      Issue No. 30      Pages 4 Rs. 20

## Pakistan giving 'effective' response to fresh 'unprovoked fire' by Afghan Taliban

**PEAK POINT**

RAWALPINDI: Security forces have given "an immediate and effective response" to "unprovoked action" from Afghan Taliban along the Pak-Afghan border on Thursday.

Security forces delivered what official sources described as a "strong and effective response" to what they termed unprovoked aggression by the Afghan Taliban regime along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, killing at least 22 Afghan Taliban personnel, destroying several hideouts and shooting down quadcopters allegedly used in the attack.

According to security sources, Afghan Taliban forces attempted to target Pakistani security check posts using quadcopters, but

the attempt was foiled. Pakistani forces responded in a timely manner and shot down all the quadcopters, the sources said.

Security officials stated that retaliatory fire continued with both small and heavy weapons. They further claimed that Afghan Taliban positions were being selectively targeted through aerial drones.

Confirmed reports indicate that 22 Afghan Taliban personnel were killed during the exchange of fire, security sources said.

Describing the Afghan action as unprovoked aggression, the sources said Pakistani forces were responding with full force. They claimed that several Taliban hideouts were destroyed in the retaliatory action and that militants fled their positions.



**MANSEHRA:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits the residence of Lt. Col. Shehzada Gull Faraz Shaheed and offers condolences to his family.

## Nothing matters to PTI except Imran Khan, says Khawaja Asif

**PEAK POINT**



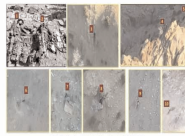
ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying that for the party, nothing matters except its founder Imran Khan.

In a post on social media platform X, Asif claimed that the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is focused on forming a "release force" for the PTI founder but remains silent against terrorists and avoids attending the funerals of martyrs.

He said that police personnel are being martyred daily and some have even been burned alive, yet the PTI founder remains the party's first and last priority, while everything else is considered insignificant.

The defence minister further alleged that the provincial leadership is more concerned about saving its chief minister's position, while neglecting provincial matters and national security. He questioned the internal unity of PTI, claiming the party has splintered into several factions. Asif added that despite internal differences and public criticism among party members, all PTI groups are united on one point.

## Security forces kill 10 terrorists in Balochistan's Zhob: ISPR



**PEAK POINT**

RAWALPINDI: The military's media affairs wing said on Thursday that 10 terrorists were killed by security forces during an operation in Balochistan's Zhob. In a statement, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that after an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Zhob on February 24, in which eight Indian-sponsored terrorists were killed, security forces conducted a comprehensive sanitisation operation on "Wednesday to hunt down "hiding khwarji" belonging to Indian proxy Fitna al Khwarji. Fitna al Khwarji is a term that the state has

designated for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan.

"During the conduct of the operation, own forces tracked down Khwarji on multiple routes and effectively engaged their locations. After an ensuing fire exchange, ten Indian-sponsored khwarji were sent to hell," the statement said. It added that weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the terrorists, who were actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. "Sanitisation operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian-sponsored terrorist found in the area," it said. The statement added that the security forces and law enforcement agencies would continue to act against terrorism at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

## PM visits residence of Shaheed Lt Col Shahzada Gul Faraz to offer condolences

**PEAK POINT**

MANSEHRA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the residence of Lt Col Shahzada Gul Faraz Shaheed in Mansehra, who was martyred while leading an operation against Fitna al Khwarji terrorists, to offer condolences to his family.

The prime minister met the mother, wife, and children of the martyred Lt Col Gul Faraz and prayed for strength and patience for them to bear the loss.

He also visited the grave of the martyred officer, offered Fataha, and prayed for the elevation of his ranks in Jannah.

"Lt Col Shahzada Gul Faraz Shaheed sacrificed his life while safeguarding the country," the prime minister

said, adding that Shaheed Gul Faraz set an example of bravery and courage.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif offering fataha at the grave of Lt. Col. Shehzada Gull Faraz Shaheed, Mansehra, 26 February 2026.

He said the entire nation, including himself, was proud of the martyrs and their families, adding that Pakistan could never forget their sacrifices.

