

CENTRELINE

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine



Rongvudhi Virabutr

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era of partnership**



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Mr. Usman Shah, CEO of Niftysphere Institute of Arts & Design, presents an award during the Fashion Show Season Four – Culture Color.

The prestigious ceremony was graced by the presence of **Mr. Aurangzeb Khan Khichi**, **Federal Minister for the Ministry of National Heritage & Culture**, who attended the event as the Chief Guest.

The event celebrated creativity, cultural expression, and artistic excellence, highlighting the Institute's commitment to promoting fashion and cultural heritage at a national level.

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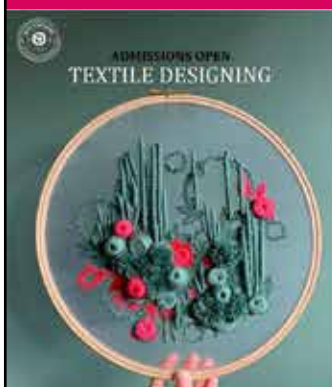
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The **NIFTYSPHERE**, Institute of Arts & Design, will be organizing a **large-scale Pop Art Show and Display Exhibition in February 2026**. This prestigious exhibition will feature interdisciplinary creative works by students from the Graphic Designing Department, Photography Department, Interior Designing Department, and Fine Arts Department.

As part of the exhibition, students will produce Pop Art-inspired short films, followed by curated visual displays, art installations, and poster presentations. The event will also include screenings of student-produced movies, showcasing innovative interpretations of Pop Art across multiple artistic disciplines.

This exhibition aims to promote contemporary artistic expression, encourage creative collaboration among departments, and provide a professional platform for emerging artists and designers to present their work to a wider audience.



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PIA finally privatised: a bold economic step or another costly gamble?



AFTER decades of debate, failed reform attempts and mounting financial losses, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has finally been privatised, marking one of the most significant economic decisions taken by the government in recent years. The national flag carrier was sold for a bid of Rs 135 billion, with the Arif Habib Group emerging as the successful bidder. According to Arif Habib, the Fauji Foundation will also join the consortium, a move that, in the view of many observers, adds considerable strength to the deal due to the institutional and military-backed presence of the Fauji Foundation. The government has expressed immense satisfaction over the transaction. Federal ministers and senior officials have openly celebrated the sale, describing PIA as a "white elephant" that had been draining national resources for years. According to official figures, the airline had accumulated massive losses, relied heavily on government bailouts, and was unable to compete with regional and international carriers. For the government, privatisation represents a long-awaited relief for the national exchequer and a step toward fiscal discipline.

Both the government and the buyers have projected optimism, promising that PIA will be given a new corporate identity, its fleet will be expanded and modernised, and service standards will be raised to international levels. The inclusion of the Fauji Fertilizers in the consortium has been highlighted as a stabilising factor. Supporters believe its presence will bring discipline, credibility, and long-term commitment, addressing concerns about governance and sustainability.

However, the decision has also triggered strong criticism from various quarters. Many citizens, labour unions, and political commentators have slammed the privatisation, calling it the sale of a national asset and a clear admission of state failure. According to critics, selling PIA means the government has effectively acknowledged its inability to run public sector institutions. They see the move as evidence of bad governance, chronic mismanagement, and lack of political will to reform state-owned enterprises.

For many Pakistanis, PIA is not just an airline but a symbol of national pride, once regarded as one of Asia's finest carriers. Critics argue that instead of privatising, the government should have focused on internal reforms, accountability, and professional management. They fear that public interest may be compromised in the pursuit of short-term financial relief. Scepticism is further fuelled by Pakistan's past experience with privatisation, particularly the case of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL). Almost 19 years ago, PTCL sold out. Public perception of PTCL has deteriorated sharply since privatisation. Service quality declined, customer support weakened. As a result, millions of users abandoned landlines in favour of mobile phones and alternative service providers. Another major concern relates to human resources. After PTCL's privatisation, many skilled and experienced employees left the company, either due to retrenchment policies or dissatisfaction with the new management's attitude. Critics fear a similar scenario at PIA, where thousands of employees may face layoffs or choose to leave, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge and operational expertise.

Despite these fears, some analysts believe that privatisation was inevitable. They argue that PIA had reached a point where continued state ownership was no longer viable. Ultimately, PIA's privatisation represents both hope and risk. It could mark the beginning of a successful turnaround story, transforming a loss-making airline into a competitive global player. Alternatively, it could repeat past mistakes, deepening public distrust in privatisation policies. The real test will lie in implementation: how the new consortium manages the airline, protects employees' rights, improves services, and delivers on its promises. Only time will tell whether this historic decision brings good news for Pakistan's aviation sector or becomes another cautionary tale in the country's economic history.

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.

Rongvudhi Virabutr

Thailand–Pakistan relations enter new era of partnership

H.E. The Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan Rongvudhi Virabutr gave an exclusive interview to Daily Islamabad POST, Centreline and Diplomatic News Agency. Here is the detailed interview of the ambassador

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti



Q1: Your Excellency, how would you describe your overall diplomatic experience in Pakistan so far?

Having just reached my one-year anniversary here on December 1, 2025, I can say without reservation that Pakistan is truly a “Land of Friendliness and Opportunity.” Despite the distance, that initial feeling of being far from home vanished instantly. I discovered that Thailand and Pakistan share a profound cultural DNA—from the

warmth and generosity of the people to our deep, ancient histories. The Pakistani spirit has embraced me, making me feel “at home” from very beginning. My mission here, however, does not permit me to simply enjoy the hospitality, warmth, and generosity extended to me without giving back in meaningful ways. I see Pakistan as a nation of immense, untapped potential—a strategic hub with a resilient and dynamic people.

With this vision, I am fully committed to advancing Thailand–Pakistani relations and unlocking the shared strengths of our two countries to the fullest. Our ties must go beyond traditional friendship. They should evolve into a sustainable partnership for development—one in which we move forward together, hand in hand, bringing smiles of happiness to the faces of our Pakistani brothers and sisters. We are consciously pivot-



ing from friendship to a “Prosperity Partnership.” My focus is clear: to deliver tangible, results-driven achievements that our citizens can truly see and feel, creating a new breakthrough in our bilateral relationship for generations to come.

Q2: In your assessment, what are the most promising areas of cooperation today?

I see two core dimensions driving breakthrough progress: Government-to-Government (G2G) economic dynamism and People-to-People (P2P) connectivity.

On the G2G front, trade and investment are decisive. Despite global fluctuations, two-way trade rebounded to USD 1.6 billion last year, but our goal is to double this volume through “Win-Win Trade”—combining Pakistan’s textiles and IT strengths with Thailand’s automotive and food processing expertise. A particular game-changer is the Halal industry. As one of the world’s leading Halal food producers—the “Kitchen of the World”—Thailand is ready to collaborate with Pakistan’s vast Muslim market. Advancing mutual recognition of Halal certification can unlock billions in food and cosmetics trade, creating a universal language of trust and quality. New investment collaborations in these high-value sectors are both feasible and imperative, with further potential in defense and beyond.

On the P2P side, tourism is the most powerful connector. At present, our two nations know each other but are not yet close; we contact but are not fully connected. Tourism helps bridge this gap, but we must go further—toward genuine familiarity and trust that positions us as the first destination for each other. The Royal Thai Embassy is committed to expanding tourism and cultural initiatives—through food, music, and art—so that our cooperation is not only economic but also deeply people to people contact.

Q3: How do you see the progress toward the Pakistan–Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?

The Pakistan–Thailand FTA is not just a technical document; it is a Strategic Gateway to a new era of economic prosperity for Pakistan. I view the FTA as having decisive importance, and I am resolutely committed to pushing it to completion swiftly.

We must change the perception that the FTA creates a disadvantage, transforming it into the understanding that it is the “Key to Global Competitiveness” for Pakistan, specifically by reducing the cost of imported raw materials, thus boosting the efficiency of domestic production.

