

Shaniera Akram slams post falsely including Wasim Akram in list of 'Divorce XI'

Friday 28 February 2025

Pakistan, UAE sign 5 five accords of cooperation on Abu Dhabi crown prince's first official visit

ARIF MEHMOOB KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The government and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday signed five accords to boost bilateral cooperation in different fields on the occasion of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's first official visit to Pakistan.

Pakistan and the UAE share close diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties. The UAE is one of Pakistan's largest trading partners in the Middle East and a major source of remittances, with a large Pakistani expatriate population living and working there.

The documents were signed in different fields, including banking, railways, mining and infrastructural investment. The crown prince and the prime minister witnessed the ceremony as officials from both sides exchanged the pre-signed documents of agreements and Memorandums of Understanding for cooperation in various fields.

Federal cabinet members, Chief of the Army Staff General Asim Munir and members of the UAE delegation were also present.

Abu Dhabi's crown



prince later met PM Shehbaz and discussed matters of bilateral interest. Welcoming the crown prince, PM Shehbaz reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to further strengthen its historic and fraternal bonds with the UAE.

Recalling his meeting with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi earlier this month, Shehbaz said that it was a matter of huge satisfaction that the two countries were now working more closely than ever before to transform their excellent political ties into a mutually beneficial economic partnership.

PML-N GB Delegation Meets Advisor to the PM Rana Sanaullah

AYESHA REHAN

ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) from Gilgit-Baltistan met with the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs, Rana Sanaullah. The meeting focused on government reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan, good governance, development projects, and upcoming elections. Rana Sanaullah emphasized that PML-N is committed to ensuring good governance in Gilgit-Baltistan and prioritizes public welfare. He stated

that development projects should align with the party's political vision to ensure sustainable progress. He assured the delegation that all administrative concerns regarding Gilgit-Baltistan would be addressed appropriately. He also affirmed that PML-N would contest the upcoming elections with full strength and that party tickets would be awarded strictly on merit. Rana Sanaullah urged party workers to maintain their trust in the leadership, assuring them that their efforts and dedication would not go unnoticed.

Ayaz Sadiq highlights role of Parliaments in strengthening Pakistan-Hungary ties

SAMRA ATHAR

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Thursday underscored the critical role of parliaments in fostering people-centric and mutually beneficial relations between Pakistan and Hungary.

According to a message received from Budapest, Hungary, he made these remarks during a meeting with Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly.

Upon his arrival at the Hungarian Parliament, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq received a warm welcome from his Hungarian coun-

terpart, alongside Bela Fazekas, Co-Chairman of the Hungary-Pakistan Friendship Group, and other senior officials. Speaker László Kövér termed the visit a historic occasion, marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Hungary.

During formal discussions, the Speaker briefed his Hungarian counterpart on key challenges faced by Pakistan, including its contributions to the global fight against terrorism, the economic impact of climate change, and the influx of 4.6 million Afghan refugees.

He also highlighted



Pakistan's parliamentary initiatives addressing the rights and welfare of women, children, and marginalized communities. Emphasizing the responsibility of the global parliamentary community, Ayaz Sadiq stated that lawmakers must remain passive observers while their people endure the consequences of global recession, escalating

conflicts in Ukraine, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Gaza, as well as emerging threats such as fake news and the unchecked spread of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

He identified AI as a new global challenge, warning that its misuse could fuel discord, misinformation, and social unrest. He urged parliamentarians to address this challenge by ensuring the responsible and ethical use of technology for public welfare.

He also commended the Prime Minister of Hungary for maintaining a neutral stance on the

Ukraine war, fostering relations with China and Russia, and leading Hungary to become the only EU country to join the Belt, One Road Initiative.

During the meeting, Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq handed over a letter from Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, addressed to Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, inviting him to visit Pakistan.

The of Hungary received the letter with appreciation and expressed hope for more frequent high-level bilateral visits.

Pak forces gives befitting response to India's aggression on Feb 27, 2019; Muqam

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions and Kashmir as well as Gilgit-Baltistan Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Thursday said that Pakistani Armed force had given a befitting response to the India's aggression on this day six years ago and bravery of our security forces were highly praised in world.

In a message on completion of six years of Operation Swift Retort, Engr Amir Muqam said

that India has been given clear message that Pakistan knew about its borders and security of its borders.

Pakistan's desire that Pakistan should not be considered as weakness, and the entire Pakistani nation was standing with their armed forces.

Engr Amir Muqam said that like the past Pakistani Air Force has again proved its power against the enemy and the entire Pakistani nation are proud of bravery of their armed forces.