The prime minister assured the bereaved family of the government's and the Pakistan Army's full support. On the occasion, he also announced the establishment of a Daamish School in Mansehra in the name of Lt Col Shahzada Gul Faraz.

Federal Ministers Attaullah Tarar, Engineer Amir Muqam

## IHC fixes March 11 hearing on Imran, Bushra sentence suspension pleas

**PEAK POINT**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday scheduled for hearing the petitions seeking suspension of former prime minister Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi's sentences in the £190 million corruption case. During proceedings, a division bench comprising Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Azam Khan expressed displeasure when dozens of lawyers affiliated with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) stood up and approached the rostrum at the same time.

## Pakistan slams India over terrorism allegations, condemns Israel's West Bank move

**PEAK POINT**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday accused India of involvement in terrorism inside its territory and alleged that New Delhi is engaged in anti-Pakistan propaganda, while also warning that recent Israeli actions pose a threat to regional peace. At a weekly media briefing, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited Doha at the invitation of the Emir of Qatar.

During the visit, both sides agreed to enhance cooperation across all areas of mutual interest, including discussions on Afghanistan and defense collaboration.

The spokesperson added that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has

departed for Saudi Arabia to present Pakistan's position at an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).



He reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of Israel's move to convert parts of the West Bank into state land, calling the step unacceptable and a violation of international law. Marking the 19th anniversary of the Samjhauta Express attack, in which

more than 70 people lost their lives, Andrabi con-

demned what he described as the Indian government's "callousness" and the release of four convicted individuals. He demanded that all those involved be brought to justice.

Addressing concerns about Afghanistan, the spokesperson stressed that Pakistan's actions are directed against terrorists, not the Afghan people. He said that document-

ed evidence of terrorism has been presented to the United Nations Security Council.

While welcoming Qatar's efforts to facilitate reconciliation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he termed threatening statements from Kabul as regrettable. Pakistan's armed forces and law enforcement agencies, he said, are fully prepared to respond to any such threats.

The spokesperson added that Pakistan is aware of defense cooperation between India and Israel and remains prepared for any threats to peace.

Referring to protests in Israel during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he remarked that it is "encouraging to see that some conscientious voices still exist there."

## TTAP decides to give 'positive response' to any offer of talks by the government

**PEAK POINT**



ISLAMABAD: Opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) decided on Thursday to respond positively to any offers for dialogue by the government. The decision was taken as prominent members of the alliance met at an Iftar gathering at the residence of TTAP leader Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar in Islamabad, and later held a meeting over the prevailing situation in the country. The gathering was attended by National Assembly Opposition Leader Mehmood Khan Achakzai, Senate Opposition Leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser.



# SPORTS



## India hammer Zimbabwe by 72 runs after posting highest total of T20 World Cup 2026



**PEAK POINT**  
CHENNAI: India produced a commanding all-round display to defeat Zimbabwe by 72 runs after posting the highest total of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 in their crucial Super Eight clash at the MA Chidambaram Stadium on Thursday.

After being invited to bat first, India piled up a formidable 256 for 4 in 20 overs, the biggest total of the tournament so far. Zimbabwe, in reply, managed 184 for 6 despite a valiant effort from Brian Bennett.

The victory marked India's first win in the Super Eight stage,

keeping their semi-final hopes alive, while the result confirmed Zimbabwe's exit and also sealed South Africa's progression to the knockouts.

India's aggressive intent was clear from the outset as Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma raced to a 48-run opening stand. Samson struck 24 off 15 balls before Blessing Muzarabani provided the breakthrough in the fourth over.

Abhishek Sharma then anchored the innings with a fluent 55 off 30 deliveries, smashing

four fours and four sixes. He added 72 runs for the second

wicket with Ishan Kishan, who contributed a brisk 38 from 24 balls. After Kishan's dismissal by Sikandar Raza, Abhishek shared another useful 30-run stand with captain Suryakumar Yadav. The skipper later chipped in with a rapid 33 off just 13 balls.