Crucially, this FTA will act as a “Talent Multiplier,” particularly in the digital and services sectors. By including provisions for the mobility of digital professionals, we will leverage Pakistan’s strength as a leading global freelancer hub, creating up to \$20 billion in added economic value. We are coordinating with all key sectors—from Ministries to think tanks—to build unwavering confidence. The final conclusion of the FTA will send the clearest and most powerful signal to global investors: “Pakistan is ready for a New Era of Prosperity.”

Q4: What steps can both sides take to boost tourism and connectivity?

“Connectivity is the New Key in Diplomacy”—this is the principle I firmly uphold, as people-to-people relations built “from heart to heart” are inherently more durable than state-level interactions. We have set clear, decisive targets: doubling the number of Pakistani tourists to Thailand to 100,000 per year and expanding tourists from Thailand who are interested in Buddhism places in Pakistan to the Gandhara region to 10,000 per year. This is about building a strong “Network of Trust.”

The priority is to breaking logistical barriers. With current flight frequency and capacity hit the maximum, we held a virtual meeting in February 2026 and are pushing for formal negotiations next year to secure a decisive increase in air frequency and capacity, which will bring more flights and more accessible ticket prices. Furthermore, we are trying our utmost effort to find the easiest way that Pakistani tourists, in the near future, be able to enjoy visiting Thailand with easiest way of access; the e-visa system that we apply now is one of the mechanism that we use. Concurrently, we are designing perfect Halal Tourism programs in Thai provinces like Krabi and Ayutthaya, and promoting Thailand as a Global Medical Hub for Pakistani patients. Tourism, through this decisive action, becomes a genuine “Bridge of Trust.”

Thailand–Pakistan relations enter new era of partnership



Q5: How is the Thai private sector viewing Pakistan as an investment destination?

Thai investors are practical: they commit where policy is clear, not just where potential is high. The Royal Thai Embassy's decisive approach is to work with the Pakistani government to dramatically improve the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking, which serves as the “compass” for global investors.

The FTA's conclusion is also the ultimate trigger point, providing the legal certainty and investment protection needed. Beyond that, we are creating new S-curve avenues: exploring joint R&D in the defense industry, expanding the Halal food processing sector, and infrastructure projects. Strategically, Thai companies view Pakistan as a vital Strategic Gateway to Central Asia and the wider Middle East, positioning our partnership as a regional economic accelerator.

Q6: Are there plans for more cultural festivals, food events, or tourism exhibitions in Pakistan?

As I mentioned earlier, our two nations know each other but are not yet close; we contact but are not fully connected. The Royal Thai Embassy must continue working tirelessly to close this gap through cultural exchange—whether via food, music, art, or other creative avenues. We began this journey with Thai Food Week in Islamabad, 8–14 December 2025, where authentic Thai chefs trained local Pakistani culinary chefs. Pakistani chefs were introduced to authentic Thai cooking techniques and had the opportunity to prepare traditional Thai dishes. These dishes have now been incorporated into the permanent menus of participating restaurants, ensuring that the “flavor of friendship” continues long after the festival itself. This initiative, organized in collaboration

with the Monal Group, was never intended as a one-off event, but rather as a sustainable culinary bridge between our peoples.

Looking ahead, the ultimate breakthrough will be the historic Gandhara Civilization Exhibition in Thailand in 2027. Both governments have agreed to bring Buddhist artifacts from Pakistan's Gandhara heritage to Thailand, allowing Thai audiences to appreciate the cultural treasures preserved so carefully by our Pakistani friends. Showcasing Pakistan's ancient Buddhist legacy in Bangkok will serve as a powerful cultural magnet, drawing immense interest and investment toward the development of Pakistan's heritage sites.

This is decisive cultural diplomacy—using our glorious past to inspire and directly drive a prosperous future.

Q7: How can both countries further enhance people-to-people contacts?

The Royal Thai Embassy is deeply committed to bringing our two nations closer and truly connected. To achieve this, we are determined to deploy every available tool—promoting tourism, fostering cultural exchange through food, music, and art, and encouraging direct interaction between our peoples. As mentioned earlier, initiatives such as the Thai Food Festival in December 2025 and the upcoming Gandhara Civilization Exhibition in Thailand in 2027 are important milestones. They showcase how culinary and cultural diplomacy can build lasting bridges of understanding.

Beyond these events, we are also advancing direct people-to-people engagement. In

collaboration with UN Women, we launched programs to upskill women entrepreneurs in Swabi and Sialkot, focusing on two vital sectors: Beauty and Livelihood and Regenerative Agriculture. We provided professional training in the beauty industry to enable women to work from home, while also helping transform backyard gardens into reliable sources of income. To enrich this effort, we invited experts such as Miss Jennifer Innes Taylor-Jane, a Thai organic farm owner, to share practical regenerative practices. We firmly believe that the most powerful way to empower women is through income generation—when women earn, they gain confidence. As we say, “From small seeds, great forests grow.” This pilot project has already enabled Thai and Pakistani women farmers to interact directly, exchange knowledge, and establish future channels of cooperation. Together, they are developing new agricultural approaches that can help Pakistani women generate sustainable income from their farms.

These are the kinds of pioneering steps the Royal Thai Embassy sees as vital to deepening people-to-people ties between Thailand and Pakistan, ensuring that our relationship grows not only in trade and diplomacy but also in the everyday lives of our citizens.

Q8: As the current Chairman of the ASEAN Islamabad Committee, what are your key focus areas during your chairmanship?

My chairmanship is guided by 3 priorities strategy, refined into a clear motto: “Visibility, Tangibility, and Bring into Reality.” ASEAN today is a \$3.6 trillion economic powerhouse with over 600 million people, while Pakistan has a population of more than 250 million. If our two regions can integrate their economies seamlessly, there is no doubt that a tangible and formida-

Thailand–Pakistan relations enter new era of partnership



ble economic force will emerge. That is why we are determined to shift from ceremony to substance.

Our priority is to ensure that ASEAN and Pakistan's economies are connected without barriers. This can be achieved through multiple mechanisms: expanding Pakistan's FTAs with individual ASEAN member states and expanding to have more FTA with each ASEAN member, and promoting initiatives such as an ASEAN Trade Fair to facilitate direct business deals. As ACI Chair, Thailand has already raised these issues with key stakeholders, including the Federal Ministers of Trade and Federal Minister of Investment and major Chambers of Commerce and Industry across Pakistan. Another critical area is the promotion of paperless trading systems. ASEAN already operates the ASEAN Single Window for paperless trade facilitation. If Pakistan develops its own paperless system and connects it with ASEAN, imports and exports between our regions will become faster, more efficient, and more transparent—significantly boosting trade. Finally, we are working to enhance visibility and engagement at every level. ASEAN Ambassadors and High Commissioners in Islamabad have already conducted joint calls with three Federal Ministers, including Trade, Investment, and Foreign Affairs. We have also initiated economic dialogues with chambers such as FPCCI, Gujranwala, and Sialkot, with more to follow. All these efforts reinforce our vision: Visibility, Tangibility, and Bring into Reality. This is how ASEAN and Pakistan can transform potential into progress.

Q9: How do you evaluate Pakistan's engagement with ASEAN as a sectoral dialogue partner and do you think Pakistan has the potential to become a full dialogue partner of ASEAN in the future?

Pakistan's potential to become a Full Dialogue Partner is absolutely certain, but it requires a decisive commitment to move from Potential to Performance. We recognize Pakistan's desire to upgrade, and this is entirely possible if it expands its current 30+ annual activities to cover all three ASEAN pillars comprehensively. We must shift its status from merely "participating" to being a "Value-Adding Partner." At present, Pakistan participates in around thirty ASEAN-related activities each year. This is a respectable start, but to truly demonstrate comprehensive engagement, the number must grow—closer to one hundred activities annually—covering the full spectrum of ASEAN cooperation. As Chair of the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad, Thailand has taken on the role of facilitator, helping Pakistan link its unique strengths to ASEAN's priorities and convert them into meaningful joint initiatives.