Russian Federation has invited PM Shahbaz Sharif to participate at 16th Int'l Economic Forum

KOMAL BUTT

ISLAMABAD: Russian Federation has invited Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahbaz Sharif to participate at 16th International Economic Forum "Russia Islamic World: Kazan Forum", scheduled to be held from 13 to 18 May in the Kazan capital of Tatarstan, offered immense opportunities for the commercial and socio-cultural interactions between Pakistan and Russia. According to the sources, Russian authorities has dispatched the invitation to the Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and looking forward to receive him

at the Forum. The aim of the forum is to strengthen trade and economic, scientific and technical, educational, social and cultural ties between the Russian Federation and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries. Being an important member of the OIC, Pakistan has markedly increased their interaction with Russia. The rapprochement of the sides will continue at the Kazan Forum, an important occasion for the participants will be the interaction between Russia and Pakistan. The KazanForum 2025 programme includes more



than 100 sessions and events on the following topics: international cooperation, business, Islamic finance and Halal industry, transport and logistics, science and technology, IT, industry, construction, medicine, education, tourism, culture, media industry and others. One of the main events of KazanForum 2025 will be the first ever congress of OIC Ministers of Culture in the history of Russia. The event will take place in the city of Kazan, which has been appointed the Cultural Capital of the Islamic World in 2026, a decision made in Jeddah in February 2025 by the Culture Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries. No less important event of the KazanForum 2025 business programme will be the annual international conference "AOOIF" on the theme: "Islamic Finance and Investment: Promoting Sustainable Development and Global Partnership",

which will also be held in Russia for the first time. Also in the KazanForum 2025 programme: a meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the participating countries and the Agreement on the North-South International Transport Corridor, the Conference on the development of Transport Logistics Potential of the Participating Countries, the second international real estate exhibition International Property Market 2025, the International Forum of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Russia Halal Expo.

Int'l investors meet Sardar Awais Leghari, discuss power sector reforms

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: A group of international investors, including representatives from K Trade, Barings, Fedy, Ashmore, and Jefferies, met with Federal Minister for Power Division, Sardar Awais Leghari here on Thursday. During the meeting, Minister Awais Leghari emphasized the importance of power sector reforms for the country's economic growth. Discussions centered around the privatization of power distribution companies, smart metering, and the government's policy on smart

grids and electric vehicles, according to the spokesperson of the power division. The Minister also apprised the delegation about the steps taken to address the growing circular debt in the sector and expressed his commitment to controlling it in the future.

He reassured the delegation that efforts would be made to reduce electricity tariffs to support industrial growth. The investor group acknowledged the significance of the government's reforms in improving the power sector and boosting the economy.

Pakistan marks 6th anniversary of Operation Swift Retort

HUMA REHAN

RAWALPINDI: The sixth anniversary of Operation Swift Retort was commemorated on Thursday to pay tribute to the valiant Armed Forces of Pakistan for demonstrating their resilience and resolve against Indian attempts to carry out a misadventure.

On February 27, 2019, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) successfully thwarted a border violation by shooting down two Indian fighter jets. During this operation, an Indian pilot, Abhinandan, was also captured. Meanwhile, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) has released a song 'Dushmana Sun' on the occasion of six years of Operation Swift Retort.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has paid tribute to the courage, professionalism and spirit of sacrifice of the Pakistani Armed Forces on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of Operation Swift Retort.

In his message on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of Operation Swift Retort, the prime minister said that six years ago, on this day in 2019, the Pakistan Air Force sent a clear message to the enemy that Pakistan is fully capable of protecting its borders.

The prime minister said by giving a befitting reply to India's aggression in the region, country's armed forces proved that its soldiers are always ready for the security of Pakistan. The prime minister



messages the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Services Chiefs have paid tribute to the unwavering courage, professionalism, and sacrifices of Pakistan's Armed Forces on the occasion of the 6th anniversary of Operation Swift Retort. According to ISPR, Operation Swift Retort was a resolute and measured response to India's unwarranted aggression, reaffirming

Pakistan's unyielding commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

They reiterated their steadfast commitment to ensuring Pakistan's national security and stability while continuing efforts to foster regional peace. They reaffirmed that Pakistan's Armed Forces remain ever vigilant and fully prepared to counter any threat to the nation, upholding the trust and confidence reposed in them by the people of Pakistan.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi paying tribute to sons of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has said that Pakistani Shaheens had defeated the enemy on February 27, 2019.

In a message on completion of six years of Operation Swift Retort, Mohsin Naqvi said the brave sons of the Pakistan

Air Force gave a befitting response to the enemy's aggression. "We pay tribute to the Shaheens of the Pakistan Air Force, who are always ready to protect the pride of the beloved country," Mohsin Naqvi said.

Mohsin Naqvi said that the Pakistan Air Force demonstrated its professional capabilities and destroyed the enemy's evil intentions.

The Shaheens of the Pakistan Air Force humiliated the pride of the enemy's airpower, Mohsin Naqvi said. He said the Shaheens of Pakistan have created an indelible story of courage, bravery and heroism. Mohsin Naqvi

February 27 is a golden chapter in the history of the Pakistan Air Force, Mohsin Naqvi said.

remember the unparalleled services of the Shaheens of the Pakistan Air Force.

"We salute the unparalleled spirit of the brave sons of the Pakistan Air Force," Mohsin Naqvi said. He said Operation Swift Retort was a historic operation of the Pakistan Air Force in which Pakistan gave a prompt and effective response to the enemy for intruding into its airspace. Mohsin Naqvi said we are proud of the success of the PAF Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has said that on February 27, 2019, the Pakistan Army defended the country's borders by giving a befitting reply to the Indian incursion.

