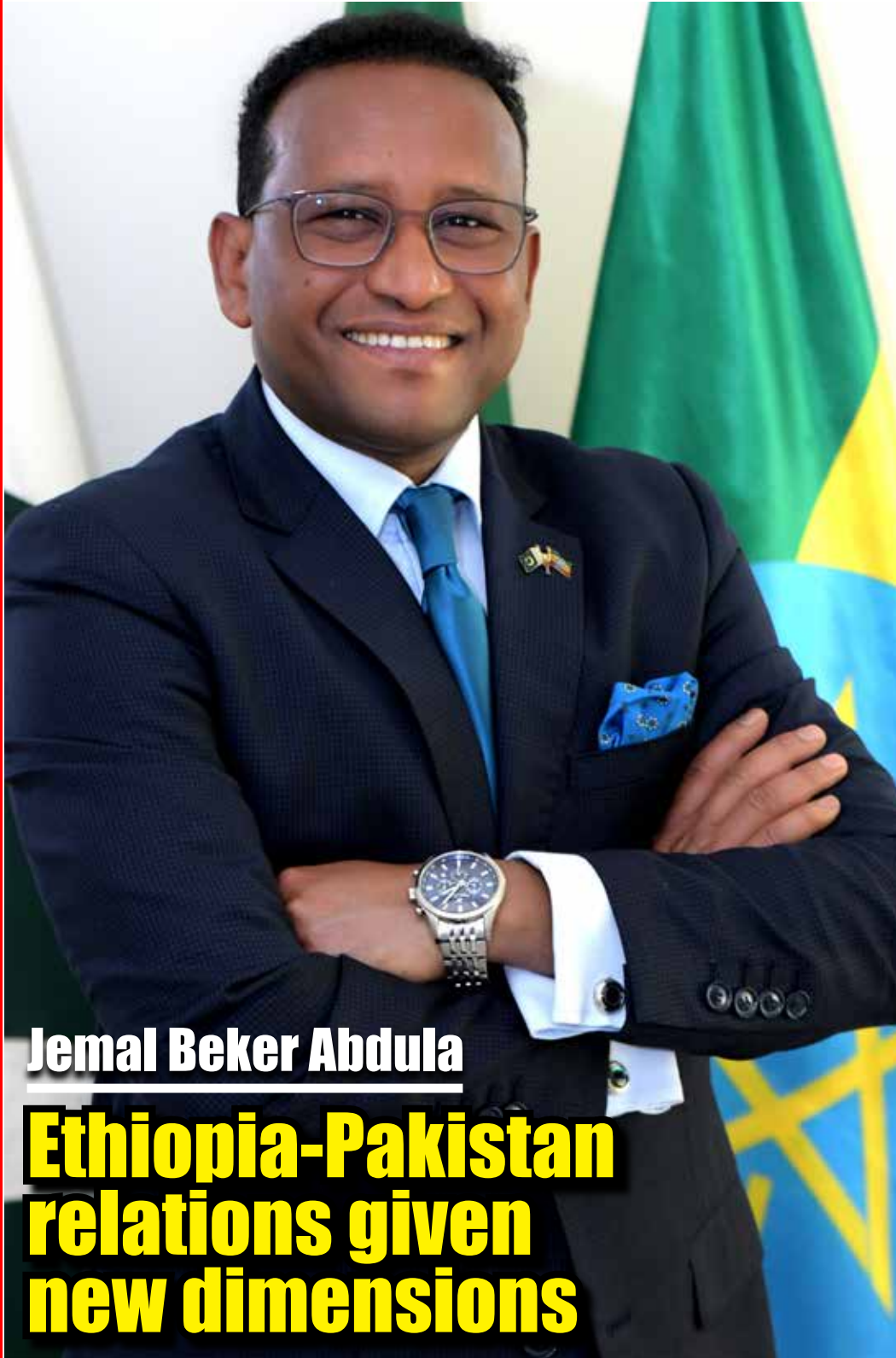


CENTRELINE

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine



Jemal Beker Abdula

**Ethiopia-Pakistan
relations given
new dimensions**



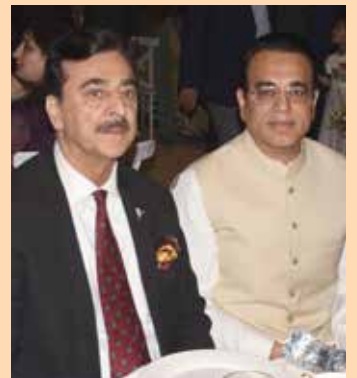
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Group hosts
Iftar dinner**

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Carnival for a Cause Raises Funds for Underprivileged Students

Carnival for a Cause conducted by **Red Maple** brought the community together for a fun-filled day dedicated to supporting **Rishma Community School**, an institution committed to educating underprivileged students. The event featured games, performances, and food stalls, offering entertainment while ensuring that all proceeds went toward enhancing education and resources for the school. With strong community participation, the carnival successfully blended joy with generosity, leaving a lasting impact on young learners.

Shooting for a Cause



ISLAMABAD: Khazar Farhadov, wife of the Ambassador of Azerbaijan, actively participated in Carnival for a Cause, an event hosted by Red Maple Montessori.



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The background of the advertisement is a photograph of a table set with various Asian dishes. There are several white bowls containing different types of food: one with noodles, one with a meat and vegetable stir-fry, one with a dark sauce and meat, one with rice, and one with a vegetable stir-fry. A glass of green juice is also visible. The table is decorated with white flowers and green leaves. The text "Asian Wok by MONAL" is overlaid on the top part of the image.

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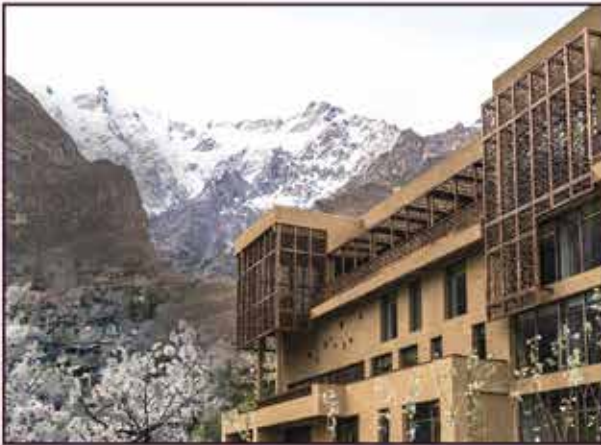
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Relief measures announced by the govt



P RIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced a much-anticipated relief package for both domestic and industrial electricity consumers, aiming to provide financial respite amid rising inflation and economic pressures. The move has been welcomed by both business communities and the general public, as it is expected to lower operational costs for industries and ease the burden on household budgets. While the initiative is being largely appreciated, some experts and economic analysts argue that there was considerable room for a more substantial reduction in electricity tariffs. They contend that the government could have utilized available financial buffers and reforms to provide even greater relief. However, given the challenges in the power sector—such as inefficiencies, circular debt, and distribution losses—policymakers have adopted a cautious approach to ensure sustainability. While unveiling the package, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasized the urgent need to address systemic issues in the power sector, particularly electricity theft, which contributes significantly to revenue losses and inefficiencies. He reiterated that eliminating power pilferage and enforcing stricter controls would not only reduce losses but also create the fiscal space necessary for further reductions in tariffs.