Two areas stand out as natural bridges. The first is disaster management. Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority has proven capacity in responding to crises, while ASEAN's AHA Centre and DELSA system provide regional coordination and logistics. By connecting these mechanisms, both sides can build a seamless framework for humanitarian assistance, ensuring faster and more effective disaster response.

The second is peacekeeping. Pakistan's Center for International Peace and Stability at NUST is recognized by the United Nations as a regional hub for peacekeeping training. ASEAN countries such as Indonesia and Thailand already contribute peacekeeping forces worldwide. Linking CIPS with ASEAN member states through training and knowledge exchange would not only strengthen regional security but also highlight Pakistan's global role in peace and stability. In this way, Pakistan's engagement with ASEAN is evolving from symbolic gestures to substantive cooperation. The path to becoming a Full Dialogue Partner is clear: expand the scale and scope of activities, leverage Pakistan's strengths in disaster management and peacekeeping, and demonstrate commitment across all three ASEAN pillars. If these steps are taken, Pakistan will not only elevate its status within ASEAN but also help shape a partnership that transforms shared potential into shared progress.

Q10: What message would you like to convey to the readers of Islamabad Post, Centreline Magazine, and DNA News Agency?

Thailand and Pakistan stand at the threshold of transformation—moving from a friendly neighbor to a partnership for development. Over the past year, I have seen that we share not only warm hospitality but also a profound cultural DNA and an unshakable aspiration for prosperity. Yet friendship alone is not enough; we must act in ways that deliver results you can see, touch, and feel. We are building a Prosperity Partnership with concrete goals: doubling our trade by unlocking billions through the Halal industry, advancing an FTA to slash costs and pave the way for new avenue of cooperation such as defense industry, digital and IT opportunities, and connecting our peoples through tourism, culture, and food—from Thai cuisine now permanently on Pakistani menus to the historic 2027 Gandhara Civilization Exhibition in Bangkok. Beyond economics, we are empowering women entrepreneurs in Swabi and Sialkot, linking farmers through regenerative agriculture, and creating direct people-to-people exchanges. As Chair of ASEAN Committee in Islamabad, we are working to integrate Pakistan more deeply with ASEAN's \$3.6 trillion economy and 600 million people, expanding cooperation from disaster management to peacekeeping, and laying the groundwork for Pakistan's eventual elevation to Full Dialogue Partner.

My message is simple: the future we want will not happen unless we are not working hard today together. There are many avenues along this journey but all avenues have the same direction which is bringing real happiness smiles to the faces of our Pakistani friends. We are not only a nation of friendship but we are also your development partner. We promise that in the future when our children will look back they would say "That was the moment everything changed."

To every Pakistani reading this: you have a true friend in Thailand, and together, we will achieve extraordinary things.

Monal Group, Thai embassy host colourful Thai Food Festival at Asian Wok

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Monal Group, in collaboration with the Royal Thai Embassy, organised a vibrant Thai Food Festival at the Asian Wok restaurant, drawing diplomats, dignitaries and food enthusiasts for an evening celebrating Thailand's rich culinary heritage.

Chairman Monal, Luqman Ali Afzal, hosted a distinguished reception attended by ambassadors and high commissioners from various countries. The event showcased an array of authentic Thai dishes, specially prepared by Thai master chefs who travelled to Pakistan exclusively for the festival. Their live cooking

and traditional flavours were widely appreciated by the guests, who praised the quality and authenticity of the cuisine.

Speaking on the occasion, the Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan, Rongvudhi Virabutr, lauded the Monal Group for organising the festival and promoting cultural exchange through food. He said such initiatives strengthen people-to-people ties and provide an opportunity for Pakistanis to experience Thailand's unique culinary traditions.

The evening concluded with expressions of gratitude from the organisers and enthusiastic feedback from attendees, who described the festival as a delightful blend of culture, taste and hospitality.





National Day of Thailand celebrated



WHY IMRAN KHAN REMAINS POLITICALLY RELEVANT

Like him or hate him, he is the only major leader who disrupts the traditional two-party monopoly that has dominated Pakistan for decades. Removing him entirely would only strengthen those two parties and make them even more unmanageable

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

THE latest press conference by the Director General Inter-Services Public Relations (DG ISPR) marked perhaps the harshest institutional criticism of Imran Khan to date. While previous briefings had carried undertones of disagreement or veiled admonitions, this one was direct, pointed, and focused particularly on the controversial interview given by the former prime minister's sister to an Indian media outlet. The military spokesperson termed the move unacceptable and deeply irresponsible, and to an extent, he was not wrong. No matter the political circumstances, using Indian media as a platform especially at a time when relations remain strained was ill-advised and bound to create national discomfort. However, the argument offered by Imran Khan's camp also carries weight: they allege that Pakistani media is so tightly controlled that the opposition is denied meaningful coverage. According to them, interview slots, airtime, and narrative-shaping opportunities are skewed to the point that opposition figures must look elsewhere to get their message out. Yet, even then, resorting to a hostile foreign platform was not an excuse. It gave ammunition to critics and raised unnecessary suspicions. The truth is that problems exist on both sides. Political actors consistently cross red lines, while state institutions respond with disproportionate measures. But within this entire debate lies a fundamental reality that Pakistan as a nation must confront: the primary responsibility for the rise, fall, and resurgence of Imran Khan lies with those who brought him to power in the first place. Everyone knows the role the establishment played in shaping and sustaining Imran Khan's political career. Therefore, the introspection that is being demanded today must begin at home. One cannot create a phenomenon and then expect it to disappear through force and coercion. Imran Khan's governance record was far from ideal. In fact, to many, his rule was chaotic. Corruption remained widespread, governance suffered, and institutional paralysis deepened. Mismanagement was visible across multiple sectors, and had he been allowed to complete five years unhindered; it is very possible that public disenchantment would have naturally peaked. Many argue that by the end of five years, no one would even be willing to speak his name politically. That is how poor the performance was. But the way he was removed from power and more importantly, the way he and his family have been treated since turned him into something far more powerful than a politician: a symbol of victimhood. The entire narrative shifted. His flaws were overshadowed by the perception that he was wronged. Every attempt to discredit him, instead of diminishing his popularity, only increased it exponentially. The more he was pushed to the wall, the stronger his public support grew. Why? Because the method adopted to neutralize him has been deeply flawed. In politics, perception is stronger than facts. And the perception created over the past two years is that Imran Khan is being singled out unfairly, persecuted, and silenced. This is why all efforts to damage him politically have failed. There is only one credible way to make Imran Khan politically irrelevant: good governance. Not press conferences, not media restrictions, not court cases, and definitely not confrontation. People today are struggling. They cannot afford basic necessities. Inflation is crushing households. Jobs are drying up. There is no sense of security, political stability, or economic direction. Under such conditions, no one is ready to listen to lectures or accusations. People judge governments by what ends up in their kitchen, not by press briefings. All credible national and international surveys repeatedly highlight the same depressing picture: Corruption remains ram-