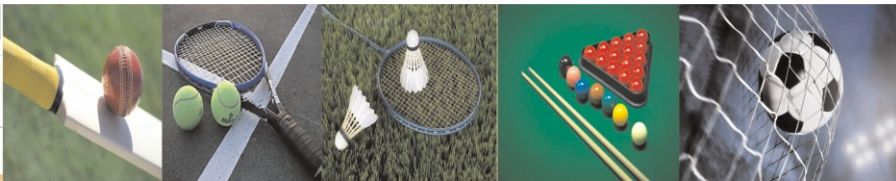
Today, on the completion of six years of Operation Swift Retort, Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz

Sadiq paid tribute to the armed forces. He said that the Pakistani nation is proud of its brave and talented forces.

National Assembly Speaker said that the Pakistani forces have made endless sacrifices for the defence of the homeland, and are on February 27, 2019, they proved that they are fully capable of protecting the country's borders.

He said that Operation Swift Retort, the Pakistani Air Force fully demonstrated its military capabilities and gave a befitting reply to Indian aggression.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq further said that the sacrifices of the Pakistani forces for the defence of the motherland will always be remembered, and the entire nation stands with its forces like a leaden wall.



Rain washes out Pakistan-Bangladesh match, hosts end Champions Trophy winless

ARIF MEHMOOD KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's last Champions Trophy group match with Bangladesh on Thursday was abandoned without a ball being bowled in Rawalpindi because of rain, ensuring the host country's title defence ended with a wet whimper.

Pakistan, who won the 50-over tournament in 2017, lost to New Zealand and arch-rivals India to finish bottom of the four sides in Group A.

Their last match had only pride at stake for both teams, with Bangladesh similarly out of the running for the semi-finals.

Pakistan's failure to advance beyond the group phase or even win a game was a huge letdown for a country hosting its first



major cricket tournament in three decades. "The expectations were very high but we didn't perform well and it is disappointing for us," Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan said. "We are upset and we are accepting that we didn't do well. Hopefully we will do more hard work and come back."

Like his counterpart, Bangladesh skipper

Najmul Hossain Shanto was disappointed they did not get to go out on a high. "We really wanted to play this match but can't do anything about the weather," he said.



high. "We really wanted to play this match but can't do anything about the weather," he said.

Pakistan finished fourth and last with one point, a position below Bangladesh, who also have one point but a better net run-rate.

Overnight rain in Rawalpindi continued on and off and despite several inspections by the umpires, no play was possible.

India and New Zealand progressed to the semi-finals from Group A. In Group B, South Africa, Australia and Afghanistan compete for the other two semi-final spots. England are out of contention.



DC Pakistan Sports Board Yasir Pirzada and President Pakistan Olympic Association Arif Saeed visited the competition venues along with the South Asian Olympic Committee delegates at Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad. The South Asian Games will be held in Pakistan from 23 January to 31 January 2026. Pakistan will host these games after a gap of 22 years.



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Aisam-ul-Haq Congratulates Mr. Zahoor Ahmed on His Appointment as Secretary IPC

SAMRA ATHAR

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, President of the Pakistan Tennis Federation-PTF, met with Mr. Zahoor Ahmed, Secretary of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination-IPC, to congratulate him on assuming office and discuss key initiatives for the growth and development of tennis in Pakistan. During the meeting, President-PTF briefed Secretary-IPC on the recent achievements of Pakistani players in national and international tournaments, the ongoing infrastructure development at the PTF Tennis Complex, and future plans for grassroots and high-performance programs. He highlighted the importance of government support in expanding training facilities, hosting international events, and providing financial assistance to promising young players. Mr. Zahoor Ahmed appreciated the efforts of the PTF under Aisam-ul-Haq's leadership and assured full cooperation from the Ministry of IPC in promoting tennis nationwide.



PTF under Aisam-ul-Haq's leadership and assured full cooperation from the Ministry of IPC in promoting tennis nationwide.

London Media Cricket Club Team visits Chamber

RIZWAN HAIDER

ISLAMABAD: The London Media Cricket Club Team, led by EC Member Shumaila Siddiqui, visited the Chamber and met with the President Mr. Nasir Qureshi, SVP Ch. Nasir and VP Abdul Rehman Siddiqui. Shumaila Siddiqui also serves as the Media Coordinator for the London Media Club (LMCC). This is the fifth season of LMCC, featuring an exciting tournament series. The matches begin in London, then continue in Dubai, followed by games in Pakistan with media teams from Islamabad and Lahore. This international tournament spans three countries, aiming to connect Pakistani media with global media networks and foster strong relationships.



strong relationships. Team manager & Owner of Urdu Point UK newspaper Tahir Chodhary, Team captain Chuliam Awan from 92 news and other international (uk) media club players and executives board members of ici had a great time together at ici. Beyond media collaboration, the event also serves as a platform to strengthen ties with both local and international business communities, paving the way for valuable business opportunities. Ultimately, this initiative contributes to Pakistan's stability and economic growth.

