

Gauri Khan says never played for SRK's movies

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Govt saved Rs 1.1 trillion through talks with IPPs: Awais Leghari

ARIF MAHMOOD KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Power Division, Sardar Awais Leghari on Thursday said that the government has saved Rs 1.1 trillion through negotiations with Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

Addressing at the concluding ceremony of 4th International Hydropower Conference jointly organized by Energy Updates with Collaboration of Private Power Infrastructure Board (PPIB), WAPDA and other stakeholders, the minister said that the government and IPPs mutually renewed the contracts in

the interest of Pakistan. He said that people could not longer afford to pay the electricity bills and the government was going to revamp the entire power sector. "We are also restructuring National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC)," he added.

Elaborating, the government reforms in power sector, he said that there has been a significant reduction in the losses of distribution companies. From July to November 2023, these losses amounted to Rs 223 billion, which decreased to Rs 170 billion during the same period in 2024, he said. He said out of total 10 Board of



Directors (BoDs) of Power Distribution Companies (DISCOs), eight have been

completely revamped and not a single induction was made on political basis. He

said that the government was reviewing various taxes included in electric-

ity bills to provide maximum relief to the consumers. Terming uniform tariff for the entire country as major challenge, he said transfer the burden of one company to another is unfair, he said. He said a competitive electricity market will be launched in March, where market forces would determine power tariff, and the government would play only a facilitating role.

The minister said that the demand for solar solutions was increasing due to the high cost of electricity. An additional 10,000 to 12,000 MW is likely to be added to the system under net metering in the country.

SBP governor says policy rate to come down in phases

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jamil Ahmad has said that the policy rate would come down in three phases. Addressing an event organised by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) in Karachi on Thursday, the SBP governor said the inflation target was expected to remain from five to seven percent this financial year (FY). He informed that in December 2024, the country's current account was in surplus and would remain in surplus throughout the cent

FY. He said that now there would be no restrictions on imports by the banks.

The SBP governor said the pace of inflation is expected to lower further in January, followed by fluctuations over the next 4-5 months. Ahmad declared that the country is positioned "to fully resume economic activity". Jamil Ahmad noted that the inflation rate decreased significantly from 4.1% recorded in December 2024. He said as per the SBP assessment, by the end of 2025, inflation is expected to stabilise within the target of 5-7%, which is within the State Bank and government's medium-term target.

Ahsan chairs preparatory meeting for Indonesian President's upcoming visit to Pakistan

SAMRA ATHAR

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday chaired a meeting of the committee, constituted by the Prime Minister to enhance bilateral cooperation and trade between Pakistan and Indonesia.

"The meeting was held in preparation for the first official visit of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to Pakistan," a news release said.

Senior officials from the Ministries of

Planning, Commerce, Finance, and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Secretary of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), attended the meeting, which was also joined by Pakistan's Ambassador to Indonesia via video link.

The participants deliberated on proposals to strengthen cooperation and boost trade between the two countries in various sectors.

Highlighting the significance of the Indonesian President's visit, Ahsan Iqbal said: "This landmark visit will open new avenues for



trade and cooperation, further strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Indonesia."

The minister directed the relevant authorities

to formulate concrete proposals to enhance trade relations, emphasizing the need to strategically target the Indonesian market to showcase Pakistani products

and foster stronger ties between the people of both countries.

He stressed the importance of promoting collaboration in education, health, information technology and tourism, suggesting the provision of scholarships in IT and healthcare sectors for students from both countries to facilitate mutual learning and capacity building.

Lauding Indonesia's cultural diversity, Ahsan Iqbal remarked, "Indonesia has successfully integrated its cultural diversity into a unified identity. We can

learn from this model."

He also appreciated Indonesia's exemplary Hajj management and suggested leveraging their expertise to improve Pakistan's pilgrimage arrangements.

The minister instructed the ministries concerned to finalize all proposals and actions ahead of the Indonesian President's visit to ensure meaningful outcomes.

This visit marks a significant milestone in strengthening economic, cultural, and people-to-people ties between the two nations.

Omar Ayub seeks immediate meeting with Imran Khan

HUMA REHAN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub demanded the government to arrange a meeting with the party founder Imran Khan if it actually has the power. Talking to media at Islamabad Judicial Complex, the opposition leader in National Assembly said that the government isn't allowing the PTI leaders to meet Imran Khan. "We were told that arranging a meeting with Imran Khan isn't included in the jail manual," said Omar Ayub. He said that PTI only wants formation

of judicial commission to probe the events of May 9 and Nov 26 and immediate release of all the political workers. Earlier, National Assembly Speaker Sarfraz Ayaz Sadiq expressed regret over allegations from PTI leaders, defending his role in facilitating talks between the government and opposition. Addressing criticism regarding his alleged inaction in arranging a meeting with the PTI founder, the Speaker clarified that facilitating such meetings does not fall under his mandate or responsibilities.

Apex Court questions 'selective military trials' of May 9 suspects

KOMAL BUTT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's constitutional bench raised critical questions about the trial of civilians involved in the May 9 events, specifically the basis for sending certain suspects to military courts while others being tried in anti-terrorism benches (ATCs).

The seven-member constitutional bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan and also including Justices Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Syed Akhtar Ali Mazhar, Muhy Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarrat Hilali, Naem

Akhtar Afghan and Shahid Bilal Hassan, resumed the hearing of the case regarding the trial of civilians in military courts.