The late surge came through Hardik Pandya and Tilak Varma, who stitched an unbeaten 86-run partnership to lift India to the tournament's highest score. Pandya blasted 50 not out off 23 balls, while Varma struck an explosive 44 not out from only 16 deliveries.

For Zimbabwe, Richard Ngarava, Tinotenda Maposa, Muzarabani and Raza claimed one wicket each but struggled to contain the scoring rate. Facing a daunting 257-run target, Zimbabwe made a cautious start. Openers Brian Bennett and Tadiwanashe Marumani added 44 runs before Axar Patel dismissed Marumani for 20.

Dion Myers fell cheaply for six as the required rate climbed sharply. Captain Sikandar Raza attempted to revive the chase with a fighting 31 off 21 balls, including two fours and two sixes, but his dismissal in the 17th over left Zimbabwe on 144.

## New PHF chief selector Samiullah eyes top 10

**PEAK POINT**

LAHORE: Former legendary player Samiullah Khan was appointed as the chief selector of the national team in a major decision taken by the ad-hoc regime of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) on Wednesday.



Samiullah, known as Flying Horse for his extraordinary speed on the field, was made the head of team selection on the recommendation of the recently-formed PHF Professional Development Committee comprising Hasan Sardar and Islahuddin Siddiqui, the PHF said in a press release.

"This appointment is part of PHF's broader strategy to revitalise hockey in Pakistan, focusing on grassroots development, high-performance training, and international competitiveness," read the release.

"The PHF has outlined a comprehensive Hockey Roadmap, which includes establishing a new team structure with a selection committee, head coach, and support staff, creating a calendar of events for domestic and international competitions, technical education for coaches, umpires, and officials; talent hunt drives to identify and develop young players."

The release added: "The PHF is also working to promote hockey at schools and colleges, revive inter-school and inter-collegiate competitions, and establish a high-performance centre to support the growth of the sport."

Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, who was made the ad-hoc PHF chief after the federation president Tariq Hussain Bugti resigned recently, hoped Samiullah's appointment would benefit Pakistan hockey significantly.

## History made as T20 World Cup sets new record with four centuries



**PEAK POINT**  
COLOMBO: A new record for the most centuries in a single edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup has been set during the 2026 tournament.

According to details, the ongoing event—co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka—has already witnessed four centuries, the

highest ever in a single edition of the tournament. Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka struck a century against Australia, while Canada's Yuvraj

Samra reached three figures against New Zealand earlier in the competition.

The record for most centuries in one

edition was initially equalled when Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan smashed a ton against Namibia, making it three centuries in the 2026 tournament—surpassing all previous editions.

The tally rose to four in the Super Eight stage when England captain Harry Brook scored a brilliant century against Pakistan. Notably, the 2024 edition did not see a single century. With several matches still to be played, the 2026 tournament could further extend the record, underlining an increasingly aggressive and high-scoring era in T20 cricket.

In 2021, only one century was scored, while the 2022 tournament witnessed two. In 2024, the 2024 edition did not see a single century. With several matches still to be played, the 2026 tournament could further extend the record, underlining an increasingly aggressive and high-scoring era in T20 cricket.

The inaugural tournament in 2007

## Master Paints/Diamond Paints win 6th Jinnah Gold Polo Cup opener



## Asian teams faces historic exit from T20 World Cup 2026 before semi-final stage

**PEAK POINT**

ISLAMABAD: Cricket teams from Asia are likely suffer early elimination from the ICC T20 World Cup 2026 for the first time in history before the semi-final round.

Hosted by India and Sri Lanka, the tournament features six teams from the South Asian region, including the host nations, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Nepal.

However, the tournament has seen a dramatic series of events, Bangladesh was controversially excluded from the World Cup before the tournament began, and Nepal, a weaker side, was eliminated in the initial phase as expected. Afghanistan, once a rising force in T20 cricket, also failed to progress beyond the group stage.

In a shocking turn of events, Sri Lanka, the co-host, was knocked out after

losing two matches in the Super Eight stage, with a recent defeat to New Zealand marking the end of their tournament. Now, only the former world champions, Pakistan, and the defending champions, India, remain as

margin to secure a spot in the semi-finals. However, if New Zealand wins, Pakistan's campaign will come to an end.