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Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi Honored with the Sports Icon Award at International Achievers Awards 2025

JAVED KHAN

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, President of the Pakistan Tennis Federation-PTF, has been honored with the prestigious Sports Icon Award at the International Achievers Awards 2025 (3rd Edition), organized by West World Events in Lahore. This recognition celebrates Mr. Aisam's outstanding contributions to sports, both on national and international platforms. As one of Pakistan's most accomplished tennis players and a dedicated sports administrator, he has played a vital role in promoting tennis and inspiring future generations. The Sports Icon Award has previously been awarded to Jahanگیر Khan and Javed Miandad, two of Pakistan's greatest sporting legends. Mr. Aisam's inclusion in this distinguished list further solidifies his legacy as a pioneer in Pakistani tennis and a national sports ambassador.



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PFF Congress unanimously approves FIFA's constitutional amendments



KOMAL BUTT

ISLAMABAD: The newly elected Congress of the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) has overwhelmingly approved FIFA's proposed constitutional amendments in an Extraordinary Congress held in Lahore, a move seen as a step toward Pakistan's return to international football. The approval paves the way for the national team's participation in the AFC Asian Cup

Qualifiers, contingent on the expected lifting of FIFA's suspension. However, concerns remain over the long-term governance structure and the effectiveness of these reforms in ensuring stability within Pakistan football. A high-profile delegation from FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) attended the meeting, including Vahid Kardany, AFC Deputy General Secretary; Rolf Tanner, FIFA's Head of MA Governance; Purushottam Kattel, Head of AFC's South Asia Unit; Sonam Jigmi, Senior Manager of AFC South Asia Unit; and Dinesh De Silva, Manager of AFC South Asia Unit. The meeting was chaired by PFF President and Normalization Committee (NC) Chairman Saud Azim Hashimi, alongside NC members Muhammad Shahid Niaz Khokhar and Harris Azmat. While AFC Deputy General Secretary Vahid Kardany commended the Congress members for their commitment to reform, critics argue that repeated external interventions and governance disputes have historically hindered Pakistan football's progress. The effectiveness of these amendments in bringing lasting institutional stability remains to be seen.



Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium has covered the wicket due to rain before the match between Pakistan and Bangladesh while the flag of Pakistan and Bangladesh was hoisted. Photo by Pervez Mughal

Experts, politicians express diverse views on creating more provinces, SDPI

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The experts on federalism, democracy, and devolution Thursday expressed diverse views on creating more provinces. Those who favoured creating more smaller provinces were of the view that the new provinces should be based on language, culture, and other local dynamics instead of administrative lines. They were speaking at a roundtable discussion on "Political Economy of Administrative Restructuring" organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). To kick off the discussion on the subject, Mian Muhammad Amir, noted

educationist and media outlet head, presented his well thought out paper titled "Pakistan 1947-2025: Why it continues to Fail its People?". He said devolution in Pakistan is limited to five capitals (one federal and four provincial). Rest of the country did not benefit being out of sight of the provincial capitals so there is a dire need to create more smaller provinces at the division levels along administrative lines. This will benefit the people across Pakistan. However, there was a consensus among the diverse speakers that service delivery in the country is poor so there is a need to strengthen local government. Mian Amir said we are reluctant to speak on this subject, otherwise, this could have been the most popular decision liked by the people of Pakistan. According to his paper,



smaller manageable provinces will help train leadership from the grassroots and at least from the middle class. He warned that 30 million children are out of schools, and we are creating a lot of unemployed youth. Quoting from the experiences of creating new provinces by various countries, he argued that only smaller provinces seemed viable. He thanked SDPI for initiating the debate on his paper and on the overall subject. PPP Senator (R)

Farhatullah Babar said as was done by the Punjab Assembly on Seraiki provinces. Instead of asking for new smaller provinces, there is a need to empower local governments so that the people can benefit from these governments at local levels. He agreed to Mian Amir's concern regarding justice, no human security, and weak services delivery which, he added, can be improved through a robust local government system. Former Punjab minister Mian Imran

Massod said that our politicians should not be afraid of such academic debates on issues of public interest. Supporting the ideas of smaller provinces, he said that since the 18th Amendment, devolution to provinces have been done and it created no harm to the federation. Similarly, more provinces may not affect federal structure. He said if consensus evolved among all players, we could do another constitutional amendment paving ways for new provinces. We should take this discourse positively as an administrative measure. MQM Leader Syed Haider Abbas Rizvi was of the view that Pakistan has been suffering from administrative ills instead of economic crisis. If we make new provinces along administrative lines, we can solve our socio-economic and political issues. He said they believe in devolution of powers. Under the 18th Amendment, the power was devolved from federation to the provinces which further should go down to MCs and UC levels. Like the national finance commission awards, there should be provincial commission awards to empower local governments. Dr Shahid Kadir, former Finance Minister, Panjab, said we must develop our democracy in true federal spirit to serve the people better in terms of service delivery. Former federal Secretary Syed Kaleem Imam called for taking the debate to the public to get their opinion on the subject. Dr Nadeem ul Haq called for reducing the burden of expenses of the governments by slashing number of the ministers and ministries and reducing expenses of the government's S e n i o r Journalist Zahid Hussain said Pakistan's system is based on state centralism. There is a need to set up a strong local government system and to reconstruct the provinces to deliver to the people. Advocate Riasat Ali Azad called for independence of judiciary, rule of law, and people legislation in the country. He was of the view that the 26th Amendment in the constitution has made the judiciary redundant. Human Rights Lawyer Col (Retd) Inamur Rehman said that nothing could be hidden in the era of social media. Tell the people about their rights and there could be a referendum on the issue of creating more provinces. Shahid Zaheer, a former bureaucrat suggested to bridge the gap between the people and policy makers to improve trust level so that people contribute taxes willingly.