The prime minister further assured consumers that the government is committed to making energy more affordable and sustainable. He hinted at the possibility of additional tariff reductions in the near future, subject to improvements in power sector management and economic conditions. With this announcement, the government aims to strike a balance between providing relief to consumers and maintaining financial stability in the energy sector. As implementation unfolds, all eyes will be on the impact of this initiative on businesses, households, and Pakistan's broader economic landscape.

Despite recent developments, several pressing questions remain unanswered. The relief came only after the government decided to do away with the dormant power plants. Additionally, the government announced the cessation of capacity payments, primarily targeting state-owned power plants. However, it remains unclear whether this policy will extend to private power producers, particularly those operated by Chinese companies. At first glance, it appears that the measure will impact only government-owned independent power producers (IPPs). The issue of so-called "ghost power plants" that have not generated a single kilowatt of electricity yet received billions of rupees is a serious one. It raises fundamental concerns about accountability, governance, and the misuse of public funds. The critical questions remain: Will there be any action against these plants? Will an independent audit be conducted to determine the extent of financial losses and identify those responsible? It is evident that the burden does not lie solely with the Independent Power Producers (IPPs). The government machinery that facilitated these transactions must also be scrutinized. This situation suggests a deeper network of systemic failures, possibly involving regulatory bodies, policymakers, and oversight agencies that allowed such arrangements to persist.

To move forward, there needs to be a transparent and independent audit to trace where the funds went and how much was extracted from the public exchequer. If wrongdoing is confirmed, legal consequences should follow—not just for the IPPs but also for those within the government who enabled these transactions. Without meaningful action, public confidence in the power sector and government oversight will continue to erode.

Beyond the power sector, several other areas require immediate government attention. The continuous depreciation of Pakistan's currency against the US dollar is severely impacting imports of raw materials, affecting industries such as the newspaper sector. One does not need to be an Aristotle to recognize that the currency will only strengthen when exports increase. However, there appears to be no serious effort from the government to encourage businesses to boost exports. While high electricity tariffs have been a major obstacle, the recent rate cuts are unlikely to provide significant relief or drive export growth. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address the root causes and create a more export-friendly environment.

Chief Editor's Profile: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti is a career journalist. He started off as District Correspondent of Daily The Muslim in 1988 from Gujrat. Later he moved to Islamabad and joined Pakistan Observer as Sub-Editor / Op-ed Writer, in 1993. In 1995 he again moved to The Muslim as Sub-Editor and he left The Muslim in 1997 to join THE Nation as City Editor and Diplomatic Correspondent, where he remained till 2002. His association with the The News spans over three years from 2002 to 2005 as columnist. In 2005 Mr. Bhatti switched over to Khabrain Group as Columnist / Special Correspondent. In 2010 he was made Resident Editor of The Post, a sister publication of daily Khabrain. In 2010, he launched his own publication Centreline. He has authored two books on European Union. He also served in Pakistan Telecommunication Company (PTCL) as Media Advisor/ Director Communication. He launched Diplomatic News Agency (DNA) in 2012. In May 2020 he launched Pakistan's First & only Diplomatic Newspaper Daily Islamabad POST.

Jemal Beker Abdula

Ethiopia-Pakistan relations given new dimensions

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Ambassador of Ethiopia to Pakistan Jemal Beker Abdula gave an exclusive interview to CENTRELINE, Daily Islamabad POST and Diplomatic News Agency (DNA). Here are excerpts from his interview

1: Could you share insights into your journey as a diplomat/politician and how it led you to your current role as the Ethiopian ambassador to Pakistan?

Let me say it with great humility that my deep passion for my country and diverse experiences has made my journey to becoming Ethiopia's Ambassador to Pakistan a fascinating and fulfilling one. It all began in 2003, fresh out of university, with a deep commitment to education. Those four years spent as an educator were truly formative, shaping my understanding of human potential and the power of knowledge. The classroom was my first diplomatic arena, where I honed my skills in communication, understanding diverse perspectives, and fostering growth. But the call to serve my country on a larger

scale motivated me to the foreign services in 2010. In a first, I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) after getting six months diplomatic training, initiating my journey as an International Organization Officer that further launched me into a dynamic path where I had both the honor and privilege of serving in various capacities – from consular services and public diplomacy to the Director for Middle East. Each role presented unique challenges and opportunities, allowing me to develop a comprehensive understanding of international relations. My dedication and proactive approach didn't go unnoticed. Soon, I was entrusted with the crucial task of establishing Ethiopia's Embassy in Canberra, Australia, as

Minister Counsellor for Economic Diplomacy. Laying the groundwork for a new diplomatic mission was incredibly rewarding. It demanded strategic thinking, resourcefulness, and a proper skill for building bridges between nations.

This experience stimulated a passion into me for pioneering new frontiers. So, when I was appointed State Minister of Innovation and Technology in 2018 upon returning from Australia, I got the chance to drive transformative change. I along with my team spearheaded initiatives like technological solutions for agriculture, industry, office services, startups, and fintech, modernizing government operations and fostering a culture of innovation and creativity. Perhaps, this pioneering spirit led me to become Ethiopia's First Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2020. Once again, I found myself building something new, strengthening ties, and fostering collaboration between the two nations.

And now, I have the immense honor of serving as the first Ethiopian Ambassador to Pakistan—a nation I deeply admire, respect and love. For the last two and half years, I have been striving to cultivate a strong and long lasting partnership between our two countries, working day in and day out to foster understanding and establish cooperation.

You could say, I have become something of an expert at establishing new missions, forging fresh connections and pioneering innovative approaches. I really thrive on the challenge of building something meaningful and lasting. And, now I am incredibly excited to embark on this new chapter in Kyrgyz





Republic, and Turkmenistan where I have presented my credentials as a non-resident Ambassador of Ethiopia in December 2024, whereas the same honor I had in the Republic of Tajikistan in January 2025.