During the proceedings, Ministry of Defence counsel Khawaja Haris argued that the interpretation of Article 233, which pertained to the suspension of fundamental rights during an emergency, was incorrect when the decision to conduct military trials for civilians was made.

He emphasised that fundamental rights could only be suspended under an emergency, as was the case during the tenure of



Gen Pervez Musharraf,

that during Musharraf's era, rights were suspended due to a lack of the right to appeal.

Justice Aminuddin Khan raised the issue of whether an emergency

had been declared in this case, prompting Justice Mazhar to clarify that the suspension of fundamental rights required an emergency to be in place.

Justice Musarrat Hilali also pointed out that, in the present case, the fundamental rights of the accused were not suspended, nor was an emergency declared when the individuals were taken into military custody. Justice Musarrat Hilali asked who determined the jurisdiction for trials in military courts and how the differentiation was made between cases that proceeded in ATCs and those sent to military

courts. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar noted that all suspects from the May 9 incidents were booked under similar FIRs and questioned why some were subjected to military trials while others faced ATCs. Justice Naem Akhtar Afghan asked whether there was any ATC order transferring suspects to military courts and demanded clarity on the process for taking suspects into military custody.

Justice Jamal Mandokhail sought an explanation of the principles and procedures followed to determine the jurisdiction of cases.

Presidency denies fake appointment notification

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The Presidency on Thursday denied a fake notification circulating on social media regarding the appointment of a person named Dr. Sohail Anjum to Grade 22 post in the President House.

In an official statement, the Presidency clarified that no such position existed in grade 22 or otherwise.

Furthermore, the Establishment Division has confirmed that no individual named Dr. Sohail Anjum had been appointed to any post in the President House.

The statement also pointed out that Dr. Sohail Anjum had allegedly gone as far as printing fake business cards falsely identifying himself as the Personal Secretary to the Secretary General of the Presidency — a position that, as clarified, did not exist.

The Presidency underscored its commitment to transparency and integrity in all officer appointments.

It has referred the matter to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for a thorough investigation into the creation and dissemination of the fake notification.

Pakistan urges dialogue to lower tensions following North Korea's latest missile launch

AVESHA REHAN

ISLAMABAD: Voicing concern over North Korea's latest launch of a ballistic missile, Pakistan has called for diplomatic engagement and dialogue to address the challenges confronting the Korean Peninsula, the Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

North Korea on Monday fired a missile as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited South Korea, where he warned Pyongyang was working ever more closely with Russia on advanced space technology.

Blinken's trip came as investigators were trying to arrest conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who has entrenched himself in his residence after being impeached for a failed attempt to impose martial law

"We strongly support the calls for revival of talks among the relevant parties," Ambassador Munir Akram, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council today, which met two days after North Korea fired off its missile. Pyongyang described as a new type of intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile (IRBM) loaded with a hypersonic glide vehicle.

Ambassador Akram called these developments "detrimental to regional and international peace and security." He added that Pakistan supported the objective of denuclearisation in the Korean peninsula, the implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and the goals of global non-proliferation and disarmament.



in Korea or elsewhere."

In this regard, Ambassador Akram called on all parties to exercise restraint and not escalate existing tensions, urging the Security Council to consider adopting some Confidence Building

Measures by the parties to reduce tensions.

Pakistan, he added, remains committed to working within the framework established by the United Nations resolutions to promote peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. "We

hope that the Security Council will find ways of reviving the dialogue and playing its due role in reducing tensions and threats to peace and security in the region.

Opening the debate, a senior UN official warned that North Korea has been actively working towards acquiring new military capabilities that undermine the global non-proliferation architecture.

"While stating that the launch had no negative impact on the security of neighbouring countries, (Pyongyang) regrettable did not issue airspace or maritime safety notifications," said Khaled Khari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations.

According to the country's official statement, the system can "deal a serious military strike to a rival by effectively breaking any of its dense defensive barriers," he said, adding that hypersonic glide vehicles travel at least five times the speed of sound and

are more evasive manoeuvres, making defence measures against the weapon much more difficult.

For his part, North Korea Ambassador Song Kim stressed that the test-fire of a new-type intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile is part of the plan to develop national defence capabilities to enhance the sustainability of the strategic deterrent, in conformity with the changing security environment of the region. As such, it had no negative

impact on the neighbouring countries security.

He further pointed out that — despite the civilian death toll in Gaza — the United States embelishes Israel's nefarious mass atrocities as "the right to self-defence".

Meanwhile, it takes its country's sovereign legitimate exercise of the right to self-defence, he observed, rejecting such "nuclear blackmail".

If "physical conflict" is created on the Peninsula due to "the reckless mania kicked up by the United States and the Republic of Korea (South Korea)", the Council should be held accountable for criminalising the just exercise of its country's sovereign right by applying double standards, Ambassador Song asserted. Additional input from AFP.