Heavy rain and important conversation under the umbrella

REPORT/WAJIHA TAMSEEL MIRZA

ISLAMABAD: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan arrived in Pakistan today, February 27, 2025, for his first official visit. He was warmly received at Rawalpindi's Nur Khan Airbase by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, and first Lady Aseefa Bhutto-Zardari, among other officials. Following his arrival, the Crown Prince pro-



ceeded to the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad, where he

was accorded a guard of honour by a contingent of the Pakistan Armed Forces. The national anthems of both countries were played, and a cultural troupe representing all four provinces performed to mark the occasion. During this one-day official visit, discussions are expected to focus on enhancing investment and economic cooperation between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. The two nations are anticipated to sign several agreements and

memorandums of understanding to strengthen their bilateral ties further. This visit underscores the deep-rooted fraternal relationship between Pakistan and the UAE, reflecting their shared commitment to bolstering economic partnerships and exploring new avenues for collaboration. Moreover in the presence of heavy rain, the President and the Prime Minister welcomed the Crown Prince with umbrellas in their hands. Even in heavy rain and harsh weather, he was enthusiastically welcomed.

CDA union to resist Capital Hospital's Privatisation

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) Mazdoor Union has announced to resist the move to privatise the Capital Hospital. General Secretary of the Union Chaudhry Mohammad Yasin, President Aurangzeb Khan and other office-bearers said that the Capital Hospital was a valuable asset of the employees and those who think of its privatisation

should be held accountable. In this regard, the CDA Mazdoor Union has asked the government to have informed the CDA Chairman, Member Administration, Executive Director Capital Hospital and the administration and now they have sent a letter again, requesting them to immediately halt the privatization of the hospital and consult with the institution's largest stakeholder, the CBA Union. "The purpose of building the hospital is to provide treatment facilities to the employees and their families of the organization but the CDA management wants to outsource the hospital and in this regard the current CBA union of the institution has not been taken into confidence and the committed has been constituted without our consent as required by law," the letter stated.

Opinion

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America's Afghan congeries

Khurram Dastgir-Khan

In the annals of warfare and strategy, it would be difficult to find a tale of more woe than America's Second Afghan War. What to call the US presence in Afghanistan during the first two decades of the twenty-first century: occupation, invasion, intervention, nation-building, counter-terrorism war? All of the above.

Who was the enemy, if the ostensible nemesis for twenty years was handed over billions of dollars-worth of US weapons upon departure? Amidst the lies and the fog of war spanning a score of years, only one minuscule part of the US government remained steadfast on the side of facts: Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR). Its latest quarterly report was published at the end of January 2025. It is eye-opening.

"Since US forces withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, the United States has been the largest donor to the Afghan people," begins the report. "The United States has appropriated or otherwise made available more than \$21.36 billion in assistance to Afghanistan and to Afghan refugees." Most of this huge number was spent inside the US to resettle Afghans and to tie expensive loose ends remaining from private contractors.

What boggles the mind is \$2.63 billion in humanitarian assistance and \$58 billion in development assistance that the US has provided to the Taliban regime since the withdrawal on August 15, 2021. That is \$67 million per month for four years running. Trunks full of cash dollars, a la the First Afghan War (1879-89), are ostensibly still being delivered.

The \$21.36 billion for Afghanistan includes \$3.50 billion in Afghan central bank assets previously frozen in the US that the US government transferred to a Swiss-based 'Fund for the Afghan People'. "Although no disbursements to benefit the Afghan people have yet been made," the report informs, "the Fund is intended to protect macro financial stability on behalf of the Afghan people that could, in the long-term, include recapitalis-

ing Afghanistan's central bank should the conditions materialise, keep Afghanistan current on debt payments to international financial institutions to preserve its eligibility for development assistance, and pay for critically needed imported goods." This Fund's purposes may be mysterious, but its balance is not: with interest accrued it stood at \$3.94 billion as of December 31, 2024.

The report insists that the Afghan-Taliban war on the US Specially Designated Global Terrorist list and thus subject to sanctions, limiting their access to foreign funds. In the very next sentence, however, we are informed that, since September 2021, the US government has authorised a series of licences allowing for the provision of humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan "while maintaining sanctions against the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other terror entities".

The facade is that the US implements its funding through NGOs, international organisations, or other third parties, minimising benefit to the Taliban. The truth behind the facade: the US has been propping up the Afghan Taliban government through mad rubrics.