2: How would you describe the historical and current state of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Pakistan?

Historically, the FDR Ethiopia and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are the two brotherly nations that share a lot of commonality. Ethiopia, the land of revered figures like Hazrat Bilal Habeshi and King Nejashei, holds a special place in Islamic history that fosters the affinity between the two countries.

Bound by a deep sense of brotherhood, rooted in historical, cultural and religious connections, these two nations have developed a bond of mutual respect and understanding since establishing the formal diplomatic ties in 1958.

This connection went one step further with landmark visit of President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Ethiopia in 1972, which paved the way for enhanced collaboration and the establishment of Pakistan's Embassy in Addis Ababa a year later.

Over the decades, Ethiopia and Pakistan have consistently demonstrated their commitment to mutual support on the world stage. They have stood shoulder-to-shoulder in international forums, championing shared interests and pursuing collaborative initiatives that uplift their people and contribute to global well-being.

The dawn of a new era in Ethiopian foreign

policy, ushered in by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed in 2018, brought renewed focus to the relationship with Pakistan. Recognizing Pakistan's strategic significance, its unwavering support during challenging times, and its potential as a valuable partner, Ethiopia has actively sought to deepen ties. Pakistan, in turn, has long recognized Ethiopia's vital role in the Horn of Africa and African continent, a region rich in economic promise and natural resources. This recognition is embodied in Pakistan's "Look and Engage Africa Initiative," which identifies Ethiopia as a key gateway to the African continent.

Today, the bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and Pakistan is flourishing. The opening of the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad is a manifestation of this deepening bond and has facilitated increased trade, investment, and people-to-people exchanges. The Ethiopian Airlines now connects Karachi and Addis Ababa with four weekly flights, fostering greater connectivity and facilitating business and tourism.

Furthermore, high-level delegations from both countries have exchanged visits, culminating in the signing of multiple Memoranda of Understanding in diverse sectors like trade, investment, science and technology. These agreements pave the way for enhanced cooperation and shared prosperity. As the world undergoes rapid transformation, Ethiopia and Pakistan are all set to elevate their relationship to a strategic partnership. By building on their historical ties and shared values, they have the potential to

bolster bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation for the mutual benefit of their people and the international community.

3. What are the key areas where Ethiopia and Pakistan are collaborating economically? Are there untapped sectors with significant potential?

Economic collaboration between Ethiopia and Pakistan is gradually increasing, particularly since the establishment of the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad. This has facilitated numerous trade delegations and agreements, fostering partnerships in sectors like pharmaceuticals, surgical, agriculture, agro processing and textiles.

In the past two years, high-level delegations from both sides have explored avenues for collaboration in each other countries. A prime example is the 75-member Pakistani business delegation that visited Ethiopia in 2023, representing major chambers of commerce and prominent companies from all spheres and sectors of Pakistan. This visit resulted in the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce signing a crucial agreement with its Ethiopian counterpart, laying the groundwork for enhanced bilateral trade.

Furthermore, leading Pakistani corporations like Arif Habib Group and Roshan Packages have also signed MoUs with the Ethiopian Investment Commission in 2023, pledging significant investments in key sectors such as fertilizer production, construction, and packaging.

The momentum continued with a reciprocal visit by a 50-member official and business delegation from the FDR Ethiopia in

May 2023 which signed multiple agreements with the different business chambers including Islamabad and Karachi. Likewise, we have facilitated an 80-member business and investment delegation from Pakistan to Ethiopia in 2024, which included representatives from the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan and various trade associations and companies. This visit yielded further agreements, with the Faisalabad and Sialkot Chambers, along with the Sundar Trade and Industry Association, signing MoUs with the Ethiopian Investment Commission. These agreements have opened doors for collaboration in diverse fields including agriculture, pharmaceuticals, surgical equipment, sports and leather goods. Current trade between the two countries includes pharmaceuticals, surgical supplies, agricultural products, textiles, and leather goods. However, both the nations need to recognize the vast untapped potential for growth. Ethiopia, for instance, imports a substantial portion of its pharmaceutical and surgical products, presenting a significant opportunity for Pakistani exporters. Conversely, Ethiopia's fertile lands offer Pakistan access to high-quality agricultural commodities like coffee, tea, pulses, soybeans, and oilseeds. By capitalizing on these untapped opportunities and fostering a spirit of partnership, Ethiopia and Pakistan are set to reap significant mutual benefits and drive economic growth for both nations.

4: What measures are being taken to enhance trade volume between Ethiopia and Pakistan, and what products or industries could benefit the most?

Ethiopia and Pakistan are actively pursuing a multi-pronged approach to bolster bilateral trade. Beyond the high-profile trade delegations and agreements, a concerted effort is underway to cultivate deeper economic ties.

The Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad has played a pivotal role to this end. Through targeted outreach, the embassy has engaged with chambers of commerce across Pakistan, from the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry to local chambers in key cities like Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Multan, Gujranwala, Shekupura Rawalpindi and Islamabad. These engagements have included presentations and briefings highlighting the diverse investment opportunities in Ethiopia's burgeoning economy.

I personally visited all those business chambers and addressed to the queries of the business community.

Likewise, in 2024, the Embassy organized multiple business forums across Pakistan, coinciding with the second Pakistani trade delegation visit to Ethiopia. These forums provided a valuable platform for businesses



from both countries to connect, explore partnerships, and gain insights into specific sectors ripe for collaboration. Formalizing this commitment, Ethiopia and Pakistan have also signed and ratified a bilateral trade agreement, providing a framework for enhanced trade and investment. Further strengthening these ties, Ethiopian Airlines now offers direct flights to Pakistan, facilitating seamless travel for businesses and fostering people-to-people exchanges between Pakistan and Ethiopia and the rest of Africa.

These combined efforts have successfully established institutional linkages between the two countries, leading to a regular exchange of delegations across various sectors. This momentum promises to unlock the immense potential for trade between Ethiopia and Pakistan. This year, Trade Development Authority of Pakistan along with Ministry of Commerce in Partnership with Ethiopian Embassy organizing the Single Country Exhibition in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in between 15-17 May 2025 where many African countries join the forum to connect with the participants from Pakistan. In this regard, I kindly invite the interested companies to seize the availed opportunities.

5: What initiatives are in place to foster cultural ties and increase people-to-people connections between the two nations?