pant, Poverty has surged, foreign investment has evaporated. The country's international image has been damaged, CPEC stands frozen, businesses are shutting down, public frustration is at its peak. Add to this the controversial lifetime immunity granted to certain figures, and the public anger becomes understandable. In such an environment, Imran Khan can never be defeated through force or narrative manipulation. The only force powerful enough to counter him is performance real, tangible, visible governance that delivers relief to ordinary people. This is why, if free and fair elections were held today, PTI would likely win by a landslide. This victory would not necessarily be because PTI is a highly organized or ideologically superior party. Rather, it would be because of how the party has been treated and continues to be treated. The sense of injustice, deprivation, and victimization resonates with millions. The operational strategy toward PTI must change if the goal is to stabilize the political landscape. However, it is equally important to recognize that completely eliminating Imran Khan from politics is neither feasible nor desirable. Like him or hate him, he is the only major leader who disrupts the traditional two-party monopoly that has dominated Pakistan for decades. Removing him entirely would only strengthen those two parties and make them even more unmanageable. From a strategic standpoint, the establishment also understands this. A controlled, balanced political system requires more than two poles of power. Eliminating Imran Khan may satisfy certain short-term impulses, but in the long run, it will create a vacuum that will be quickly filled by forces less predictable and harder to negotiate with. At the end of the day, no one in Pakistan is a traitor. They all believe they are acting in the interest of the country, even if their methods or interpretations differ. A more inclusive approach is needed. Dialogue is needed. Tolerance is needed. The economy is in shambles, inflation is at historic highs, foreign investment has dried up, and CPEC—once hailed as a game-changer—is practically dormant. This is not the time for internal wars. It is the time for reconciliation and reconstruction. The DG ISPR's press conference may have been aimed at correcting narratives, but the real correction that Pakistan needs goes far deeper. Until governance improves, institutions learn from past mistakes, and genuine democracy is allowed to function, Imran Khan will remain an unstoppable political force. And perhaps, despite everything, Pakistan needs him not necessarily in power, but in the system to prevent a return to the suffocating two-party formula that has already inflicted decades of damage.

CDA to facilitate “New Uzbekistan” Highway naming proposal



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, met with Uzbekistan Ambassador, H.E. Alisher Tukhtayev, at the

CDA Headquarters on Wednesday. The meeting discussed matters of mutual interest and strengthening bilateral relations. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that Pakistan views its relations with brotherly country Uzbekistan with great regard and respect. H.E. Uzbek Ambassador said that Pakistan and Uzbekistan share many commonalities in cultural, social and religious aspects. Chairman CDA said that steps should be taken regarding granting the status of Sister Cities to the Federal Capital Islamabad and Tashkent. H.E. Uzbek Ambassador proposed Chairman CDA to allocate an area related to Uzbekistan in Islamabad's F-9 Park. Chairman CDA said that an area for Uzbekistan could be allocated in any park, including Sector F-9 Park and Gardenia Hub. Tukhtayev, appreciating the measures taken by the CDA for the beauty and development of the Federal Capital Islamabad, said that Islamabad is an exceptionally green, lush and naturally beautiful City. He added that the beauty, greenery and cleanliness of the Federal Capital Islamabad are commendable. The meeting also discussed the possibilities of relocating the Uzbek Embassy to the Diplomatic Enclave. Chairman CDA said that proposal should be made through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for relocating the Embassy of Uzbekistan to the Diplomatic Enclave. – DNA

Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami stresses need for national stability, dialogue

LAHORE: Renowned Pakistani journalist, senior editor, analyst, and distinguished intellectual Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami emphasized the need to steer Pakistan away from the quagmire of conflict to ensure the country's progress and survival. Speaking at a memorable evening organized by the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) as part of the APNS Talks series, Shami stressed that national stability, democratic values, institutional coordination, and meaningful dialogue are essential to overcome the challenges facing the country. APNS President Syed Sarfraz Ali welcomed all participants and remarked that in front of Shami's knowledge, experience, and insight, they feel like mere students. "Every session with Shami is a treasure trove of wisdom, and no gathering is complete without benefiting from it," he added. Jameel Athar Qazi, Chairman of the APNS Punjab Committee, reflected on Shami's contribution to Pakistan, stating: "The country has seen two Mujibs—one who broke Pakistan, and the other who has been striving to hold it together." Senior journalist Habib Akram lauded Shami's guidance, sharing that upon moving from Sargodha to Lahore, he received invaluable mentorship from Shami, which helped him achieve prominence in journalism. Shami's son, Umar Mujeeb Shami, described his father as consistent in both appearance and character, saying: "He has always kept me close, and is not only a father but also a friend. I have grown learning from his life and work." Umar also recounted memorable anecdotes from his father's career. Other participants, including Dr. Savera Shami, Salman Ghani, and Ajmal Jami, highlighted Shami's fearless journalism during authoritarian regimes. They noted that despite facing restrictions on his newspapers Shami's resolve never wavered. He has remained a steadfast champion



of truth and democracy through all eras. Throughout his career, prominent leaders sought Shami's counsel. Prominent personalities of the country valued his advice. Analysts say that any account of Pakistani journalism marked by integrity, courage, and insight would be incomplete without Shami's name in golden letters. When asked that in his opinion which period in Pakistan's history would he describe as relatively free for the press, he said that the governments of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was favourable towards press freedom. Having dedicated over half a century to journalism, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami has not only made it his life's purpose but has also brought new direction, dignity, and intellectual depth to the profession. He is widely regarded not only as one of the most senior journalists in Pakistan but also as a pillar of the country's ideological and intellectual media landscape. – DNA

Ethiopian, Moroccan envoys in Islamabad discuss regional cooperation



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Ethiopia to Pakistan, Dr Oumer H. Oba, paid a courtesy call on Mohammed Karmoune, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco and Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps in Islamabad. The meeting, held at the Embassy of Morocco, focused on matters of regional importance and strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties. Ambassador presented Ethiopia's landmark initiatives for sustainable development, highlighting their positive impact within the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Discussions were described as constructive, centering on enhanced collaboration for regional stability and integration. The Ethiopian envoy reiterated a steadfast commitment to working closely with the Dean's office to advance Pan-Africanism and shared continental objectives. The dialogue underscores the ongoing diplomatic engagement among African nations represented in Pakistan, aiming to foster unity and cooperative progress on regional platforms.

China grants Pakistan exclusive corridor for flights to Bangladesh

For regional aviation, the corridor underscores the growing role of China's airspace infrastructure in connecting South and West Asia

Saifullah Ansar / DNA

ISLAMABAD: China has approved an exclusive airspace corridor for Pakistan to operate direct flights to Bangladesh without traversing Indian airspace, officials familiar with the development said on Tuesday. The decision, which provides Pakistani carriers a northern routing via western China into the Bay of Bengal corridor, is expected to shorten flight times on select sectors while reshaping regional overflight dynamics. According to aviation officials, the approved routing will allow Pakistan's civil aviation authorities and national carriers to plan direct services linking major Pakistani cities with Dhaka and other Bangladeshi destinations through designated Chinese airways. The arrangement is understood to have been finalized following technical consultations between air navigation service providers and civil aviation regulators, with flight planning to be phased in once operational approvals and slot allocations are completed. Industry analysts say the corridor could reduce fuel burn and scheduling uncertainty arising from limited or sensitive routings across the subcontinent. Overflight approvals and air traffic management in the region have often been subject to geopolitical considerations, with carriers balancing efficiency against airspace constraints. For regional aviation, the corridor underscores the growing role of China's airspace infrastructure in connecting South and West Asia. It also highlights the interplay of bilateral air services agreements, ICAO principles governing overflight rights, and state-to-state coordination on air traffic flows. Bangladeshi aviation stakeholders have signaled interest in reciprocal schedule alignment, including potential code-sharing and cargo cooperation, contingent on final timetables and safety assessments. Pakistani carriers are expected to announce inaugural schedules after conducting demonstration flights and completing regulatory compliance. Chinese civil aviation sources emphasized that safety, capacity, and orderly traffic management guided the approval, noting that all operations will comply with international aviation standards and real-time air traffic control protocols. If implemented as planned, the corridor could mark a notable shift in South Asian air connectivity, offering a new template for route diversification amid evolving regional realities.