PCB unveils domestic cricket schedule for 2025 season

ARIF MEHMOOD KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday unveiled schedule of the men's domestic cricket tournaments for the 2025 season with three first-class tournaments including the ongoing President's Trophy Grade-I. Apart from the red-ball, focus will also be placed on white-ball tournaments, which include one 50-over List-A event, three T20 and one non-first-class three-day tournament. Development cricket has seen some exciting changes as well with the introduction of the U15 and U17 tournaments, and the Champions U19 One-Day Cup and three-day Trophy. These three events will serve as a clear pathway for aspiring and talented cricketers.

age-group and pathways tournaments are set to take place in 2025. This includes a minimum of 131 first-class, 37 50-over List-A and 119 T20 matches. Additionally, the club, age-group, schools, colleges and universities tournaments are set to yield more than 10,000 matches across the country, further creating opportunities for emerging cricketers. The 18-team National T20 Cup will take place in March and will provide opportunities to players from 16 regions across Pakistan to showcase their talent in the shortest format. President's Trophy Grade-II, the non-first-class three-day departmental tournament, will be held in April and May, which will be a battleground for the departments vying for places in the 50-over List-A and first-class departmental tournaments.



The exciting Pakistan Super League 10 will catch

the eye-balls in April and May, following which the senior men's domestic events will come to a three-month halt. During this

time period, the PCB will hold training, fitness and conditioning camps across the 16 regions to get the players ready for the

upcoming domestic tournaments, while also preparing for the second half of the year, which again promises to be excit-

ing, competitive and challenging.

Quaid-e-Azam Trophy and the Champions Cup - the two premier first-class tournaments - are set to take place in September and October. These events will provide the players opportunities to perform in red-ball matches and strengthen their claims for places in the Pakistan Test side.

The 50-over List-A tournament - President's Cup Grade-I - is slated for the November-December window, which will be followed by the second edition of the Champions T20 Cup. The Champions Cup One-Day tournament will be played in January 2026.

On the age-group and Pathways front, the PCB has reassessed the U13 and U16 categories and relaunched them as U15 and U17 to maximise the

participation of teenagers in the national tournaments. The decision also aims at nurturing the talent early and to provide the youngsters with plenty of time in their respective age-groups to grow and emerge.

The National U19 Cup will be contested between 18 regional teams in September as the performers of the Inter-District U19 players will progress to regional academies and then take part in this tournament.

After working their way up from the Club and District and Regional level, the best of the best U19 men's cricketers will be assembled as part of the inaugural five-team Champions U19 Cup and Trophy under the guidance of the five mentors, which is set to take place in October and November.

ICC delegation visits National Bank Stadium to assess Champions Trophy preparations

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: A six-member delegation from the International Cricket Council (ICC) visited the National Bank Stadium on Thursday to assess the ongoing preparations for the upcoming Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan.

The delegation, which included key ICC officials, broadcasters and logistics personnel, thoroughly reviewed the arrangements at the venue.

The purpose of the visit was to ensure that all necessary facilities are in place for the tournament, which is set to begin on February 19, 2025.

Usman Wahla, Director of International Cricket at the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), provided the delegation with an briefing on the development works currently underway at the stadium.



The deadline for completing the required development works at the National Bank Stadium is set for January 25, 2025, ensuring that everything is ready well before the Champions Trophy commences.

It is pertinent to mention that the eight-team tournament, comprised of 15 matches, will run from February 19 to March 9, across three venues - Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi in Pakistan and Dubai.

The eight teams are divided into two groups: Group A features Pakistan, India, New Zealand, Bangladesh, while Group B is comprised of Afghanistan, South Africa, England and Australia.

Hosts Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the curtain raiser on February 19 in Karachi, while the blockbuster clash between arch-rivals Pakistan and India is scheduled for February 23 in Dubai.

Fakhar Zaman declares full fitness, ready for Champions Trophy

KOMAL BUTT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan cricket team's opening batter Fakhar Zaman has announced his full fitness, stating that he will be in action during the upcoming Champions Trophy.

In an interview with a private TV channel, Fakhar revealed that many were unaware he had been unwell following the T20 World Cup. His poor health prevented him from being fully fit, which is why he wasn't part of the national team. He explained that he skipped tours to Australia and South Africa to focus on regaining fitness for the Champions Trophy. Fakhar emphasised that preparing for the tournament was always on his mind, as the Champions



Trophy marked a phenomenal start to his career, and he is excited about the upcoming edition. Speaking about Saim Ayub, Fakhar expressed hope and prayers for his swift recovery. He praised Saim as a talented cricketer who, if consistent over the next 4-5 years, could become one of the top play-

ers globally. Fakhar also mentioned feeling fortunate to be part of the team alongside Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan. He stated that while opening was his priority, he is willing to adjust his batting position based on the team's requirements, reaffirming that the team's needs always come first.

Darren Gough returns as Lahore Qalandars' head coach for PSL 10

SEHRISH NAZ

LAHORE: Lahore Qalandars have officially announced the appointment of legendary English fast bowler Darren Gough as their Head Coach for the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 10.

Gough, who previously had a successful stint with the team during the inaugural Global Super League in 2024, guided the Qalandars to the tournament finals. His return has reignited excitement among fans as he aims to lead the squad to their first PSL title.

The 54-year-old brings extensive experience from his illustrious career as England's top ODI wicket-taker and his post-retire-



ment roles in cricket commentary, coaching, and management. Gough expressed his enthusiasm, highlighting the

team's passion and his determination to achieve new heights with the Qalandars.

Sameen Rana, Team Director of Lahore Qalandars, praised Gough's leadership and experience, expressing confidence in his ability

to inspire the players for PSL 10.

In related news, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has rescheduled the PSL 10 draft for January 13 at Huzuri Bagh, Lahore. The revised pick order includes significant changes to draft categories, streamlining selections across Platinum, Diamond, Gold, and Silver tiers.