Fostering robust cultural ties and people-to-people connections is a cornerstone of Ethiopia's diplomatic efforts in Pakistan. Recognizing the shared historical connections and common values that bind the two nations, the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad is actively engaged in a mul-

tifaceted approach to promote cultural exchange and understanding.

Participation in prominent cultural events and conferences across Pakistan has been a key strategy. The embassy's involvement in the vibrant Karachi Cultural Festival in December 2024 is the manifestation of our commitment to this end.

This three-day extravaganza, which drew over 25,000 visitors, provided an ideal stage to showcase the beauty and diversity of Ethiopian culture and heritage. The Embassy captivated attendees with mesmerizing traditional music and dance performances, enticing food stalls offering authentic Ethiopian cuisine, and the immersive Ethiopian coffee ceremony, thoughtfully adapted to suit Pakistani preferences. Beyond large-scale events, the Embassy recognizes the power of food diplomacy. Food acts as a universal language, fostering connections to unite the two distant nations.

To this end, the Embassy regularly hosts food festivals and coffee ceremonies, extending warm invitations to Pakistanis from all walks of life to savor the rich and flavorful culinary traditions of Ethiopia. These events offer a unique opportunity to experience the essence of Ethiopian hospitality and cultural heritage.

In 2024, the Embassy further enriched the cultural landscape by bringing the acclaimed Ethiopian musical troupe, Biftu Oromia, to Pakistan. Their captivating performances in Karachi and Islamabad enthralled audiences, introducing them to the diverse musical traditions and vibrant dances from various regions of Ethiopia, including Amhara, Oromo, Somali, Afar, Tigray, and the culturally rich southern regions. These per-

formances not only showcased the artistic talents of Ethiopian musicians and dancers but also provided a window into the soul of Ethiopia's diverse communities.

In addition to these in-person engagements, the Embassy leverages the power of media and digital platforms to amplify its message and reach a broader audience. Through proactive engagement with Pakistani media outlets and a dynamic social media presence, the Embassy shares compelling stories, captivating visuals, and insightful information about Ethiopian culture, history, and traditions. This digital diplomacy fosters curiosity, appreciation, and a deeper understanding of Ethiopia among the Pakistani people.

These multifaceted efforts, driven by a genuine desire to connect with the people of Pakistan, are effectively building bridges of understanding and friendship.

6: Are there any programs aimed at promoting educational exchange or technical cooperation between universities and institutions in Ethiopia and Pakistan?

Expanding educational and technical cooperation between Ethiopia and Pakistan is a key focus, with initiatives underway to foster knowledge exchange and build lasting institutional partnerships.

Both governments are actively working to establish a framework for collaboration between universities in the two countries. This includes plans to create platforms for rectors and vice-chancellors to connect and share knowledge, paving the way for faculty and student exchanges, joint research projects, and the development of collaborative academic programs.

A concrete example of this cooperation is the recent agreement signed between Jijiga University in Ethiopia and the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation in Pakistan. This partnership will enable Ethiopian medical doctors to pursue specialized training in Pakistan, strengthening medical expertise in Ethiopia.

These educational exchanges have a profound impact that extends beyond the academic realm. They foster deep connections and mutual understanding between individuals and communities. For instance, Ethiopian doctors who trained in Pakistan demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity with the Pakistani people during the devastating floods of 2022, expressing their eagerness to provide medical assistance and support. Such instances highlight the transformative power of educational cooperation in forging lasting bonds of friendship and empathy. By investing in educational exchange and technical collaboration, Ethiopia and Pakistan are not only fostering intellectual growth but also cultivating a future generation of leaders and professionals committed to cooperation and mutual support.

7: What efforts are being made to promote Ethiopia as a tourist destination for Pakistanis, and vice versa?

The first thing we did in this regard is to bring the Ethiopian Airlines to this country. The Ethiopian Airlines now offers direct flights from Karachi to Addis Ababa, making travel faster and more convenient than ever before. The journey takes just four hours!

On the other hand, Pakistanis love to explore, so we are highlighting the unique experiences Ethiopia offers. From our vibrant cities to our stunning natural landscapes, there's something for everyone to discover. We are actively participating in tourism expos and events in Pakistan, sharing captivating videos and photos of our transformed tourist destinations. Recently the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Abiy Ahmed initiated, developed and inaugurated 14 world class tourist destinations and renovated 25 existing destinations that can meet the taste and values of Pakistanis.

We are also working closely with tour operators in both countries to develop exciting travel packages and itineraries. Plans are underway for a joint tourism conference in Ethiopia to further boost travel between our nations. The people believe in the power of visual storytelling. So, we are inviting social media influencers from Pakistan to experience Ethiopia firsthand and share their adventures with their followers. Similarly, we are working to welcome Ethiopian influencers to Pakistan to showcase its beauty. We're confident that these efforts will lead to a significant increase in tourism, fostering greater understanding and friendship between our peoples.

8: What message would you like to convey to the government and people of Pakistan about Ethiopia and the potential of the partnership between the two countries?

To the Government and people of Pakistan, I extend a message of goodwill and opportunity from Ethiopia, a land steeped in history and brimming with potential.

Our shared heritage resonates deeply. Ethiopia is the land of Hazrat Bilal Habeshi, the revered companion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and King Najeshi, who offered refuge to the early Muslims asylum seekers during the first Hijra in Islam toward Ethiopia. These historical connections form a strong foundation for our growing relationship.

Ethiopia, with Addis Ababa as its vibrant capital, serves as a crucial diplomatic hub, housing the headquarters of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and third diplomatic center in the world. As the second most populous nation in Africa, we are a gateway to a vast market of over 1.4 billion people

African continent. Partnering with Ethiopia offers access to this huge continent, brimming with opportunities for trade, investment, and collaboration.

We applaud Pakistan's "Look Africa and Engage Africa" policy and are eager to facilitate their increased presence in the continent. Our nations share striking similarities such as similar federal governance structure, strategic geographical locations, influential diasporas, rich cultural traditions, and even culinary delights. These commonalities pave the way for a robust and mutually beneficial partnership.

Together, we can address pressing global challenges such as climate change, hunger, poverty, and terrorism. By joining our hands, we can achieve prosperity and sustainable development for both our nations and contribute to a more stable and equitable world.

9: On a personal note, what has been your experience living and working in Pakistan? Any memorable moments or lessons?

My time in Pakistan has been an extraordinary journey, filled with warmth, discovery, and profound appreciation for the Pakistani people and land. From the moment I arrived, I was welcomed with remarkable hospitality. Everywhere I travelled, whether to the breathtaking landscapes of the north, the historical treasures of Lahore, or the vibrant energy of Karachi, I was welcomed with open arms and genuine affection.