PIA to resume London flights from March 29

Nazir Siyal

KARACHI: The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Tuesday announced resuming its flights to London after a six-year hiatus from March 29, 2026. The airline will operate four flights per week from Islamabad to London, said an airline spokesperson, adding that the flights will be operated via Heathrow Airport's state-of-the-art Terminal 4. The London flights will further add to passengers' ease, who are currently able to utilise PIA's three flights per week to Manchester.

The airline's announcement comes after last week the sources said that it had secured approval for four weekly flight slots at London's Heathrow Airport. These slots had previously been allocated to Turkish Airlines to keep them active while the PIA's UK operations remained suspended. They said the arrangement was made to ensure the slots were not forfeited during the suspension period imposed on the airline.

With restrictions now easing, the airline has formally informed Heathrow Airport in writing of its decision to restart London flights from March 2026. The resumption of London flights is also to be taken against the backdrop of PIA's successful privatisation, where its 75% stake has been sold to a consortium headed by the Arif Habib Corporation. Since then, the consortium, which bought the airline for Rs135 billion, has said that it plans to extend the fleet to 64 aircraft in phases. Furthermore, the Fauji Fertiliser Company Limited has joined the Arif Habib-led consortium and will not only contribute to the airline's financial support and corporate expertise but will also be part of the management structure.

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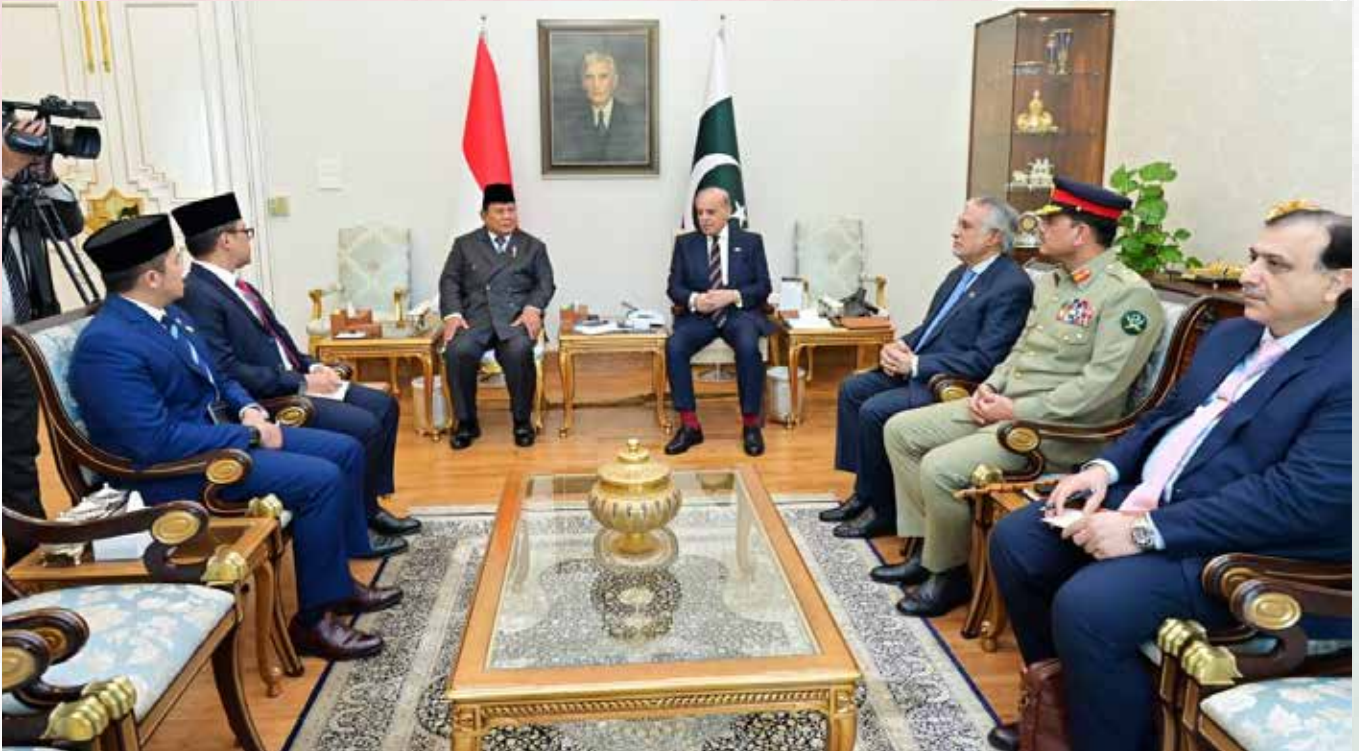


JANUARY 2026

Brotherly bonds strengthened

Pakistan, Indonesia pledge to diversify relations in all fields

PM Shehbaz Sharif Welcomes Indonesian President, says visit marks ‘New Horizons’ in bilateral ties; Indonesian President thanks Pakistan, sees bright future for bilateral ties



Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

ISLAMABAD: The leaderships of Pakistan and Indonesia pledged to further expand and diversify relations adding all efforts shall be made to make optimum use of potential that both countries have. The President of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto, in gracious remarks expressed profound gratitude to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and members of the federal cabinet for the exceptional warmth and hospitality extended to him. He said the people of Pakistan had given him a touching reception, noting that “even before landing on Pakistani soil, I was welcomed by your Air Force pilots – a remarkable gesture of friendship.” The Indonesian President reaffirmed that relations between the two nations remain “solid and enduring,” rooted in decades of mutual respect and shared aspirations. He revealed that Indonesia is embarking on a large-scale education and capacity-building initiative in the health sector, adding that Pakistan’s support would be “critical at this stage.” He welcomed Islamabad’s readiness to send doctors, specialists, and other professionals to contribute to Indonesia’s national development. He further shared that he has instructed his ministers to fast-track efforts to rebalance bilateral trade. “We want to move at a fast speed,” he stressed, emphasizing the need for practical steps that transform goodwill into tangible progress. He praised the growing alignment between the two countries on regional and global issues, noting that both sides maintain close coordination in foreign policy. Touching upon the situation in Gaza, the President reiterated Indonesia’s unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause. “We will not waver in our support to Palestine,” he asserted, adding that his foreign ministry is closely monitoring developments and coordinating with friendly nations, including Pakistan. Looking to the future, the Indonesian leader said he felt optimistic about expanding cooperation across multiple sectors. Extending an invitation to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, he said: “I welcome Prime Minister Shehbaz and other Pakistani leaders to visit Indonesia – come and see what we are doing and share your advice on how we can jointly enhance our partnership.” He concluded that this visit was not merely





symbolic, but a defining moment that would help both countries accelerate collaboration in health, education, trade, and foreign-policy coordination. The visit, he noted, sets the stage for a renewed era of engagement between Pakistan and Indonesia, built on trust, shared values and a commitment to progress. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif warmly welcomed Indonesian President on his historic two-day visit to Pakistan, describing the occasion as a “deeply meaningful moment” that underscores the brotherly bond between the two nations.