On the other hand, India, Pakistan, and the defending champions, India, remain as



the last hopes for an Asian team to make it to the semi-finals. But both teams face significant hurdles. Pakistan's hopes were dented after England's resounding victory over New Zealand. If England beats New Zealand again, Pakistan will have to defeat Sri Lanka by a large

Super Eight match, faces the daunting task of improving their net run rate. If they hope to make it to the semi-finals, they will need to win their next two matches by substantial margins. But India faces a tough challenge from Zimbabwe and West Indies.

## T20 World Cup: Markram's unbeaten 82 powers South Africa to 9-wicket win over West Indies



**PEAK POINT**  
AHMEDABAD: South Africa secured their second consecutive victory in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 Super Eight stage, defeating West Indies by nine wickets in a commanding fashion at the Narendra Modi

Stadium on Thursday. Chasing a target of 177, the Proteas completed the job in just 16.1 overs, losing only one wicket in a clinical run chase led by captain Aiden Markram. His unbeaten knock ensured South Africa maintained full control

after an explosive start from the openers. Quinton de Kock and Markram set the tone early, finding the boundary regularly and putting together a brisk opening stand. De Kock narrowly missed a half-century, wrapped up the chase scoring 47 off 24 balls with four fours and four sixes before Roston Chase claimed the only wicket to fall. Markram remained in complete command, registering his 14th T20 fifty and anchoring the chase with sixes. Earlier, West Indies had posted 176 for eight after being

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# ICT-PEIRA launches comprehensive enrollment data drive to support zero out-of-school children mission

**PEAK POINT**  
ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (ICT-PEIRA) has initiated a comprehensive enrollment data collection and regularization drive aimed at ensuring accurate student records across all private educational institutions in ICT. A meeting chaired by Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah, Chairman ICT-PEIRA, was held to discuss collaborative measures with representatives of private schools, FDE, FBISE, and ICT-PEIRA officials.

The focus of the meeting was not punitive action, but partnership, facilitation, and data accuracy to strengthen educational planning in the Capital Territory. Dr. Mallah emphasized that maintaining verified and authentic enrollment data is essential to determine the exact number of children currently studying in schools. This initiative will enable the government to accurately identify the number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in each Union Council of ICT and formulate targeted strategies to achieve the Federal



Minister for Education's vision of Zero Out-of-School Children in Islamabad. "We are not here to create difficulties for schools. We are here to work together," said Dr.

Mallah. "Accurate data will help us identify gaps, support underserved areas, and ensure that every child in ICT is enrolled in school. We will review data Union Council

by Union Council to leave no child behind." In response to requests from representatives of private educational institutions, ICT-PEIRA has announced a one-time amnesty from 1st March to 30th April 2026 for schools with pending renewal cases. During this facilitation period, institutions may submit applications for registration or renewal without penalty for late submission. The Authority encouraged all school representatives to assist in providing updated lists of institutions operating within their respective areas

to ensure that every institution becomes part of the regulatory and support framework. Dr. Mallah reiterated that the objective of this exercise is to promote transparency, strengthen planning, improve educational access, and uplift the overall quality of education in Islamabad Capital Territory. ICT-PEIRA remains committed to working closely with all stakeholders to ensure that no child in ICT remains out of school and that Islamabad becomes a model district for educational inclusion in Pakistan.