The natural beauty of Pakistan is simply stunning. The majestic mountains, lush valleys, and flowing rivers create a magical landscape. The rich history of this land is palpable in the magnificent architecture and cultural heritage, particularly in Lahore and Karachi, cities that boast a unique blend of ancient and modern. And the food! The diverse and flavorful cuisine of Pakistan is a real treat for me.

What has truly touched me is the deep-rooted passion for environmental preservation I've witnessed across the country. The overwhelming response to the Green Legacy Initiative, launched by the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad, was truly inspiring. People from all walks of life, from young children to elders, joined us in planting trees, showing a profound commitment to a greener future of Pakistan.

Pakistan has become my second home, and the memories I've created here will forever hold a special place in my heart. The kindness, generosity, and love I've received have been overwhelming.

To the people of Pakistan, I express my deepest gratitude. Thank you for welcoming me into your hearts and sharing the beauty of your country with me.

I am looking forward to more exciting collaborations with the people of Pakistan for strengthening our bilateral relations to the new heights!

Well-nourished children learn the best and can change the world

FINLAND used to be one of the poorest European countries at the end of the 19th century. It was not unusual to have children working in the fields and factories, in order to sustain their families. The years 1866-87 carry an unfortunate denomination of years of famine. Due to short crops, people of Finland suffered of malnutrition and 8 per cent of the population died out of famine. As Finland became independent in 1917 and started to build up its institutions, one of the first tasks was to get children to school, instead of forcing them to work in harsh conditions. Soon it became clear that hungry school children are not capable of learning. Thus, Finland was the first country in the world, in 1943, to enact a law whereby school children were guaranteed free-of-charge meal during the school days. First, food was served for under-

privedged children but since 1948 school meals have been available for all students. Having learned from our history, there was a strong will to develop the country away from unequal, agriculture-based society towards a more modern welfare society. It was understood that the best way to improve our economy, was to educate people and not just the rich ones but the whole population. Education was perceived as an investment in the future. Over 70 years later, Finland has developed into a modern welfare so-

ciety, recognized for having one of the best education systems in the world. Free school meals remain an essential part of Finland's education system to ensure equal access and participation for children, and it plays a role in the country's development into an information society. In many parts of the world, the situation is much gloomier. School attendance as such has increased considerably, which is good news. Simultaneously, we are struggling with a persistent learning crisis where the majority of children in low and lower middle-income countries are in school but cannot read or write a simple sentence. Climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts around the world, have aggravated the situation. Due to increasingly frequent extreme weather conditions, crops become smaller and uncertain. Children



Hannu Ripatti

promote the achievement of sustainable development goals. The ultimate objective of the Coalition is that every child in the world will receive a school meal on a daily basis by 2030.

We provide financial support for school meal programmes worldwide. In 2024, Finland allocated 5 million euros to WFP's school meals programmes globally. This also includes support to the School Meal Coalition Secretariat coordinated by WFP. We also provide technical expertise for countries wishing to develop their school meals programmes. Finland has launched a website about the Finnish model and relevant stakeholders: <https://www.educationfinland.fi/schoolmeals>

For those countries that are currently looking to reform their education, Finland wants to give a gentle hint. Please invest in free school meals! It is a small but significant concrete investment in children's future, and school meals programs can be started with small steps. School meals programs can strengthen the overall food security, but they can also contribute to the local economy. When implemented correctly, food programs can help diversify food systems. The use of locally produced products in school meals benefits the consumption of locally produced agricultural products and can promote the diversification of production. This in turn positively impacts the crisis resilience and economy of local communities.

Looking ahead, our mission remains clear. We have to ensure that by 2030, every child, everywhere, has access to a healthy and nutritious school meal. This goal is very ambitious but it can be reached. We only need to intensify our efforts and work together. As an end result, we get an affluent youth that is capable and motivated to build a better and more equal and prosperous world for all. Let us go for it!

– The writer is the Ambassador of Finland to Pakistan

“FINLAND used to be one of the poorest European countries at the end of the 19th century. It was not unusual to have children working in the fields and factories, in order to sustain their families. The years 1866-87 carry an unfortunate denomination of years of famine. Due to short crops, people of Finland suffered of malnutrition and 8 per cent of the population died out of famine. As Finland became independent in 1917 and started to build up its institutions”

are the ones that are hardest hit by the global food crisis. There is a simple, yet effective solution for both improving food security and better learning results: free school meals. Thus, Finland was one of the founders of the global School Meals Coalition that was created in 2021. It now includes over 100 member countries and 108 other partner organizations. The aim is to support and encourage countries to develop their food and education systems, recovery from the pandemic, and

President, PM, Info Secy, PIO greet APNS

Sarmad Ali elected President APNS, Athar Secy General

Centreline magazine once again elected Executive Committee member; Nazafreen Saigol Lakhani was elected as Senior Vice President, Shahab Zuberi as Vice President, Mohsin Bilal as Joint Secretary and Naveed Kashif as Finance Secretary of the Society



Nazir Siyal / DNA

KARACHI: The Annual Meeting of the APNS General Council held on March 15, 2025 at APNS House, Karachi unanimously elected Sarmad Ali as President, Nazafreen Saigol Lakhani as Senior Vice President, Shahab Zuberi as Vice President, Muhammad Athar Kazi as Secretary General, Mohsin Bilal as Joint Secretary and Naveed Kashif as Finance Secretary of the Society. The AGM was held under the chairmanship of Mrs. Nazafreen Saigol Lakhani, President of the Society. The Council unanimously approved the report of the Executive Committee for the year 2024-2025 as well as the Annual Accounts of the Society for the year 2024.

The General Council attended by 107 members from across the country, formed an Election Commission headed by Mr. Mumtaz Ahmed Phulpoto with Syed Irfan Shah and Mr. Ali Bin Yunus as members. The Election Commission conducted the election of the Executive Committee for the year 2025-26. Following dailies and magazines were elected un-opposed of the Executive Committee of the APNS for the next tenure: Daily Jasarat, Daily Jiddat, Karachi, Daily Business Recorder, Daily Aghaz, Daily Dawn, Daily Deyanat, Daily Khabrain, Daily Times, Daily Jang, Daily Dunya, Daily Tijarat,

Daily Pakistan, Lahore, Daily Ausaf, Daily Sahafat, Daily Awam (Quetta), Daily Mashriq (Quetta), Daily Wahdat, Daily Mashriq (Peshawar), Daily Kawish, Daily Aftab (Multan), Daily Business Report, Daily Paigham, Daily City42, Daily Pakistan Observer, Daily Halchal, Daily Sayadat on daily seats and Monthly Dastak, Weekly Family, (Nawa-e-Waqt Group), Monthly Naey Ufaq, Monthly Naya Rukh, Monthly Centre Line, and Fortnightly Ibrat elected on periodical seats.