Lahore Qalandars hold the first pick in the Platinum 1 category. Although originally planned for Gwadar, the draft was relocated due to logistical challenges, with the PCB confirming Gwadar as a key step for the PSL 2025 Trophy Tour.

KP female players honoured for remarkable performance in US Junior Squash Championship

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihani, has praised the remarkable performance of the province's female players in the US Junior Squash Championship and assured that the provincial government will fully support and encourage them.

He awarded a cash prize of Rs. 500,000 to Mahnoor, who won the gold medal in the US Squash Under-13 Junior Category, and Rs. 200,000 to Seharish, who won the bronze medal in this regard. On Thursday, both players hailed from the province, Mahnoor and Seharish, met with the Provincial Minister at his



office. The Minister lauded their performance at the Junior Squash Championship in the United States and said that they are a great asset to both the province and the country, as they are making their mark internationally. He emphasized that the vision of Chief Minister Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur and Founder Chairman Imran is to support athletes and talent. He added that efforts are being made to encourage talented players in every possible way. The Minister extended his best wishes for further success to Mahnoor and Seharish in the future.

Pak-WI test series tickets sale starts in Multan on today

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday announced the sale of tickets for the two test match series of the Pakistan Men's cricket team against West Indies due to start at the Multan Cricket stadium from January 17.

The tickets will go on sale at the 11 designated TCS centers in Multan from January 10 (Friday), at 12 pm.

Fans can watch the action free of cost from the First Class (Wasim Akram and Elahi brothers) and General (Hanif Muhammad and Mushtaq Ahmed) enclosures of the Multan Cricket Stadium throughout the two Test matches from 17-29 January.

For both the Test matches, tickets for the PCB Gallery



(Inzamam ul Haq) will be available for sale at just PKR 500. The VIP enclosures, which include Fazal Mahmood and Imran Khan stands, will be accessible with PKR 150 tickets.

Premium enclosures (Javed Miandad and Zaheer Abbas) tickets will be worth PKR 100 for both the Tests.

Tickets may be bought from the following TCS Express Centres in Multan:

- Area Office
- Qazafi Chowk
- Gulgasht
- Mall Road
- Gulshan Market
- Bosan Road
- Wapda Town
- Mumtazabad
- Chungi No. 1
- Garden Town
- Chowk Rashidabad.

World Rugby Partners with STH to Revolutionize fan experience

ZAHID YAQOOB KHAWAJA

ISLAMABAD: World Rugby has announced an exclusive agreement with Sports Travel & Hospitality (STH) to redefine the premium fan experience for the next three men's and women's Rugby World Cups. The partnership, which will launch the 'RWC Experiences' program, aims to bring fans closer to the action than ever before. The program will offer a range of ticket-inclusive packages for England 2025 (women), Australia 2027 (men), and Australia 2029 (women).

World Rugby Chief Executive Officer Alan Gilpin stated, "Fan experience is at the heart of our purpose to grow rugby's audience share by making it more accessible and relevant. Our relationship with STH goes to the heart of this purpose. The 'RWC Experiences' program will combine innovative travel and hospitality solutions with interactive fan-centered activities. Fans can expect options spanning travel, accommodation, world-class dining, and immersive cultural experiences. STH Group Chief Executive, Chris John,

added, "We are thrilled to announce this new partnership with World Rugby and our drive to redefine and deepen fan experiences for the next three Rugby World Cups. The partnership is part of World Rugby's strategy to grow the sport's relevance and accessibility. With men's and women's Rugby World Cups taking place in England, Australia, and the USA, World Rugby has a transformative runway of certainty and opportunity to drive new participation and revenue opportunities.



TCL Showcases Its Latest Display Innovations and Breakthroughs Across Smart Devices

PEAK POINT

LAHORE: TCL, Pakistan's No. 1 LED TV brand showcases a diverse range of display technologies at CES 2025. This includes QD-Mini LED TVs, professional monitor, smart projectors, and RayNeo AR Glasses. Additionally, TCL unveils its latest AI advancements in new product categories and a complete smart home ecosystem, underscoring its commitment to providing smarter and healthier lifestyles and inspiring greatness globally. TCL's leadership in



TCL's latest AI advancements in new product categories and a complete smart home ecosystem.

display innovation is highlighted by its flagship TCL X1K QD-Mini LED TV. This model redefines home entertainment with over 14,000 local dimming zones, delivering breathtaking clarity and visual precision. Enhanced by TCL AI-domain Halo Control Technology, it offers a truly immersive viewing experience, bringing every scene to life with vivid detail. To complement these visuals, TCL has strategically partnered with Bang & Olufsen, a leader in luxury audio, to deliver their

R83 Professional Monitor Series offers pixel-level precision, enhancing immersive gaming and creative excellence. These products highlight TCL's dedication to catering to diverse consumer preferences, from expansive TVs sophisticated and design-forward solutions. As another highlight, TCL's flagship TV series is set to integrate Google's Gemini model, with plans to launch an all-new Google TV with Gemini capabilities in 2025. TCL is also showcasing an interactive demo in a dedicated showroom, unveiling the immersive and intelligent features with the help of the Gemini model on its TV, promising to transform home entertainment. TCL also debuts innovative products at CES 2025, including the PLAYBUCE Projector, a redefining portable projection, TCL AI Me, the world's first modular AI companion robot, RayNeo X3 Pro Smart Glasses featuring in the true AR era with built-in computing power in a compact, streamlined design. Also, the brand showcases its commitment to user-centric

design and sustainability with eco-friendly remote controls made from recycled tea leaves and cardboard furniture. High lighting its focus on sustainable innovation, TCL FreshN 3.0 Air Conditioner redefines cooling with features that promote health, boost energy efficiency, and enhance convenience. Its liftable Fresh Air Inlet brings fresh outdoor air in, removes odors, and increases indoor oxygen levels. The energy-saving technology intelligently adjusts the operation frequency, while Smart