# Unregistered Pilgrim operators and airfare delays trigger strong reaction in Parliament

**NADEEM TANOLI**  
ISLAMABAD: Serious procedural lapses in Hajj mission selections, lack of transparency in pilgrim group operators, and unanswered requests for airfare relief dominated a tense meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Religious Affairs. Lawmakers raised concerns over exclusionary criteria, weak oversight, and delays in facilitation measures for Zaireen, demanding urgent reforms and greater accountability. The most alarming issue raised during the session was the alleged procedu-

ral weakness in the selection of Moavineen and members of the Hajj Medical Mission. The Committee observed that the existing selection framework contains significant gaps that may be unfairly excluding capable and deserving candidates. Lawmakers warned that the current system risks undermining merit and transparency, especially if age restrictions continue to operate as a disqualifying factor. The Committee stressed that merit must remain supreme and recommended a comprehensive overhaul of the selection mechanism, including a review of the NTS oper-

ating system. The Committee also expressed serious concern over the presence of unregistered Zaireen Group Organizers operating without clear oversight. Members demanded a full list of all registered ZGOs along with the names of their heads to ensure accountability and prevent exploitation of pilgrims. The Ministry was directed to submit comprehensive details in the next meeting, signaling tighter scrutiny of pilgrimage management operations. Another pressing issue was the lack of progress on reducing airfare costs for pilgrims. The Secretary informed the

Committee that a formal proposal seeking reduction in PIA airfare for Zaireen had been sent to the Ministry of Defence, but no response has been received so far. The delay raised eyebrows among lawmakers, who viewed the silence as a serious concern given the financial burden faced by pilgrims. Regarding facilitation offices for Zaireen in Baghdad and Karbala-e-Mualla, the Ministry clarified that its role remains regulatory and limited to monitoring Zaireen Group Organizers under existing agreements. It stated that the Ministry does not design or offer Ziarat pack-

ages. While the matter of establishing facilitation offices has been formally taken up with relevant authorities, operationalization remains dependent on approval from host countries. The Committee further resolved to recommend a formal communication to the Prime Minister's Office seeking an increase in the Minority Welfare Fund. Lawmakers argued that the current allocation is insufficient to address the needs of minority communities. They emphasized that strengthening the Fund is critical for promoting inclusivity, social equity, and meaningful par-

ticipation of minorities in religious and cultural spheres. During the session, the Committee also confirmed the minutes of its previous meeting and reviewed the implementation status of earlier recommendations. Several agenda items were deferred for future deliberation. The meeting, chaired by Ms. Shagufta Jumanji, was attended by multiple members of the National Assembly along with senior officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter Faith Harmony.

# Opinion & Editorial

Arif Mehmoed Khan  
Group Editor: 0333-5366814  
Samra Athar Kakakhel  
Resident Editor  
Nadim Tanoli  
Joint Editor: Mob-0301-777874  
Email: editor.peakpoint@gmail.com  
www.peakpoint.pk

## Closure of Ghulam Khan border is detrimental to economy

BY ABDUS SALAM BAITAB



The closure of the Ghulam Khan border is not only causing losses to local traders, but it is also having adverse effects on Pakistan's economy. Due to the closure of this border, Pakistan is being deprived of billions of rupees in foreign exchange annually. The suspension of the route has caused serious concern among traders across the country, especially in Bannu and the southern districts. On one hand, their businesses have come to a halt; on the other hand, billions of rupees remain stuck in Afghanistan for this rea-

son, the Chamber of Commerce has been demanding at every forum that the route be reopened. These remarks were made by the General Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, Ghulam Qibaz Khan. According to a survey of the medicine market in Bannu, the largest market for Pakistani medicines was Afghanistan, especially the province bordering Pakistan. There, a single pharmaceutical company used to generate more than two billion rupees in business in just one week. However, due to the closure of the route, this trade has come to a complete halt. Billions of rupees have also been stuck, and their payment will only be possible once the road is reopened. In trade, the rule is that the easiest and shortest routes are chosen. Along with this, those routes are explored on which the least amount of time is

required for transportation. Keeping this principle in mind, if we assess the importance of the Ghulam route, we can determine its significance from the fact that it is the nearest route for access from Gwadar Port to Afghanistan and then to Central Asia. It takes seven to eight days to reach the Torkham border from Gwadar, whereas it takes only three days to reach Afghanistan's Khost province from Gwadar Port. This proves that this route is extremely close and highly efficient. On one hand, this reduces the transportation cost for traders, and on the other hand, the goods are delivered on time. If the goods are of such a nature that they spoil within three or four days, traders are also protected from that loss. Due to the current situation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, traders are the most concerned. They want this issue to be