The new Executive Committee elected Mrs. Zahida Abbasi of Daily Nau Sijj, Karachi on woman – publisher seat. Due to sad demise of brother of Mr. Javed Mehr Shamsi, he could not attend the AGM. The President co-opted Daily Kaleem Sukkur as member of the Executive Committee on Sindh Excluding Karachi Dailies Seat. The newly elected Executive Committee appreciated the performance of the Election Commission for conducting the elections.

The members at the Annual Council meeting strongly condemned the continuous ban on the Government advertisements of Daily Dawn and termed it as a policy of arm-twisting and using advertisements as a tool to dictate editorial policy of the newspaper. The AGM noted that the due quantum of advertisement for a newspaper, is not a privilege but a right as the government releases its advertisements for

transparency in its functioning and to ensure “People’s Right to Know”. The payment of the government advertisements is made from the public exchequer hence, the government ads can not be issued or denied as per the choice of any government. The APNS has always asked for just, fair and transparent distribution of government advertisements. The Council also expressed its concern on the continued stoppage of government advertisements to Daily Sahafat and urged upon the Ministry of Information to withdraw the ban.

The AGM in a resolution, expressed its profound concern on the state of print media due to the present economic situation which has caused severe financial crisis for newspapers, many of them are at the verge of collapse. In this situation, the media expected support from the government to brave the financial crunch. The AGM urged upon the new Federal Government to implement the decision of Mian Shahbaz Sharif approved in his last tenure to increase the government advertisement rates. The members in the AGM, requested the Federal and provincial governments to pay the long outstanding dues of newspaper industry, increase the quantum of advertisements and allocate a separate share of print media in the advertising budget so that the newspaper industry would be able to survive in the present situation.



Zahid Latif Khan Director Pakistan Mercantile Exchange hosts iftar



Acting together to defend and promote women's rights

IN 2019, France adopted a “feminist diplomacy strategy” that places gender equality and the rights of women and girls among the top priorities of its foreign policy. France’s feminist diplomacy is based on the principle of equal rights – a fundamental principle of the French Republic, founded on the motto: ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’. Our feminist diplomacy is part of our long-standing commitment to fundamental freedoms and the universality of human rights. Announced on this International Women’s Day, France’s new international strategy on gender equality for the next five years will mobilise our diplomatic action globally. Bilaterally, France has set itself the ambitious goal of having 75% of its official development assistance include gender equality content. At the multilateral level, France advocates the systematic consideration of gender equality in all forums: at the UN, the G7, the G20, the EU and other European organisations. At the UN, France is a leading country within the Commission on the Status of Women and supports ardently UN agencies such as UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund.

Gender equality and the rights of women and girls are indeed cross-cutting issues that must be promoted and defended in all areas: peace and security, climate and environment, development, democratic governance, human rights, humanitarian action, economic, financial and commercial issues, digital, culture, education, health, and food security. In this regard, education is a priority area and our action aims to promote equality in and through education in order to foster the civic and political participation of women, as well as their economic empowerment. Another priority is to defend women’s health, including sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR), in order to affirm the absolute right of women to control their own bodies. This imperative led France to include the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy in its Constitution, on 8 March, 2024.

Because women are particularly vulnerable victims in conflict situations but also because they play a key role in conflict prevention, they must benefit from specific support. This is why, over the past five years, France has contributed 14.2 million euros to the Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence founded by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege. With 4.5 million euros in 2024, France is also supporting the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), the largest United Nations fund dedicated to feminist organisa-

tions in crisis contexts. We will also strengthen the French Support Fund for Feminist Organizations. Since its creation in 2020, this fund has allocated 254 million euros to 1,400 associations in more than 73 countries, and has made France a leading country in funding feminist organisations.

International mobilisation on this major issue must be maintained. To this end, France will host this year the 4th Ministerial Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy Conference. After Germany (2022), the Netherlands (2023) and Mexico (2024), the conference in France will mark the commitment of a growing number of governments to feminist diplomacy and will be a unique opportunity to bring together states and civil society on women’s rights. To move forward together on this issue which concerns half of humanity, we can rely on the essential international conventions that France and Pakistan have ratified, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which are among the 27 international con-

“ Gender equality and the rights of women and girls are indeed cross-cutting issues that must be promoted and defended in all areas: peace and security, climate and environment, development, democratic governance, human rights, humanitarian action, economic, financial and commercial issues, digital, culture, education, health, and food security ”

ventions that countries benefiting from the GSP+ agreement with the European Union, including Pakistan, have committed to implementing. France’s engagement to cooperate with Pakistan to promote women’s rights has been expressed concretely through numerous actions. Following the deadly floods in the summer of 2022, the French Government provided exceptional support of 1 million euros to the actions of the World Food Program dedicated to pregnant and lactating women and, locally, the French Embassy provided financial support to the programme of the French NGO Secours Islamique (Islamic Relief) to support the economic activity of women in the district of Tharparkar (Sindh).



Nicolas Galey

Furthermore, in cooperation with the Aga Khan Development Network, UNDP, UN Women, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change and with the support of the Pakistani Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, the French Embassy has been organising the ‘Gender and Climate Award’ for the past three years. This award provides financial support to women involved in the fight against climate change in Pakistan to develop their projects. The French Embassy also supports the actions of Pakistani civil society, such as those of Ms Mary GIL’s Center for Law and Justice, which aim to empower young girls from families of garbage collectors through edu-

cation. Other initiatives contribute to promoting the role of women in our societies, like the Women International Film Festival in Islamabad, which the French Embassy has supported since 2022. We have also promoted the CSR actions of four French companies in Pakistan – L’Oréal, Ipsos, Servier and Schneider – aimed at increasing the empowerment of women. Together with our Pakistani partners, we are happy and proud to continue developing these projects and supporting these actions to pursue our common goals in promoting women’s rights, freedom and dignity.