Voice Control allows for hands-free operation without an internet connection. TCL's FRESH BUILT-IN Refrigerator enhances kitchens with a sleek, space-saving design and advanced food preservation, while the P860 Washer-Dryer set offers stackable, compact solutions with anti-wrinkle technology for optimal garment care. Essential to TCL's green efforts is its Smart Home Energy Management Solution (HEMS), integrating solar panels, energy storage, and heat pumps for efficient energy use.

Standing Committee Proposes Reforms for MDCAT to Ensure Fairness in Medical Admissions

NADEEM TANOLI

ISLAMABAD: The Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, chaired by Dr. Mahesh Kumar Malani, convened at the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) to deliberate on reforms for the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) and broader health sector improvements. The meeting emphasized the need for transparency, efficiency, and fairness in the MDCAT examination process, as well as addressing critical regulatory concerns in healthcare. The committee discussed recurring issues in the MDCAT exam, including complaints about out-of-syllabus questions in 2024 papers. It was noted that the responsible authorities deleted such questions and provided revised answers. However, committee mem-

bers stressed the necessity of ensuring accuracy from the outset to prevent post-exam corrections. The use of juvenile cards for biometric verification was proposed to prevent impersonation during registration, along with improving the registration software to avoid errors. To decentralize the process, the committee suggested that provinces be granted greater autonomy in conducting MDCAT exams, leaving PMDC to oversee licensing exams. This measure, the committee argued, would eliminate inconsistencies arising from the centralization of MDCAT and lead to a smoother and more equitable process for aspiring medical students. The inclusion of supplementary students in the MDCAT 2024 cycle was debated, with concerns that their participation could disadvantage regular students. The committee unanimously recommended their

exclusion, proposing they take the exam in subsequent cycles to maintain fairness. Legal consultations on this matter will guide the final decision. Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj, President of PMDC, provided detailed statistics on the MDCAT 2024. He reported a total of 167,772 registered candidates, with the highest score of 199 achieved by one candidate. The assessment, which saw participation from Pakistan, AIK, GB, and international centers, reflected significant competitiveness for the limited 20,347 MBBS and BDS seats in public and private institutions. Dr. Taj reassured that all admitted universities had been instructed to expedite the admissions process to allow for timely commencement of the academic year. The formation of the MDCAT Reforms Committee was also highlighted. Its objectives include revising the MDCAT syllabus for uniformity, creating a

standardized question bank, and mandating domicile-based exam centers. Additionally, the reforms aim to align the MDCAT timeline with the declaration of intermediate results to avoid scheduling conflicts. A centralized committee and IT-based solutions are being introduced to improve exam transparency and minimize errors. The committee also raised concerns about the regulation of mental health professionals. Noting the rising demand for psychologists in Pakistan, members recommended measures to regulate the profession to ensure adherence to international standards. The Standing Committee affirmed its commitment to fostering fairness and uniformity in Pakistan's healthcare and medical education systems. Future meetings will continue refining policies, guided by stakeholder consultations and legal evaluations.

Standing Committee on Energy Expresses Concern Over Electricity Issues

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Standing Committee on Energy (Power Division) convened today at the Parliament House under the chairmanship of MNA Mr. Mahammatullah. The committee deliberated on various pressing issues affecting electricity consumers and proposed several measures to address these concerns. The committee expressed serious apprehensions regarding excessive electricity billing and directed the Ministry of Energy (Power Division) and the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) to implement effective measures for reducing electricity rates. It was particularly emphasized that additional taxes being

charged under various headings should be eliminated to alleviate the financial strain on consumers. The committee further explored solutions that would ensure the benefits of such efforts are directly passed on to the consumers. Minister for Energy, while briefing the committee, reiterated the government's commitment to reducing the financial burden on electricity consumers. He informed the committee that approximately 70% of tube wells have been converted to solar energy and that electricity tariffs for the industrial sector have been reduced. The minister assured the committee that constructive suggestions from its members would be considered in policymaking to better facilitate electricity consumers.

Opinion Column Header

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What is our climate vision for the NDCs?

Soha Nisar

As Pakistan stands at the precipice of 2025, the urgency to confront the climate crisis has never been more pronounced. The revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which form the backbone of Pakistan's climate ambitions, offer a roadmap to navigate the existential threat posed by climate change. Yet, as the world edges closer to irreversible environmental collapse, Pakistan's ability to translate these ambitious goals into meaningful action will determine whether the country can rise to the challenge or be swept away by the tides of ecological disaster.

The revised NDCs reflect Pakistan's recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis. The country has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2030, with 35 per cent being contributed by international financial support. These targets, while ambitious, are not merely symbolic; they represent the potential to reshape Pakistan's future. However, a deeper look at the alignment of these targets with the country's broader economic policies reveals a troubling disconnect.