resolved through negotiations in some way, and they seek a permanent solution to the problem. Besides traders, transporters are also being significantly affected by this route, because through this route, 1,500 to 2,000 vehicles used to pass daily. Due to the closure of the route, these vehicles are now left idle at the depots. The whole world knows and this is fact that Pakistan and Afghanistan are brotherly Islamic countries. Their people share close ties and relationships with one another. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan honorably hosted one of the largest refugee populations in the world. A whole generation of Afghans was born here, grew up here, and received their education here. Similarly, people from Pakistan used to go to Afghanistan and conduct business as if they were operating in their

own country. Therefore, this is the voice of the day and the demands of time and circumstances require that, keeping in mind the concerns of the public, traders, doctors, and people from other walks of life, the governments of both countries should play their role in bringing the two nations closer together. This would result in the reopening of transit routes, the revival of trade not only between the two countries but also with Central Asia, and enable Pakistani traders to once again earn foreign exchange for the country, thereby strengthening the national economy. The Bannu Chamber of Commerce has also demanded from the government that the route be opened immediately so that they can start trade activities from Central Asia through this nearby route, which will bring a new wave of development to the region.

## Terrorists' reach

At least nine police personnel were martyred in separate terrorist attacks on Tuesday, bringing into focus both the high price law enforcers are paying in the battle against terrorism and the geographical reach of violent elements. Six of them were martyred in a terrorist attack in Kohat, while a suicide bombing in Punjab's Bhakkar district claimed two lives. Separately, a constable was fatally shot in Wana. While KP and Balochistan have recorded the highest number of casualties in the ongoing wave of terrorism, Punjab has remained largely immune. However, those Punjab districts bordering KP, such as Mianwali, have experienced some terrorist activity. In the latest phase of the terrorist insurgency, security forces — including military personnel, paramilitary men and police officers — have suffered a high rate of casualties. The incidents on Tuesday underscore that policemen are also on the front lines in the battle against terrorist violence. Whether it is military or police personnel, the state must ensure advanced equipment and training in modern counterinsurgency and counterterrorism tactics for them. Far too many of them have fallen in the line of duty, and their sacrifices should not be in vain. While Punjab has remained largely immune to terrorist violence in the last couple of years.

**Khurram Abbas**  
CRITICAL minerals, especially lithium, copper, cobalt, nickel and rare earths, are the oil of the 21st century. The demand for minerals has been exploding due to their consumption in semiconductor manufacturing, electric vehicles, batteries, renewable energy

## Minerals diplomacy

and advanced weapons systems. This has transformed minerals from an economic commodity into a strategic geopolitical asset. Mineral diplomacy has been increasingly replacing oil diplomacy. States are eagerly signing mineral agreements, investing in mining abroad and creating strategic

reserves. Governments are also using minerals as a 'tool' to mend ties with the Trump administration. For instance, notwithstanding America's looming war threat, Iran has offered a broader set of cooperative deals, potentially involving energy and mining. The global hunt for

minerals has renewed South Asia's significance, particularly India and Pakistan. New Delhi's minerals strategy is largely different from Islamabad's minerals diplomacy. India is replicating Beijing's model of acquiring overseas mining projects and introducing the Rare Earth Corridor strategy to

become a manufacturing power independent of China. Islamabad is trying to position itself as a 'mineral state' and has shown willingness to work with the US and the Western bloc to create an alternative supply chain. There are several factors behind Islamabad's eagerness. Courtesy Dawn

## Primary completion female students rate soars to 89%, 96% schools buildings infrastructure completed: Report



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Minister of Federal Education and Professional Training (FE&PT), Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui launched report under the title of "Girls' Education Statistics and Trends Report 2023-24," highlighting that the primary school completion rate for girls has surged from 75% to 89%, reflecting a significant return on infrastructure investment.

The launching ceremony was held at PIE on Thursday, which was graced by Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, (FE&PT) Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui as chief guest, other participants included Minister of State, FE&PT, Wajaha Qamar, Federal Parliamentary Secretary Farah Naz Akbar, Senator Fawzia, DG PIE Dr Muhammad Shahid Soroya, representatives of partners and educationists.