– The writer is Ambassador of France to Pakistan. The article first published in ET

Serena Hotels celebrates the Spirit of Ramadan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels hosted its Annual Corporate Iftar Dinner, a cherished tradition celebrating the spirit of Ramadan, under the gracious hospitality of CEO Serena Hotels Mr. Aziz Boolani and Mrs. Wiqar Boolani. The event brought together a distinguished gathering of government officials, mem-

bers of the Armed Forces, Diplomats, Heads of International Agencies, Corporate Executives, and media personnel. Guests enjoyed a wide variety of delicious food from different cuisines, including traditional Pakistani flavors, Middle Eastern specialties, East Asian delicacies, and classic continental dishes. The ambiance was further enriched with live folk music, adding a cultural

touch to the memorable evening. As the event unfolded, it highlighted Serena Hotels legacy of impeccable service and commitment to excellence, reaffirming its role as a leader in hospitality. Serena Hotels remains dedicated to organizing memorable events that bring people together, strengthen connections, and create a welcoming atmosphere for its valued guests.



Serena Hotels celebrates the Spirit of Ramadan



Serena Hotels celebrates the Spirit of Ramadan





President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh hosts iftar for the diplomatic community based in Islamabad



Celebrating culture and spirituality at Serena Hotels Ramadan Qawwali Night

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels, under its Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, hosted a mesmerizing Qawwali Night during the holy month of Ramadan. The soulful evening featured the legendary Abida Parveen, whose powerful performance of famous Sufi kalams captivated the audience, creating a deep sense of spiritual reflection and cultural appreciation. The event brought together a distinguished gathering, including government officials, members of the Armed

Forces, diplomats, heads of international agencies, corporate executives, and media personnel. Guests were captivated by the heartfelt performance, which honored the rich tradition of Sufi music and its timeless messages of love, unity, and devotion. Abida Parveen's performance of renowned kalams such as Mai Nara-e-Mastana, Man Kuntu Maula, Tu Nay Dewana banaya, Dama Dam Mast Qalandar and many more resonated deeply with the audience, who enjoyed the spiritual ambiance to the fullest. Following the musical experience, at-

tendees were treated to an exquisite Sehri, thoughtfully curated to reflect the essence of Ramadan's traditions. The evening showed Serena Hotels dedication to bringing different cultures together and encouraging meaningful conversations through the arts. Serena Hotels continues to create memorable experiences that highlight cultural diversity and support artistic expression and togetherness. The Qawwali Night with Abida Parveen was yet another evidence to this vision, leaving an unforgettable mark on the attendees of the event.





Celebrating culture and spirituality at Serena Hotels Ramadan Qawwali Night



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Uzbek food fest in Capital attracts huge interest

One of the key figures present at the exhibition was Sardar Yasir Ilyas, the CEO of Centaurus, who visited all the stalls and praised the high quality of the products displayed. Speaking to the media, he described the Uzbek trade fair as a resounding success and expressed optimism that such initiatives would further cement trade relations between entrepreneurs from both countries

Ansar M Bhatti/DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Uzbekistan in Pakistan successfully organized a trade mission in collaboration with the Plant Quarantine and Protection Agency and the Association of Exporters of Uzbekistan. The trade fair generated immense interest among both the general public and key business stakeholders in Pakistan, with many expressing a strong desire to enhance trade ties with Uzbek companies. The exhibition showcased a diverse range of Uzbek products, primarily focusing on fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, food, and processed products. The event provided a significant platform for Pakistani entrepreneurs to engage directly with Uzbek exporters and explore potential business collaborations. The positive response and enthusiastic participation from Pakistani businesses indicated a strong inclination towards fostering long-term trade relations between the two nations.

Adding to the event's significance, diplomats from various countries attended the exhibition and lauded the initiative taken by the Uzbek Embassy. They emphasized the importance of such trade fairs in strengthening economic cooperation and opening new avenues for investment and trade expansion. One of the key figures present at the exhibition was Sardar Yasir Ilyas,

the CEO of Centaurus, who visited all the stalls and praised the high quality of the products displayed. Speaking to the media, he described the Uzbek trade fair as a resounding success and expressed optimism that such initiatives would further cement trade relations between entrepreneurs from both countries. Dean of the African Group and Ambassador of Morocco, Mohamed Karmoune, also attended the exhibition and was highly impressed by the quality and cost-effectiveness of the products on display. He remarked that such trade collaborations would not only benefit the two nations but also create opportunities for broader regional economic engagement.

Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtaev, accompanied the dignitaries to various stalls, personally briefing them about the products and their potential for export. He reiterated the commitment of Uzbekistan to enhancing trade relations with Pakistan and supporting initiatives that promote economic cooperation.

Ambassador of Uzbekistan in his speech said it was his great pleasure to warmly welcome all of you to the Food Fest Uzbekistan 2025 here in the beautiful city of Islamabad. He added, in these holy days of Ramadan, the Food Fest Uzbekistan aims to bring our two brotherly nations, Uzbekistan and Pakistan, even closer.

Uzbekistan's food industry is not just about

flavor – it is about history, culture, and the stories that have been passed down through generations. From the famous plov to the mouthwatering samsa, from the delectable lagman to the sweet and fragrant chak-chak, Uzbekistan's cuisine is a reflection of its warm hospitality, rich traditions, and the spirit of togetherness that binds its people. Ambassador Alisher said, this festival is a journey – a journey into the heart of Uzbek culture, where each product tells a story. These stories are of nomadic traditions, of ancient cities like Samarkand and Bukhara, of grand feasts, and of simple family meals shared around a table. Each bite is a connection to the past, and a celebration of the present.

'Today, we are not just tasting food – we are celebrating the legacy of the people of Uzbekistan. The rich spices, the vibrant colors, the intricate preparation techniques – every detail has been carefully passed down through generations, and now, it is our honor to experience it firsthand'. As we explore the food stalls and engage in the various activities today, let us remember that food has the power to bring people together. It transcends boundaries, breaks down barriers, and creates bonds that last a lifetime, he added. The exhibition provided a valuable opportunity for Uzbek exporters to establish connections with potential Pakistani buyers, including supermarket chains and large-scale importing enterprises.





Chairman Monal Group Luqman Ali Afzal hosts grand iftar dinner





Diplomats commend RCCI for fostering strong links with diplomatic community



Malaysia's Vision for ASEAN 2025

Strengthening regional unity and sustainability

Highlighting the economic ties between ASEAN and Pakistan, the High Commissioner noted that bilateral trade reached an all-time high of USD 11.8 billion in recent years.

With Pakistan's ongoing economic diplomacy efforts, he expressed confidence in further increasing trade and investment between ASEAN and Pakistan

Ansar M Bhatti / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Malaysia, Dato Azhar bin Mazlan, has reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to ASEAN as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. Addressing an audience in Islamabad, he emphasized Malaysia's responsibility in leading ASEAN in 2025 as its Chair, marking a significant milestone in regional cooperation.