The absence of a coordinated approach between the NDCs and Pakistan's five-year development plans, particularly the 13th Economic Development Plan, exposes a glaring vulnerability. This target places significant pressure on the government to ensure that the necessary investments and policies are in place. The country's climate strategy risks being undermined by an incoherent policy framework that fails to integrate climate action into the very DNA of its economic ambitions.

Pakistan's political landscape, fraught with macroeconomic instability and external pressures such as the IMF's financial programmes, has often undermined the integration of climate considerations into national economic planning. With the 18th Amendment in place, the fragmentation of governance has made it even more challenging to implement climate policies effectively at the provincial level.

Without robust mechanisms to align national climate goals with provincial priorities, the nation's strategy risks being reduced to a collection of lofty promises rather than a cohesive blueprint for action. The 2025 climate action agenda must rectify this by embedding climate action in the national and provincial planning documents, ensuring that climate resilience is prioritised at every level of governance.

In this context, the country's energy transition, a critical pillar of the NDCs, must take centre stage. Pakistan has set an ambitious target of achieving 60 per cent renewable energy in its national energy mix and 100 per cent electric vehicles by 2030, goals that are not just technical challenges, but moral imperatives.

The energy sector is the largest contributor to Pakistan's carbon emissions, and addressing this issue will require a paradigm shift. We cannot afford to continue down the path of coal dependency. The government's commitment to phasing out coal imports is a step in the right direction, but it must be followed by decisive action: building the infrastructure for renewable energy, incentivising the adoption of electric vehicles, and ensuring that green energy solutions are accessible to all. Without these investments, Pakistan risks locking itself into a future of fossil-fuel dependence, undermining its own climate goals in the process.

Pakistan's vulnerability to climate impacts is already starkly visible in the agricultural sector, which remains the backbone of its economy. The NDCs' focus on adaptation, including the enhancement of water management systems and the protection of vulnerable ecosystems, is essential. However, these measures will be meaningless unless they are implemented with urgency and foresight.

The challenge is not just about building infrastructure but about building resilience from the ground up. Empowering local communities, particularly in the rural areas where climate change is having the most severe effects, must be at the heart of Pakistan's climate strategy.

Entrepreneurial culture

Sara Malkani

An enabling environment for young businesses to grow is crucial in any economy. The last decade or so has seen attempts to bring financing and support startups in Pakistan.

My YouTube algorithm led me to one such attempt to nurture the startup culture in the form of a reality TV show on the Green Entertainment channel — Shark Tank Pakistan. In this show, an international franchise entrepreneurs pitch their businesses to a group of investor sharks in the hope of acquiring investment. Creators and investors in Shark Tank Pakistan say that the show will educate budding entrepreneurs and catalyse innovation.

But I could not see the educational value of the show after I saw a few pitches, which did not set forth clear business plans, but still attracted commitments from investors in several crores of rupees. Perhaps I did not understand the business plans or was mistaken about the minimum level of clarity needed to attract venture capitalists. I knew it was a relatively high-risk investment — but it is really such a leap of faith.

Lured by the algorithm, I decided to view Shark Tank in other countries, including the US and India. When I watched the pitches in these shows, I observed detailed pitches and rigorous investor assessments. It had reason to be baffled by Pakistan's version.

ST Pakistan convenes that investors here prefer to gamble rather than support viable businesses.

I doubt that the contrast in the shows is only the consequence of differences in individual producers or investors. The contrast reflects differing levels of maturity, analytical reasoning and value for money in different economies. It sheds light on where we need to improve as a country if we want to build sustainable industries.

Three broad contrasts stand out for me. First is the rigour of pitches. In ST USA and India, successful pitches clearly describe the nature and value of their product, their revenues and profits, and explain why they think their business is scalable. Unfortunately, the sharks in Pakistan do not expect the pitchers to show up with this level of preparation or understanding of their market. This is a disservice to the entrepreneurs.

For example, YouTube features a startup claiming to sell Turkish coffee in Pakistan get an investment of Rs6 crore (Rs60 million) on a valuation of Rs30 crore on the basis of monthly sales of Rs40 lacs (Rs4m). This, even though the investors on the show said that their coffee does not taste like Turkish coffee but like the whipped milk coffee that one finds in government offices. Why does a misleadingly named product get such a significant investment? At no point are pitchers asked about the price at which they sell their product or their competitors in the market. Other than a goal to open several more outlets in malls, where for some reason the profitability of the product is presumed, no viable business plan is shown.

Trafficking challenge

Human trafficking remains one of Pakistan's most persistent tragedies, preying on the desperation of vulnerable individuals. The boat disaster off Greece's coast last month, which claimed the lives of five Pakistani nationals, serves as a grim reminder of the perilous journeys many undertake in search of better futures. While the government, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has signalled a commitment to tackling this scourge, the true challenge lies in translating promises into sustained, long-term action. Human trafficking thrives on the desperation of young individuals from poor and middle-class backgrounds. Lured by promises of lucrative employment abroad, families often sell their land and livestock, paying traffickers between Rs4 million and Rs6 million. Instead of opportunity, many find death at sea or imprisonment in foreign lands. Rising unemployment and inflation exacerbate this desperation, fueling the networks of traffickers who operate with impunity, often aided by corrupt officials within government institutions. Prime Minister Sharif's recent directives to seize traffickers' properties, intensify legal actions, and emphasise stricter prosecution are steps in the right direction. The focus on enhanced airport screenings, public awareness campaigns, and encouraging legal channels for overseas employment reflects a multi-pronged approach. However, these measures must extend beyond announcements. Arresting facilitators and rooting out enablers within government offices is essential for long-lasting impact. The tragedy in Greece is far from an isolated incident. In recent years, hundreds of Pakistani migrants have perished while attempting dangerous crossings to Europe.