The purpose of this succour and its future directions should be subject to intense analysis in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. SIGAR's latest report to the US Congress is loaded with statistics in detail as do all its previous instalments. What and SIGAR reports do not provide are answers to questions such as "How had the war ended into a stalemate with no realistic prospect for an enduring victory?" What happened to the much-touted and mega-hyped COIN (counterinsurgency)? Why did the longest war in US history end in ignominy for the hyperpower? A partial answer is, however, provided intriguingly by SIGAR in a different context. As journalist Craig Whitlock recounts in "The Afghanistan Papers" published by the Washington Post in 2021, SIGAR staffers interviewed during 2014-18 many officials who served during the Bush and Obama years to try to document "Lessons Learned". These interviews are a

Advancing uncertainty

Khurram Husain

The scale is now awe-inspiring. The speed with which the world is changing is overtaking many analytical abilities.

A single warning now needs to be played on repeat until it seeps into the minds of Pakistan's power elites: the world you relied on to underwrite your dysfunctions and bailouts is now ending, and it is ending very fast indeed.

Who among us can say with total confidence that the IMF and its affiliated institutions such as the World Bank will even exist after five years? There are the institutions, along with the larger group of multilateral bodies and congressional trade regimes that have kept Pakistan afloat for the better part of the last 50 years.

Without them, Pakistan will not be able to pay the bills for its overdeveloped state apparatus and its consumption-driven economy built on outmoded technology. In short, without these entities, the country sinks into financial and economic non-viability. This is not a minor point. Its external sector dysfunction is the biggest stone in Pakistan's shoes. And there is now massive uncertainty whether the country will continue receiving the bailouts and reverse-chits it has been getting almost non-stop for more than a quarter century. Minus these bailouts and close monitoring of its economic decisions, the country sinks into non-viability.

Today, many employees of the UN, IMF, the World Bank and all other bodies that were part of the architecture of the US-led global order that emerged after World War II are themselves wondering whether their employment is as safe as the long term as the houses were when they joined these organisations. The US-led global order is rapidly being dismantled and it is no longer possible to say how much of it will exist in five years.

Who can say with total confidence that the IMF and its affiliated institutions will even exist after five years? It now sounds like pious incantations to talk about structural reforms. Let's model our assessments on the assumption that these are never going to happen.

Creating a privatisation or two in the near future, there is not going to be anything that resembles broadening of the tax base or the export base in the near future, nor are government expenditures going to be reduced sharply. Let's assume we have to navigate the choppy waters ahead without these reforms. What does that effort look like? Technology provides some answers. Digitisation of payments can be a promising way to promote formalisation of the economy. This avenue was not available until recent years but it is now. In India, some research suggests the size of the informal economy shrank from 52 per cent of the total economy in 2006, the year they adopted the Universal Payment Interface, to less than 40pc by 2022, driven in large part by growing formalisation as small business and retail transactions moved to digital payments instead.

Courtesy Dawn

Opposition's grand alliance

There may be somewhat of a lull in the political realm these days but that seems to be a temporary respite for political observers who may soon get busy reading the opposition's grand alliance plans given the conversation on the first day of the two-day Grand Alliance Conference in Islamabad put together by the country's political opposition. Yet, political analysts are sceptical about its effectiveness, largely due to the PTI's inconsistent strategy. The party's habit of shifting stances has cost it credibility, weakening its ability to mount substantial pressure on the government. If the PTI had continued the dialogue, it could have exposed the government's alleged non-seriousness, gaining public sympathy. Instead, the abrupt withdrawal only showcased the party's own lack of commitment. Former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's candid criticism on the first day of the conference on Wednesday, Feb 26, targeted what he said was the ruling coalition's suppression of democracy and the dismantling of the judicial system. His rebuke of his former party, the PML-N, and the PPP for abandoning their principles may strike a chord with those disillusioned with the political status quo.

profoundly futile version of what happened in Vietnam six decades ago.

"US officials confessed that the war plans had fatal flaws and that Washington had wasted billions of dollars trying to remake Afghanistan into a modern nation", writes Whitlock. "US government's botched attempts to curtail runaway corruption, build a competent Afghan army and police force, and put a dent in Afghanistan's thriving opium trade. Astonishingly, commanding generals admitted that they had tried to fight the war without a functional strategy."

Whitlock supplemented the interviews with many additional sources, released documents, and additional interviews. The conclusion is stark: "running throughout were torrents of criticism that refuted the official narrative of the war, from its earliest days through the start of the Trump administration. US officials had repeatedly lied to the public about what was happening in Afghanistan, just as they had in Vietnam."

SIGAR's reports and interviews did not alter the course of the war. But the documents collectively will form one of the objective bases on which future histories of the Second Afghan War will be written. Until that is written, one is served better by Carter Malkasian's 'War Come to Garmser', Wesley Morgan's 'A Hard Place', Rajiv Chandrasekaran's 'Little America', Jonathan Stebbins' 'The Ghosts of Afghanistan', and most recently, Sune Rasmussen's 'Twenty Years'.

Brown University's Watson Institute has made first approximations of the cost of America's Afghan catastrophe. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, 243,000 people died as a direct result of this war.