Speaking at the joint press interaction, the Prime Minister said Pakistan felt “indebted and honoured” that the Indonesian President chose to visit Islamabad, the first such high-level visit in seven years. He noted that the presidential aircraft was welcomed by Pakistan Air Force jets — a gesture, he stressed, that was “not merely ceremonial, but an expression from the heart for a brotherly leader and a trusted partner.” PM Shehbaz said the discussions held between the two sides were “exceptionally fruitful”, covering a wide spectrum of cooperation including trade, investment, palm oil procurement, information technology, energy, agriculture, education, and defence collaboration. He highlighted that both sides agreed to expand economic engagement and explore new avenues of partnership. In particular, Pakistan expressed readiness to send Pakistani doctors, medical specialists, engineers, and other experts to Indonesia as part of its contribution to Indonesia’s ongoing national development. “We will be happy to send our doctors, specialists and skilled experts to Indonesia. Pakistan is ready to



partner in Indonesia’s progress in health, IT, agriculture and several other sectors,” the Prime Minister said, adding that the visit opens a fresh chapter in people-to-people and institutional cooperation. PM Shehbaz said Pakistan takes immense pride in its 75-year-long diplomatic relationship with Indonesia — one of the earliest countries to establish ties after Pakistan’s creation. “Your visit coincides with the completion of 75 years of our relations. Let us celebrate this journey with zeal and renewed commitment,” he stated. Recalling historical bonds, the Prime Minister noted that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as President of the All-Pakistan Muslim League, had strongly supported Indonesia’s independence movement. He added that Indonesia has always stood by Pakistan in critical times, particularly during

the wars with its neighbouring country, offering unwavering diplomatic and moral support. “Indonesia supported Pakistan wholeheartedly in our hour of need. This is something we have never forgotten and will always cherish,” Shehbaz remarked. He said Pakistan looks forward to increased high-level exchanges, collaboration in emerging technologies, enhanced investments, and joint initiatives in climate resilience, maritime security and halal trade. Concluding his remarks, the Prime Minister reiterated that Pakistan values Indonesia not only as the largest economy in ASEAN but also as a close friend, an important Muslim-majority country, and a partner in the pursuit of global peace and development. “We genuinely feel proud that you visited Pakistan. Our bonds are destined to grow even stronger,” he said.

Indonesian President decorated with award



Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: A special investiture ceremony was held at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Tuesday, where President of Indonesia was conferred the prestigious Nishan-e-Pakistan, the country's highest civil award. The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chairman Senate, Speaker National Assembly, and senior military leadership, marking a significant moment in Pakistan-Indonesia bilateral relations. A dignified ceremony was also held in honour of the visiting Indonesian President, reflecting the deep-rooted ties and mutual respect between the two nations. Later, President of Pakistan held a one-on-one meeting with the Indonesian President, during which the two leaders discussed historic relations and reaffirmed their shared values and longstanding goodwill. Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. President of Pakistan expressed heartfelt condolences over the recent floods and landslides in Sumatra, praying for the departed souls and wishing speedy recovery for the injured. Reiterating their commitment to promoting interfaith har-

mony and tolerance, the two Presidents decided to build the future partnership on principles of inclusive and comprehensive development. Satisfaction was expressed over the steady growth in bilateral trade, with emphasis on diversifying and balancing economic exchanges. The Joint Trade Committee was acknowledged as an effective platform for strengthening business-to-business ties. Pakistan and Indonesia agreed to expand collaboration in information technology, agriculture, energy, and tourism. Both leaders underscored joint efforts to tackle climate change, disaster management, and sustainable development. They also expressed the resolve to advance defence cooperation, including training and joint production initiatives. The two countries reaffirmed their commitment to counter Islamophobia at global forums. President of Pakistan highlighted the need for regional peace and development and briefed the Indonesian President on the situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Later, ministers, senior officials, and top military commanders from both sides joined the delegation-level talks aimed at deepening the multidimensional partnership between Pakistan and Indonesia.

ROMANIAN ENVOY TALKS ABOUT EVER-EXPANDING RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN

Ambassador Stoenescu shared that Romania has significantly expanded its presence in Pakistan over the past year

Mahnoor Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Romania's Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Dan Stoenescu, delivered an inspiring address on the occasion of Romania's National Day, celebrated on 1 December, emphasizing unity, resilience, and the deepening partnership between Romania and Pakistan. Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi was the chief guest, while Governor KP Faisal Karim Kundi and other federal ministers and special assistants also attended the event. Speaking to a distinguished gathering of diplomats, officials, academia, and members of civil society, the ambassador said that Romania's National Day marks "the Great Union of 1918"—a defining moment when all Romanian provinces united to form a modern and sovereign state. He said the day serves as a reminder of national unity, shared values,

and the country's unwavering commitment to freedom, security and prosperity. Highlighting this year's milestone, the ambassador noted that Romania and Pakistan are celebrating 61 years of diplomatic relations, built on friendship, mutual respect, and consistent cooperation.

Ambassador Stoenescu shared that Romania has significantly expanded its presence in Pakistan over the past year. The opening of the Romanian Honorary Consulate in Peshawar, and upcoming honorary consulates in Karachi and Lahore, reflect Romania's strategic focus on strengthening bilateral engagement. He said his extensive travels across Pakistan—including Karachi, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi and Peshawar—have helped open new avenues for trade, investment and business dialogue. A major highlight of the year was the successful launch of the first Romania-Pakistan IT Forum, bringing over 100 tech compa-

nies from both countries into direct contact. The envoy termed it a "historic step" toward building partnerships in technology, innovation and digital transformation. The Romanian ambassador underscored a notable momentum in bilateral defence ties, citing high-level military exchanges that have reinforced the "trusted partnership" between the two armed forces.

Cultural and educational collaboration has also grown substantially. The first edition of the Romanian Cultural Days in Pakistan—featuring film screenings, art exhibitions and music performances—drew strong public interest in Islamabad and Karachi. Academic partnerships with institutions such as NUST, GIFT University and NUTECH continue to expand. The ambassador proudly announced the opening of Pakistan's first Romanian language lectorate at NUML University, welcoming its inaugural Romanian language lecturer, Dr. Oana Ursache.





Romanian Embassy concludes cultural days with Christmas concert

Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Dan Stoenescu, warmly welcomed the guests and highlighted the importance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening people-to-people contacts and fostering mutual understanding between nations

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Romania concluded the Romanian Cultural Days in Pakistan with a special Christmas concert, held in a festive and heartwarming atmosphere that celebrated music, culture, and the universal spirit of peace and goodwill associated with the Christmas season. The event brought together members of the diplomatic community, cultural enthusiasts, and friends of Romania for an evening marked by artistic excellence and shared joy. In his brief remarks, Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Dan Stoenescu, warmly welcomed the guests and expressed gratitude to the audience for their presence and continued interest in Romanian culture. Introducing the performers, the ambassador highlighted the importance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening people-to-people contacts and fostering mutual understanding between nations. The concert, hosted at Saint Thomas Church, Islamabad, featured renowned Romanian soprano Georgiana Costea-Glugă, accompanied by accomplished pianist Sheeza Maqsood. Together, they captivated the audience with a rich and carefully

curated repertoire of traditional Romanian carols and beloved seasonal melodies, offering a unique musical experience that blended Romania's cultural heritage with universally cherished Christmas classics. The programme included iconic Romanian carols such as "Mo Crăciun cu plete dalbe" and "O, ce veste minunată", alongside internationally celebrated pieces including "Silent Night" and other festive favourites. The soulful and expressive performances created a warm, joyful, and celebratory ambiance, resonating deeply with listeners and filling the historic church with the spirit of the season.

Members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of various faiths, the Romanian community in Pakistan, and music lovers from Islamabad attended the concert, reflecting the unifying power of music and cultural exchange. The event also underscored shared values of harmony, compassion, and coexistence that transcend national and cultural boundaries.

As the closing highlight of the Romanian Cultural Days in Pakistan, the Christmas concert stood as a meaningful symbol of cultural dialogue and enduring friendship between Romania and Pakistan, leaving the audience with lasting memories of an evening rooted in tradition, artistry, and goodwill.



Romanian studies inaugurated for first time in Pakistan at NUML



Mahnoor Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Romania in Pakistan, with the support of the Institute of the Romanian Language and in collaboration with the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), has inaugurated the first-ever academic presence of Romanian Studies in Pakistan. This landmark initiative opens a new academic and cultural gateway between South Asia and Central and Eastern Europe.