Mohsin Naqvi stresses regional collaboration to combat narcotics

ARSHAD MALIK

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior and Anti-Narcotics, Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday visited the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Headquarters, where he was welcomed by ANF Director General Major General Abdul Muneed.

During his visit, Minister Naqvi announced plans to host a regional conference aimed at strengthening collaboration with Gulf countries in the fight against drug trafficking. The conference will invite the heads of anti-narcotics forces from Gulf nations and focus on developing a unified strategy to tackle the narcotics trade.

"This conference holds criti-

cal importance in creating a joint action plan against drug trafficking," Naqvi stated. He also highlighted the outcomes of his recent visit to Saudi Arabia's Anti-Narcotics Headquarters, where discussions were held to enhance bilateral cooperation.

Praising ANF's efforts, the minister commended the agency's remarkable performance in 2023, which included 2,450 operations leading to the seizure of drugs worth approximately \$10 billion. "Despite limited resources and manpower, ANF's dedication to combating drug mafias is truly commendable," he remarked.

Minister Naqvi emphasized the importance of continuing the crackdown on drug networks

with full force to protect the younger generation from falling prey to narcotics. He also directed the continuation of awareness campaigns against drug use in educational institutions, stressing that no leniency would be shown to individuals involved in drug trafficking.

The minister called for immediate, multifaceted measures to address the rising trend of drug abuse and reaffirmed his commitment to eradicating the menace.

Federal Secretary for Interior Muhammad Khuram Agha and senior ANF officials were also present during the briefing on ANF's operations and performance.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi in a group photo during his visit to ANF Headquarters.

JJ announces countrywide protests over rising electricity prices

SEHRISH NAZ

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has announced plans for a nationwide protest on January 17, demanding a reduction in electricity prices.

The announcement was made by party chief Hafiz Naqem ur Rehman during a press conference in Lahore on Thursday.

Hafiz Naqem criticised the government for not addressing the rising economic challenges, particularly the failure to reduce electricity bills despite the shutdown of Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

"Even though the IPPs are closed, electricity bills have not decreased," he said, emphasising the parties' concerns regarding the economic hardships faced by the public.

He also pointed to the increasing prices of petrol and essential food items, which have continued to rise while other sectors, such as the stock exchange, show positive trends.



Highlighting the issue of IPPs, Hafiz Naqem stressed that despite the government's claims of resolving the crisis, the people continue to suffer.

"We raised the issue of IPPs, but they remain unaffected and the promised relief has not materialised," he added. He also questioned the government's decision to exempt IPPs from income taxes while ordinary citizens continue to bear the tax burden.

The JI leader criticised the government for its handling of the agricultural sector, particularly the pricing of sugarcane and wheat, which are facing significant production losses due to unregulated pricing.

He urged the government to implement support programmes for these crops to avoid further losses in the agricultural sector.

Hafiz Naqem also expressed concerns about the education system, noting that the budget shortfalls and inequitable distribution adversely impact health and education, leaving public institutions in rural and urban areas unable to provide quality services. The concerns were voiced during a seminar organized by the Aman Development Foundation in collaboration with the Center for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI). The event focused on a four-year budget review for the education and health sectors. Speakers included Aman Development Foundation Chairman Muhammad Tufail, social activist Muhammad Akhtar Raja, District Literacy Officer Qamar Islam, Railway Station

Call for Increased Investment in Education and Health Sectors

PEAK POINT

RAWALPINDI: Political and social figures have urged the federal and provincial governments to take significant steps to improve education and healthcare, emphasising that the current budgets allocated to these sectors are insufficient. They highlighted that budget shortfalls and inequitable distribution adversely impact health and education, leaving public institutions in rural and urban areas unable to provide quality services. The concerns were voiced during a seminar organized by the Aman Development Foundation in collaboration with the Center for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI). The event focused on a four-year budget review for the education and health sectors. Speakers included Aman Development Foundation Chairman Muhammad Tufail, social activist Muhammad Akhtar Raja, District Literacy Officer Qamar Islam, Railway Station

Master Zaheer Abbas, Muhammad Anas, Aamir Khan, Saeda Begum, and Anwarul Haq Mughal. Speakers stressed that developed nations have prioritized education and healthcare, ensuring comprehensive facilities for their citizens. However, they lamented that even in this modern era, Pakistan's rural areas and major cities continue to suffer from inadequate schools and hospitals. The speakers highlighted that, despite budget constraints, a transparent and equitable use of resources could bring significant improvements. They called on the government to increase health sector budgets at all levels, prioritize hospital infrastructure, and allocate more funds to under-resourced areas to address inequalities in healthcare services. These measures, they argued, are essential for fostering long-term development and ensuring access to quality education and medical care for all citizens.

Successful int'l conference on girls' education to commence on Saturday: Dr Khalid Siddiqui

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui on Thursday said it was significant development that ministry would organize successful international conference on girls' education in Muslim countries from January 11 to 12 in federal capital.