These figures do not include deaths caused by disease, loss of access to food, water, infrastructure, and/or other indirect consequences of the war. Unbundling the death figures corrects the perspective of the 276,000 dead in Afghanistan, 2324 were US military, six were American civilians, and 4007 were US contractors. The rest were Afghans.

Courtesy The News

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President Zardari confers Nishan-i-Pakistan award on Abu Dhabi Crown Prince

ARSHAD MALIK

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday conferred the Award of Nishan-i-Pakistan upon Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in recognition of his exceptional services and unwavering support for Pakistan.

The top civilian award was conferred at a special investiture ceremony held at the Alwan-e-Sadr and attended by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, federal ministers, diplomats, and senior government officials.

During the ceremony, it was highlighted that Crown Prince of

Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan is a distinguished leader whose forward thinking vision has played the pivotal role in strengthening the longstanding and fraternal relations between UAE and Pakistan. Sheikh Khalid has played significant role in the UAE's progress. As Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, he has overseen transformative initiatives across various sectors. His visionary leadership has led to advancement in governance, technology, infrastructure and social development, and enhancing the overall quality of lives for the UAE citizens and residents, thus reinforcing the UAE's position as a global leader in innova-

tion and development. On the humanitarian front, Sheikh Khalid has demonstrated a profound commitment to global causes. He has led the numerous humanitarian initiatives that provide vital support to the underprivileged communities. His approach to humanitarian efforts reflects UAE's vision of global solidarity and support. Sheikh Khalid is a dynamic leader who has been instrumental in promoting economic, trade and investment cooperation between Pakistan and UAE. His leadership facilitated the advancement of significant investment initiatives in Pakistan economy aimed at boosting key sectors such as infrastructure, energy, healthcare and technology thereby contributing immensely to Pakistan's socio-economic progress.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari conferring the award of Nishan-i-Pakistan upon the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Council, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed, at Alwan-e-Sadr.

Youth can play role in saving Pakistan CDs: Sanaullah Ghumman

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The spread of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) has become a big problem in the world as well as in Pakistan, is one of the major reasons for this is unhealthy food, which contains excess sugar, salt and trans-fat. We will have to work on a war footing to prevent them. Ultra-processed foods are a major cause of the spread of non-communicable diseases, their excessive consumption has greatly increased the risks of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, blood pressure and other life-threatening conditions. Sweetened beverages, dairy desserts, candies, and baked goods are the main sources of added sugar. These products, which are devoid of essential nutrients and fiber, deprive our body of the components that are important for optimal health. An awareness session was organized by the



Pakistan National Heart Association (PNAH) at the University of Haripur (UOH) in Haripur to engage the youth in the campaign to prevent unhealthy food. Addressing the session, Mr. Sanaullah Ghumman, General Secretary of PNAH, stressed the need to take urgent steps to reduce the consumption of ultra-processed products. Citing the International Diabetes Federation, he revealed that diabetes and its complications kill about 1,100 people in Pakistan every day. Unhealthy diets play a major role in heart diseases, obesity, diabetes, kidney failure, and other

Minimum Nisab amount fixed for Zakat ahead of Ramadan

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The government has announced fixation of the minimum amount of Nisab for Zakat which is Rs179,689 for the year 1445-1446 AH.

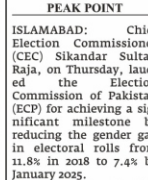
According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, the Administrator General Zakat has notified the Nisab at Rs179,689 for the Zakat year 1445-46 AH. No deduction of Zakat at source shall be made, in case the amount standing to the credit of an account in respect of the first mentioned in column 2 of Serial No.1 of the first schedule of Zakat and Ushr Ordinance, 1980, is less than Rs179,689 on the first day of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak, 1446 AH. Ramadan has already been notified as the "Deduction date" likely to fall on 1st or 2nd March 2025 (subject to appearance of the moon) for the deduction of Zakat from Saving and Loss Sharing

Electoral gender gap shrinks to 7.4% from 11.8% in seven years:CEC

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, on Thursday, lauded the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for achieving a significant milestone by reducing the gender gap in electoral rolls from 11.8% in 2018 to 7.4% by January 2025.

Inaugurating the fifth phase of inclusive women CNIC/voter registration campaign on International Women's Day 2025, alongside all four Election Commission members, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Raja, said this accomplishment highlights the ECP's ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and gender equality in the electoral process. The campaign's progress as a testament to the ECP's relentless efforts. Sikandar Sultan Raja highlighted the Election Commission's comprehensive approach to further narrowing the gender gap in electoral rolls, calling it a shared responsibility of the ECP and NADRA, not just a promotional campaign. He praised the dedication of the team and partners for their tireless responsibility of the ECP and NADRA, not just a promotional campaign. He praised the dedication of the team and partners for their tireless responsibility of the ECP and NADRA, not just a promotional campaign.