The inauguration ceremony took place on Tuesday, 23 December 2025, at NUML Islamabad, in the presence of the Ambassador of Romania, Dr. Dan Stoenescu, NUML Rector Maj. Gen. Shahid Mahmood Kayani, the Dean of the Faculty of Languages, Professor Dr. Jamil Asghar Jami, the Director General Brigadier Muhammad Rafiq Khan, Dr. Huma Hayat Khan, Head of National and International Linkages Office, members of the university faculty, representatives of the Romanian diaspora, and members of the diplomatic corps. The event marks the historic introduction of Romanian language, literature, and cultural studies into Pakistan's leading multilingual academic environment. By becoming the first university in the country to offer Romanian language courses, NUML reaffirms its role as a space where languages do not merely coexist, but actively

engage in dialogue, responding to a growing global interest in cultural depth, intellectual diversity, and the humanities.

Developed in partnership with the Institute of the Romanian Language and supported by the Embassy of Romania in Pakistan, the Romanian Studies program goes beyond language instruction. It creates an interdisciplinary academic space integrating linguistic training, literature, translation, history, and cultural studies, positioning Romania within broader European and South Asian intellectual dialogues. Students are invited not only to learn Romanian, but also to explore a cultural landscape shaped by historical crossroads, memory, creativity, and resilience.

As part of the inauguration, the Embassy of Romania donated a collection of books to NUML, comprising volumes in Romanian and English on Romanian culture, history, civilization, art, and literature. The donation was made with the support of the Romanian Cultural Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, further strengthening the academic foundations of Romanian Studies at NUML.

Quoting the renowned Romanian linguist Eugen Coeri, who described plurilingualism as a form of freedom, the initiative reflects a shared commitment to promoting linguistic diversity and intercultural understanding. The Romanian Studies program will be coordinated by Dr. Oana

Ursache, Doctor of Philology, specializing in comparative literature, culturology, and Hispanic, Oriental, Pre-Columbian, and Arabic literatures. She brings extensive international academic experience, having previously taught at tefan cel Mare University of Suceava, the University of Alicante, the University of Granada, and Arizona State University. In 2021, she also served as Secretary of State at the Department for Romanians Abroad. Following significant academic experience in Spain and the United States, Dr. Ursache has chosen NUML Islamabad to establish a new Center of Romanian Studies, further enhancing the university's academic profile.

The introduction of Romanian language courses—offered for the first time in Pakistan—is expected to strengthen bilateral relations and foster deeper cultural and academic understanding between Romania and Pakistan. With Pakistan's population approaching a quarter of a billion people, the initiative represents a unique opportunity to expand academic cooperation and advance cultural diplomacy.

Ambassador Dan Stoenescu expressed his sincere appreciation to the Institute of the Romanian Language, the Romanian Cultural Institute, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania for their continued support and commitment in bringing this important project to fruition.

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54th Eid Al-Etihad Day

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif hails Paki-UAE ties as excellent

Turning to bilateral ties, Ambassador Alzaabi spoke of the deep-rooted and historic friendship between the UAE and Pakistan, built on mutual respect and a shared vision for regional peace and development



ISLAMABAD: Chief guest Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Ambassador of United Arab Emirates Salem Mohammed Alzaabi, UAE Defence Attache cutting cake to celebrate the 54th Eid Al Etihad Day, at the Islamabad Serena Hotel. – DNA

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has praised the strong and enduring partnership between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, describing bilateral relations as having grown from “cordial to excellent” over the years.

Speaking at an event marking the 54th Eid Al-Etihad Day of the UAE, the Prime Minister said the relationship between the two brotherly nations is “poised to grow even further,” supported by shared values, mutual respect, and a deep history of cooperation. The Prime Minister extended warm greetings to the leadership and people of the UAE on the national occasion, noting that the UAE has always stood by Pakistan in times of need. He highlighted the UAE’s consistent support during economic challenges, natural disasters, and regional crises, expressing profound gratitude on behalf of the Pakistani nation. The Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Salem Alzaabi, hosted a grand reception in the capital on Monday evening to celebrate the 54th Union Day of the UAE.

The event was graced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as the Guest of Honour, alongside federal ministers, diplomats, senior officials, and notable figures from Pakistani society. In his address Ambassador Alzaabi said they commemorated the historic unification of the Emirates in 1971 under the founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. He emphasized that this year’s theme, “United,” reflects the core values of unity, cohesion, and tolerance that have propelled the UAE’s remarkable development over five decades.

“This year’s celebrations coincide with the declaration of 2025 as the ‘Year of the Community’ in the UAE, reaffirming our leadership’s belief in the vital role played by all citizens and residents,” the Ambassador stated. He highlighted the UAE’s strategic national visions, including “We the UAE 2031” and the “UAE Centennial 2071,” which guide the nation’s advancement in clean energy, knowledge-based growth, and future-ready sectors.

Turning to bilateral ties, Ambassador Alzaabi spoke of the deep-rooted and historic friendship between the UAE and Pakistan, built on mutual respect and a shared vision for regional peace and development. “As we gather here in Islamabad, we are reminded of the strong bonds that unite our two nations,” he said.

Looking forward, the Ambassador outlined a robust commitment to strengthening the partnership. “We see tremendous potential for collaboration in various sectors, including renewable energy, artificial intelligence, sustainability, economic diversification, and agricultural innovation,” he announced. He expressed confidence that such cooperation would create new opportunities for the youth of both nations and drive innovation beneficial to the wider region. In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Alzaabi extended heartfelt gratitude to the government and people of Pakistan for their consistent warmth, hospitality, and support. “May the bond between the UAE and Pakistan continue to grow stronger for generations to come,” he said. The reception served as a vibrant testament to the enduring diplomatic and people-to-people ties between the two brotherly nations, with attendees celebrating the UAE’s national day amidst a spirit of camaraderie and shared future aspirations.



Islamabad Serena Hotel Marks Start of Festive Season with Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Serena Hotel ushered in the festive season with a warm and vibrant Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony held in the hotel's beautifully decorated lobby on Friday evening. The annual celebration brought together guests, families, and members of the Christian community to share in the joy and spirit of Christmas. The event opened with melodious Christmas carols that filled the lobby with festive cheer, setting the tone for an evening of togetherness and celebration.

Pastor Rashid from Christ Church delivered a heartfelt message, of-

fering blessings for the season and reminding attendees of the importance of compassion, kindness, and giving—values central to the Christmas spirit.

General Manager of Islamabad Serena Hotel, Christoph Hoeflich, extended warm greetings to all attendees, wishing them a Merry Christmas and encouraging everyone to enjoy the evening in harmony and goodwill.

A highlight of the ceremony was the delight of children as they met Santa Claus, their laughter and excitement adding a special charm to the gathering. Guests enjoyed

a selection of sweet and savory refreshments, along with warm beverages that complemented the cozy, festive atmosphere.

The sparkling Christmas tree, adorned with twinkling lights and ornaments, served as the centerpiece of the evening, symbolizing the beginning of a series of seasonal celebrations at the Serena Hotel.

The event concluded with a shared sense of joy and anticipation for the festive weeks ahead, as the hotel's enchanting ambiance lifted spirits and welcomed the holiday season with warmth and elegance.





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Swiss Embassy premieres documentary on glacial melting

Ambassador Georg Steiner emphasized that while Switzerland continues to contribute through various development and environmental projects, the future of Pakistan's tourism particularly in the northern regions depends largely on the vision and commitment of the Government of Pakistan

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

ISLAMABAD: To mark International Mountain Day and the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation 2025, the Embassy of Switzerland hosted the premiere of a 30-minute documentary titled "The Melt Down of Glaciers – Switzerland and Pakistan" at the residence of Ambassador Georg Steiner. Diplomats, climate experts, civil society leaders, and media representatives attended the event, which shed light on the growing challenges posed by rapidly melting glaciers in both countries.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Georg Steiner emphasized that while Switzerland continues to contribute through various development and environmental projects, the future of Pakistan's tourism particularly in the northern regions depends largely on the vision and commitment of the Government of Pakistan. He said Switzerland is always ready to support Pakistan in enhancing its tourism potential, adding that Pakistan is "blessed with scenic beauties that deserve global attention." The documentary explored the critical role of glaciers, snow, and ice in the global climate system and hydrological cycle. It reveals how accelerated melting threatens water security, agriculture, and the livelihoods of vulnerable mountain populations. Featuring interviews with glaciologists, climate scientists, and community members, the film documented the shared challenges faced by Pakistan and Switzerland. While Switzerland

benefits from advanced monitoring technologies, strong infrastructure, and substantial financial resources, it still struggles to cope with the pace of glacial retreat. In contrast, Pakistan home to over 7,000 glaciers and the world's greatest concentration of peaks above 8,000 meters remains extremely vulnerable. Limited resources, combined with the increasing threat of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), pose severe risks to agriculture, irrigation systems, and human settlements.