This report was prepared in collaboration with Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), Malala Fund, Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE) and the Ministry of Education.

The key findings of the report highlighted 96% of schools have concrete buildings, 92% have toilets and 82% have clean drinking water. The percentage of girls completing primary education has increased from 75% to 89%, and facilities and infrastructure for girls' education are gradually improving every year and others.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said that the data presented in the report would serve as the foundation for policymaking on girls' education. He emphasized that accurate data is essential for solving educational challenges, noting that no country progresses alone but advances collectively with regional cooperation. He stressed the need to move toward practical actions.

## Effective governance rooted in strong Parliament, says Speaker

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Thursday said that the foundation of effective governance lies in a strong Parliament and that Pakistan must further strengthen its state and democratic institutions amid a rapidly evolving global landscape. Delivering the keynote address at the plenary session of the Pakistan Governance Forum 2026, titled "Strengthening Parliament for Effective Governance," National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq made the remarks.

The two-day forum, organized by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, was held here from February 25 to 26.

Highlighting global trends, Ayaz Sadiq said that the international system is changing rapidly, power dynamics are shifting, and technology is redefining tradi-



ditional governance structures. In such circumstances, Pakistan must strengthen its parliamentary and administrative capacities to meet complex challenges effectively. Speaking on institutional reforms, NA Speaker outlined that under the National Assembly Secretariat Employees (Amendment) Act 2026, administrative and financial powers have been transferred from individual discretion to the Cross-Party Finance Committee, promoting transparency and collective oversight. Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq noted that reforms in human resources have led.

## Pakistan turns from default risk to global case study, targets \$1tr economy by 2035: Ahsan

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday said Pakistan's economic turnaround over the past two years has drawn global attention, with major international financial institutions presenting the country's recovery as a model case study.

"In the last two years, the incumbent government has steered Pakistan, which was on the brink of bankruptcy, to a position where, through governance and reforms, every major international financial institution is now presenting Pakistan's economic transformation as a case study," the minister told APP on the sidelines of the Pakistan Governance Forum-2026, themed "Reimagining Governance for URAAN Pakistan." He said the forum was convened to align all stakeholders, federal and provincial governments, ministries, departments and the private sector, around actionable reforms under the Uraan Pakistan agenda to achieve a \$1 trillion economy by

2035.

"Well, the purpose of the Pakistan Governance Forum is to create alignment so we can collectively work towards our economic goals, implement the 5Es framework, Equity, Exports, Energy, Environment, E-Pakistan, achieve exports over \$100 billion, transform Pakistan into a technology-led economy, embrace AI, and address climate, energy and social challenges," he said.

Ahsan Iqbal stressed that infrastructure alone could not drive growth. "The best hardware is useless without software. Buildings and roads have little value if we do not invest in the skills, health and capacity of our people," he said, underlining the centrality of human capital. The planning minister warned that Pakistan faced two paths: "If we continue with business as usual, Pakistan may at best become a \$600 billion economy by 2035. But with transformational reforms and positive national synergy, we can achieve the \$1 trillion target. The difference between these outcomes is the coefficient of governance."

## Senior Journalist Anila Shaheen passes away after a brief illness



PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Senior journalist and member of the Peshawar Press Club, Anila Shaheen, passed away on Thursday after a brief illness. She had been under treatment for the past several days at a private hospital in Peshawar. Her elder brother, Irfanullah, said she suffered a brain haemorrhage at the time of her death four days ago and had remained in a coma since then. Despite undergoing two surgeries, she could not survive. Colleagues and members of the journalistic community described Anila Shaheen as a fearless, principled and highly professional journalist whose services to the field would be remembered for a long time. Alongside her reporting work, she actively struggled for the rights of journalists, freedom of the press and the resolution of problems faced by working journalists, a role that many termed a lasting source of guidance and inspiration. She also held several key positions.