Addressing a press conference, the minister said that International conference would jointly organized by the MoFEPT and the Muslim World League (MWL) with aims to address challenges and opportunities of girls' education.



He said that Pakistan was taking lead to host international conference to promote and project girls' education among Muslim communities and the ministry under special directives of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had already sent invitations to 57 countries which was confirmed by the 48 countries.

He further said that the conference would be attended by leaders, policy makers, diplomats, religious scholars, educationists and experts from Muslim countries who were at the forefront of driving educational reforms to further streamline the system.

Dr. Khalid Maqbool apprised that the prestigious event will be presided over by the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

The conference's keynote address would be delivered by Nobe Laureate and globally acclaimed advocate for girls' education Malala Yousofzai, he added.

Salik, Ramesh discuss initiatives for protecting minorities rights in country

MOHSIN ALI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Thursday met with Minister for Human Rights and Minorities, Ramesh Singh Arora, to discuss initiatives for protecting minority rights in the country.

In a statement here, Chaudhry Salik Hussain reiterated the government's commitment in safeguarding minority rights, emphasizing that the government is dedi-

cated for protecting all rights of minorities in the country.

He announced plans to introduce minority quotas in demands from countries seeking Pakistani workers, ensuring fair selection and equal opportunities for minorities.

The minister also highlighted the importance of technical training courses in enhancing skills and employment opportunities for minorities.

He assured that the government would provide training programs

tailored to market demand, enabling minorities to contribute to the national economy.

Ramesh Singh Arora appreciated the government's efforts to promote tourism, issue minority cards, and protect the heritage of the Sikh community.

He noted that there are approximately 2.8 million minorities living in Punjab, who have a deep affection for Pakistan.

Ramesh Singh Arora emphasized the need for a proper secretariat for the Pakistan Curdware

Committee and the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSCGPC).

He also highlighted his efforts to facilitate meetings between the foreign Sikh community and ambassadors in Pakistan, showcasing Pakistan as a safe country for minorities.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain assured his commitment to minority rights initiatives, providing every opportunity for minorities to contribute to Pakistan's economy.

Winter packages distributed among poor in Swat

HAROON SIRAJ

SWAT: Muslim Hands has started distributing winter packages among orphans, destitute children and the poor in Swat valley. According to the details, Packages were distributed among hundreds of lower class at Muslim Hands School Kanju, Muslim Hands Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Regional Director Raimullah Khan, Deputy Director Irshad Khan and others distributed the packages. The distributions for the Upper Swat will start today. On this occasion, Rahimullah Khan said that Muslim Hands has distributed warm clothes to the destitute for winters and they are starting the process of distributing it among the poor. He said that 685 packages are being distributed in Swat while the 255 packages are being distributed in Madyan in Muslim Hands School. These packages include four blankets, socks, gloves, sweaters, warm shawls, warm hats, etc. The authorities said that Muslim Hands has been doing this good work for the last 31 years and the support of philanthropists and other needy people.

BISP Kafalat Program's assistance increased to Rs13,500: Rubina Khalid

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Chairperson, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Rubina Khalid here Thursday said that assistance amount under Kafalat Program has been increased from Rs6,500 to Rs13,500. She termed the increase was a new year gift of the Govt for millions of beneficiaries of BISP.

Talking to media after her visit to BISP Pabbi Tehsil office in Nowshera district, she said that the BISP Sunamand Program was being launched under which necessary technical and vocational skills would be provided to beneficiaries for securing dignified jobs in local and international markets.



Rubina Khalid said that deserving families with necessary registration documents such as Form-B of their children and CNIC can come to our dynamic registration centres for availing the services and assistance especially scholarship for their kids residing in schools besides receiving stipends under Benazir Bhutto Nausohnoma Program. She recalled the famous saying of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto that

"skills was a precious asset for a person" and said that Govt accorded highest priority to enhance the vocational skills of the beneficiaries so that they could get dignified jobs in the country as well as abroad.

Rubina said that Qazi e Awam Shaheed Zulfiqar Bhutto had granted identity to the labourers and workers of Pakistan by issuing them green passports that enabled them to get dignified jobs abroad.

She thanked the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan for increasing the budget of BISP during current fiscal year, benefiting over 9.3 million beneficiaries registered under this landmark program.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain held a meeting with Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora.

Commissioner Malakand Orders Improved Facilities for Residents

HAROON SIRAJ

SWAT: Commissioner Malakand Division Muhammad Abid Khan paid a surprise visit to the Tehsil Administration Babuzai Swat, Service Delivery Center Babuzai Swat and Driving License Branch of Deputy Commissioner Swat. Commissioner Malakand Division inspected different parts of the offices of Tehsil Administration Babuzai Swat and inquired about the facilities being provided to the residents present on the spot. Commissioner Malakand Division Director Raimullah Khan registers and expressed his anger over the poor sanitation arrangements. He directed the concerned authorities to provide timely facilities to the residents in light



of the orders of the provincial government so that the people-friendly policy of the provincial government could be made available to the public. Commissioner Malakand Division Director Raimullah Khan also inquired about the online facilities being provided to the public during the inspection of the Service Delivery Center and issued necessary orders. He issued orders to the concerned authorities to take departmental action against the absent staff of the Service Delivery Center Babuzai. On this occasion additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Swat Muhammad Hamid, Assistant Commissioner (Revenue/General) Malakand Division Sher Ali Khan and other concerned officials were also present on the occasion.