Highlighting the economic ties between ASEAN and Pakistan, the High Commissioner noted that bilateral trade reached an all-time high of USD 11.8 billion in recent years. With Pakistan's ongoing economic diplomacy efforts, he expressed confidence in further increasing trade and investment between ASEAN and Pakistan.

To a question about the Pakistan's status as full dialogue partner, the high commissioner said that there was an ASEAN moratorium therefore until and unless that moratorium is lifted Pakistan may not be able to become a full dialogue partner.

He said, Malaysia is committed to expediting the admission of Timor-Leste as the 11th member of ASEAN, further strengthening the unity and inclusiveness of our community.

'At the same time, we will also prioritize regional peace and stability, including efforts to progress the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus towards facilitating a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Myanmar'.

Malaysia is committed to advancing negotiations on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ensuring stability and mutual understanding in the region.

Malaysia is dedicated to ensuring that ASEAN remains an inclusive, forward-looking, and resilient organization," said High Commissioner Dato Azhar bin Mazlan.

Malaysia's leadership will be guided by the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and its Blueprints, as well as the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. These frameworks have contributed to ASEAN's achievements in fostering regional peace, stability, and prosperity. Looking ahead, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 will be adopted at the 46th ASEAN Summit in



Kuala Lumpur, charting the course for the next two decades.

Key Priorities Under Malaysia's Chairmanship include Strengthening ASEAN Centrality by promoting strategic trust through sustained dialogue, diplomacy, and goodwill among nations.

Expanding ASEAN's partnerships beyond the region, including strengthening ties with Pakistan. Enhancing intra-ASEAN trade and investment with a focus on inclusivity, sustainability, and regional economic growth.

Promoting digital resilience, green finance, market integration, and supply chain development.

Addressing development gaps and inequali-

ties to improve living standards while mitigating climate change impacts.

"As Malaysia assumes ASEAN's Chairmanship in 2025, it is not just about regional diplomacy but about building a future together—one of shared prosperity, peace, and mutual respect," said Dato Azhar bin Mazlan. He invited media representatives and stakeholders to play a role in fostering greater understanding and awareness of ASEAN's vision.

"As we break our fast together this evening, let us be reminded that unity and co-operation are the bedrock of progress. Let us work together to ensure that ASEAN remains strong, united, and inclusive for generations to come," he concluded.



Malaysia-Pakistan iftar celebrates “Two Nations, One Ummah” in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan and To' Puan Amelia Amani Lee Abdullah hosted the Iftar Reception themed “Two Nations, One Ummah: Malaysia & Pakistan”. Dr. Mufti Akeel-Ur-Rehman Pirzada, Grand Mufti of Islamabad/Chairman Ulama Aman (Peace) Committee of Pakistan graced the occasion as a Guest Speaker. Distinguished guests present were senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, Islamabad-based ASEAN Heads of Mission, heads of think tank, members of the media, Malaysian diaspora, Friends of Malaysia, and staff members of the High Commission with families. Malaysia-Pakistan iftar celebrates “Two Nations, One Ummah” in Islamabad. Apart from celebrating the blessed month of Ramadan, the gathering was a testimony of the strong fraternal ties between Malaysia and Pakistan bonded by one faith, shared traditions, and a commitment to upholding Islamic values. In his welcoming remarks, the High Commissioner underscored the excellent ties between Malaysia and Pakistan. He stated that Malaysia placed high regard to its strong brotherly relationship with Pakistan. Going forward, he was confident that with the ongoing collaborative efforts, the relationship would soar to a higher level. During the event, the guests enjoyed an array of specially curated Malaysian cuisines such as beef rendang, bubur lambuk, fried chicken, fried spaghetti, mutton curry, scented rice, as well as traditional Malaysian savoury and desserts. – DNA





CEO Murree Brewery hosts iftar dinner





Brunei High Commissioner Kamal Ahmad hosts Iftar for players of Rising Stars hockey club men and women



Australian High Commissioner hosts iftar for Rising Stars Hockey Club



Prominent dignitaries attend Iftar hosted by Movenpick in Islamabad



DNA

ISLAMABAD: An exclusive Iftar dinner hosted by Movenpick Management brought together several high-profile dignitaries, business leaders, and government officials in the capital. The event served as a platform for fostering discussions on economic growth, investment opportunities, and business collaborations in Pakistan. Among the distinguished attendees were Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, Federal Ministers Hanif Abbasi and Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, and President of

The Centaurus Group, Sardar Rashid Ilyas Khan. Also present were CEO of The Centaurus Sardar Yasir Ilyas, President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat, and Chairman of REIT, Zahid Latif Khan. A large number of ambassadors and high commissioners from various countries attended the event. The Charge d Affaires of the US Embassy Nathalie Beker was also in attendance. Mr. Nicolas Verdun, the General Manager of the MOVENPICK greeted the guests upon arrival. The gathering not only provided a festive and

spiritual atmosphere during the holy month of Ramadan but also offered an excellent opportunity for networking and strengthening ties between the business community and policymakers. The discussions revolved around investment prospects, real estate development, and economic initiatives, particularly in the commercial and hospitality sectors. The evening concluded with a group photograph capturing the presence of these influential figures, highlighting their collective commitment to Pakistan's economic progress and business-friendly environment.



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Indian Charge d Affaires Geetika Srivastava hosts iftar for Pakistani friends





Islamabad Marriott Hotel hosts iftaar for corporate community



CEO of Waqas Travels hosts Iftar for Aviation Industry Professionals

The event took place at Sizzling Wok, one of Islamabad's finest restaurants, known for offering an exquisite selection of authentic Asian cuisine

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a gesture of hospitality and camaraderie, Waqas Ahmed, CEO of Waqas Travels, hosted a special Iftar dinner for esteemed friends and professionals from the aviation industry. The gathering brought together key figures from the sector, providing a platform for meaningful discussions and networking

in a relaxed and festive setting. Among the distinguished attendees was the Sales Manager of Turkish Airlines Mr. Tibet Tuncel, who joined other aviation professionals to share insights on the industry's latest developments and future prospects. The event took place at Sizzling Wok, one of Islamabad's finest restaurants, known for offering an exquisite selection of authentic Asian cuisine.. The Iftar dinner not only

celebrated the spirit of Ramadan but also reinforced the strong professional relationships within the aviation industry. Attendees appreciated the opportunity to engage in fruitful conversations while enjoying a delightful culinary experience. The evening concluded on a warm note, with guests expressing their gratitude to Waqas Ahmed for his generous hospitality and efforts in fostering stronger industry ties.





Additional Secretary MOFA Hamid Asghar Khan fetes friends and diplomats





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