## Pakistan yet to deploy AI agents; inclusive tech policy needed amid climate risks: Musadik Malik

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Musadik Malik on Thursday said Pakistan has yet to deploy operational artificial intelligence (AI) agents but is expected to see their emergence within the next few years, stressing that technological advancement must remain inclusive — particularly in the face of growing climate risks.

Speaking at the Pakistan Governance Forum 2026 held at a local hotel in Islamabad, the minister said the prime minister had provided clear policy direction on technological development and that related proposals had been consolidated accordingly. Pakistan yet to deploy AI agents; inclusive tech policy needed amid



climate risks: Musadik Malik

He noted that countries such as Japan, Singapore and China were already actively developing AI agents, while Pakistan was working toward building capacity in the field.

Musadik Malik said the primary technical challenge surrounding AI deployment was currently one of efficiency, which he expected would improve over time. However, he emphasised that the more critical concern for policymakers was ensuring.

## Serving Ramadan Iftar across Pakistan

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Zakat Foundation of America organised special Ramadan Iftar meals in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Kotli in Azad Kashmir, Khanewal, Muzaffargarh, Multan, Pattoki, Toba Tek Singh and Manselra, respectfully serving patients' attendants and underprivileged residents from nearby areas. The initiative aimed to ensure dignified iftar provision while reaching communities around major hospitals and neighbourhoods in need. Organisers said the Ramadan Iftar programme was designed not only to feed those observing the fast but also to promote compassion and mutual cooperation across society. A large number of young volunteers from universities nationwide participated in the Iftar arrangements, taking active roles in prepar-



ing and distributing meals to beneficiaries. One volunteer recalled that after taking part in the activity last year his outlook on life changed for the better. He said the happiness that comes from making life easier for others cannot be matched and that the experience deepened his sense of humility and gratitude. Members of civil society welcomed the outreach, noting that such Ramadan Iftar efforts reinforce values of brotherhood and mutual respect.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in a group photo with participants of Pakistan Governance Forum 2026.

## Pakistan awards 11 oil & gas blocks

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Petroleum Division, Government of Pakistan Thursday signed Petroleum Concession Agreements (PCAs) and Exploration Licences (ELs) awarding 11 onshore blocks marking a significant step forward in advancing oil and gas exploration activities across the country. The signing ceremony was held in Islamabad, and was attended by the Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik, said a news release. The awarded blocks include eight in Balochistan, two in Sindh, and one in Punjab.

The successful joint venture partners include Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), Mari Energies Limited (MariEnergies), Pakistan Oilfields Limited (POL) and Prime Global Energies (Prime).

Speaking at the ceremony, the Minister for Petroleum termed the signing a significant milestone in the government's efforts to boost domestic exploration, attract investment, and reduce reliance on imported energy. Signing of agreements demonstrate strong investor confidence in Pakistan's upstream potential.



The Minister expressed confidence that recent discoveries would lead to further investments in development and production, create employment opportunities, stimulate economic activity in the regions and will contribute meaningfully to reducing reliance on imported

energy. He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to facilitate exploration activities ensuring a stable investor-friendly environment for promoting the sustainable development of Pakistan's indigenous energy resources. MariEnergies will

serve as operator for six blocks. The company has secured 100% working interest in five blocks: Padag, Chagai, Dalbandin, Merui, and Merui West and will lead the Ahmad Wal block as operator with a 60% working interest, alongside OGDCL holding 40%. OGDCL will operate three blocks, including Kalat North with 100% working interest. It will also lead two joint venture blocks: Naing Sharif (OGDCL 70% as operator, Prime 30%) and Khui-II (OGDCL 60% as operator, MariEnergies 40%). PPL emerged as the highest bidder for the Kalat South block and will operate it with a 40% working inter-

est, in partnership with OGDCL (30%) and MariEnergies (30%). POL secured the Jherruk block with 100% working interest. The minimum committed investment by the successful bidders exceeds USD \$1 million (approximately Rs. 8.66 billion) over the next three years. In addition, more than Rs. 276 million has been committed towards social welfare initiatives in the respective areas.

In the event of commercial hydrocarbon discoveries, substantial additional investments amounting to millions of dollars are anticipated for field development and production activities.