Accounts and other similar accounts having credit balance of Rs179,689 at the rate of 2.50 percent. No Zakat will be deducted from current Accounts. All the Zakat Collection and Controlling Agencies (ZCCAs) are requested to deduct the Zakat accordingly. A copy of return of Form CZ-08 (A&B) may please be provided to the Ministry immediately after depositing Zakat in Central Zakat Account No. CZ-08 being maintained with the State Bank of Pakistan. Zakat applies to the savings accounts and products maintained by banks, asset management companies, and other financial entities. Meanwhile, customers who have submitted Zakat exemption certificates will not have any deductions. The amount under Nisab has increased this year from the previous year's Rs135,179.



Japan provides grant to support education development in Islamabad's Tarnol area

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan, under its Grant Assistance for Crossroads Human Security Projects (GGP) Program, has approved a grant of USD 44.02 (approximately Rs12.2 million) to support a local non-governmental organization (NGO) in improving educational infrastructure in Tarnol, Islamabad.

A grant contract was signed on Thursday between Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi, and a representative of the Community Services Program (CSP) at the Embassy of Japan. CSP, which has been actively working in the



fields of education, health, and infrastructure for the past 15 years, will use the funds to construct a school building and install furniture in village Ramzanija, Tarnol. The project will expand the school's capacity, providing a better learning environment for children from pre-school to 5th grade, accommodating both boys and girls. The new school building is expected to be completed by February 2026. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Ambassador Akamatsu Shuichi highlighted Japan's commitment to education as a driver of national prosperity, citing Japan's own experience of economic growth through investment in education.

PM's climate aide, for strong focus on urban forests to tackle environmental challenges

MOHSIN ALI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam attended a tree plantation event aimed at planting one hundred thousand trees, hosted jointly by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Nestlé Pakistan here on Thursday. During her address at the event, Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam emphasized the critical importance of addressing environmental quality and increasing biodiversity. "Urban afforestation enhances biodiversity, providing

combating climate change, and the importance of urban forests cannot be overstated." She highlighted the rapid, unprecedented expansion of cities, which leads to pollution, rising temperatures, and the loss of green spaces. Romina described the tree plantation initiative as a "ray of hope," demonstrating that integrating trees into urban landscapes can mitigate the effects of heat, improve air quality, and increase biodiversity. "Urban afforestation enhances biodiversity, providing

habitat for wildlife and improving the overall ecological health of urban areas. It offers a natural, sustainable solution to the climate crisis with long-term benefits for both the environment and public health," she added. Romina underscored that urban afforestation plays a crucial role in combating climate change by reducing carbon emissions and mitigating its harmful effects. She emphasized that as cities continue to grow, incorporating more green spaces, including urban forests, is essential to offsetting the environmental impact of urbanization. She further acknowledged the significant steps being taken by the Vao nations in advancing urban afforestation as a strategy to mitigate the impacts of climate change. "Vao countries, such as Bangladesh, are incorporating afforestation initiatives in urban planning to combat flooding and rising sea levels," she said. The Vao consists of 58 nations most affected by climate change, advocating for stronger climate action and financial support.

KP gov announces Ramadan, Eid packages for more than one million families

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on Thursday announced the distribution of Ramadan and Eid packages for this year as well. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that the provincial government had decided to provide a Ramadan and Eid packages again this year, which would be given to deserving families in the province, adding that each deserving family would be provided with Rs10,000. He stated that the relief package would be provided to more than 1 million deserving families in the province.

He further mentioned that the relief package would be distributed to the deserving families through the banks and EasyPaiza before the 15th of Ramadan, and the government would bear any additional transfer charges to ensure that the relief package be delivered to the deserving individuals. Saif went on to say that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur had directed that the relief package be delivered to the deserving individuals with complete transparency. He further mentioned that the relief package would be distributed to the deserving families through the banks and EasyPaiza before the 15th of Ramadan, and the government would bear any additional transfer charges to ensure that the relief package be delivered to the deserving individuals. Saif went on to say that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur had directed that the relief package be delivered to the deserving individuals with complete transparency.

Pakistan's International-Standard Fashion Ramp Walk Set to Dazzle Islamabad

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The federal capital is set to witness an extraordinary display of fashion and glamour as "Runway of Heart - The Fashion Walk" takes center stage on February 26, 2025. This grand event, organized by VIP Event Management under Sam Rajput's company, Sam Events and Productions will take place at E-Eleven, Islamabad, from 6 PM to 9 PM. Bringing together a blend of international models and renowned Pakistani designers, the fashion walk promises to showcase cutting-edge designs and trends that define the industry. With participation from top-tier brands and fashion icons, the event aims to set new benchmarks for the country's fashion landscape. Speaking about the upcoming event, Sam Rajput stated, "Runway of Heart is not just a fashion event; it's a celebration of creativity, culture, and global fashion excellence. We are excited to bring an international-standard ramp walk to Pakistan and provide a platform for designers and models to shine on a grand scale. The fashion extravaganza is expected to attract industry professionals, celebrities, influencers, and fashion enthusiasts, making it a must-attend event for anyone passionate about style and innovation."



EMPOWER HER
EMPOWER HER EMPOWER PAKISTAN
WOMEN LEADERS CONFERENCE

ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam is speaking at a conference titled "Empowerment Her" organized by the Center for Pakistan and International Relations (COPAIR).