Experts from both countries underscored the need for enhanced scientific cooperation, data sharing, and policy alignment to address the worsening effects of climate change. They stressed that glaciers are not only natural wonders but essential water sources for millions. Ambassador Steiner reiterated Switzerland's commitment to supporting Pakistan in climate resilience, environmental preservation, and sustainable tourism initiatives. He noted that the documentary aims to deepen public understanding of these challenges and stimulate stronger collaborative action.

Produced with support from the Swiss Embassy in Pakistan, Adventure Club Pakistan, and Explore n Exped, the documentary blends powerful visuals with scientific insight. Audiences praised its balanced storytelling and breathtaking cinematography, describing it as an important contribution to climate awareness in the region. The event concluded with discussions on strengthening partnerships to protect mountain ecosystems and support communities living on the front lines of climate change.



Dialogue on Humanity: Swiss Ambassador Inaugurates Photo Exhibition at National Art Gallery

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The National Art Gallery at the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) hosted the inauguration of a powerful and thought-provoking photo exhibition titled "Dialogue on Humanity", jointly curated by Photo-Élysée Museum Lausanne, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Ambassador of Switzerland to Pakistan Georg Steiner formally opened the exhibition, welcoming diplomats, art enthusiasts, students, and members of civil society. Despite what he described as "a busy evening with multiple events taking place in Islamabad," the ambassador expressed delight at the strong turnout and appreciation for the importance of the occasion.

Ambassador Steiner extended special thanks to Asma Tariq from the Swiss Embassy and the team at ICRC for their dedicated efforts in bringing the exhibition to Pakistan. He also acknowledged the PNCA staff for their cooperation in hosting the

event. In his address, Ambassador Steiner highlighted the global relevance of the exhibition. "Dialogues on Humanity has already travelled to 11 countries," he noted, adding that the exhibition invites visitors to reflect deeply on the principles that shape modern humanitarian action: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. These principles, he said, lie at the heart of the Geneva Conventions and remain vital amid the complexities of the contemporary world.

He emphasized that the purpose of the exhibition is not only to showcase striking images but also to encourage critical

and independent thinking. Referencing key themes printed on the invitation card—living in nature, hope and dignity, facts and fiction, truth and lies, digital and data—the ambassador said the photographs urge viewers to contemplate how humanitarian values are applied in daily life. Visitors are encouraged to scan a QR code provided at the venue, which connects them to an online platform to share their reflections with a global audience. Ambassador Steiner expressed hope that Pakistani voices and perspectives would contribute meaningfully to this global conversation.



Uzbek photojournalists to be invited to Pak: Tarar Photo exhibition marks new chapter in Pakistan–Uzbek cultural relations

Culture minister praises photographers work; Uzbek ambassador says exhibition shows deep bilateral culture bonds

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has announced the launch of a journalists and photojournalists exchange programme between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, aimed at promoting mutual understanding and familiarising media professionals with Pakistan's culture, history and heritage.

He made the announcement while speaking at the opening of a photo exhibition at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), featuring works by Pakistani photojournalists who recently visited Uzbekistan on an official invitation. The exhibition showcased the rich cultural heritage, landscapes and everyday life of Uzbekistan as captured through the lenses of Pakistani photographers. The photojournalists include Ramzan Mughal, Shahid Qureshi (Raju), Suleman. Azhar Hafeez and Gulrez Ghauri.

Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage Aurangzeb Khan Khichi was also present on the occasion, along with diplomats, artists, journalists and a large number of students and culture enthusiasts.

Addressing the gathering, Attaullah Tarar said the exchange programme would provide journalists and photojournalists from both countries an opportunity to learn from each other, share professional experiences and gain firsthand exposure to the cultural and historical richness of Pakistan and Uzbekistan. He noted that Uzbekistan had recently hosted a delegation of Pakistani journalists, and now Pakistan was keen to reciprocate the gesture by inviting Uzbek media professionals.

The information minister said Pakistan attached great importance to its relations with Uzbekistan, describing the bilateral ties as rooted in shared history, culture and values. He added that the leadership of both countries – Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev – was fully determined to further strengthen cooperation and take their nations forward on the path of development and prosperity. Recalling his recent visit to Uzbekistan, Attaullah Tarar praised the warm hospitality extended to the Pakistani delegation. He said the visit helped deepen understanding between the two sides and opened new avenues for cooperation, particularly in the fields of culture, media and people-to-people contacts. He further stated that, in collaboration with



the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, a comprehensive plan would be devised to promote and showcase Pakistan's culture, history and heritage to the outside world. Such initiatives, he said, were essential to project Pakistan's soft image and highlight

its rich civilisational legacy at the international level. Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, speaking on the occasion, lauded the outstanding work of the Pakistani photojournalists whose photographs were on display.

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Kenya envoy reaffirms strong ties with Pakistan



Mahnoor Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The High Commission of the Republic of Kenya on Thursday commemorated the 62nd Anniversary of Kenya's Independence (Jamhuri Day) with a ceremonial event in Islamabad, where Kenya's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ambassador Lt-Gen (Rtd) Peter Mbogo Njiru, highlighted Kenya's democratic journey, economic transformation, and deep-rooted relations with Pakistan.

Addressing the gathering, the High Commissioner welcomed guests and recalled that Kenya attained independence on December 12, 1963, describing Jamhuri Day as a moment of pride and reflection on the sacrifices made by Kenya's forefathers for freedom and nationhood.

"This celebration reminds us of the sacrifices of those who laid the foundation of our republic and calls upon us to honor their aspirations for a peaceful, prosperous and united Kenya," he said.

The ambassador said the theme of this year's Jamhuri Day, "Tourism, Wildlife and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE)", reflects Kenya's strengths in natural heritage, cultural diversity, innovation, and its growing role as a global destination for tourism and international conferences.

Highlighting Kenya's progress over the past six decades, Ambassador Njiru said the country continues to enjoy political stability, democratic maturity and economic vitality under the leadership of President Dr William Samoei Ruto. He said Kenya remains committed to inclusive development, climate resilience, regional peace initiatives and shared prosperity.

He noted that Kenya has transformed into a regional economic hub driven by agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, technology and services. Major infrastructure development has strengthened Kenya's position as a gateway to East and Central Africa, while its rapidly ex-

panding digital economy has earned it the title of Africa's "Silicon Savannah".

The High Commissioner outlined several key sectors offering investment opportunities, including manufacturing, agriculture and agro-processing, information and communication technology, tourism, and the creative, blue and mining economies. He said Kenya's investment framework is open and investor-friendly, allowing 100 percent foreign ownership and full repatriation of profits.

He further highlighted incentives available under Kenya's Special Economic Zones and Export Processing Zones, as well as the Nairobi International Financial Centre, which is positioning Nairobi as a leading financial hub in Africa.

Ambassador Njiru said global confidence in Kenya is reflected in the presence of over 300 multinational corporations headquartered in Nairobi, along with the United Nations' expanding footprint in the Kenyan capital.



Satyani receives Franco-German Human rights, rule of law prize

The French Ambassador highlighted that since 2016, France and Germany have marked International Human Rights Day, observed on December 10, by honoring individuals who have shown exceptional courage in defending fundamental rights

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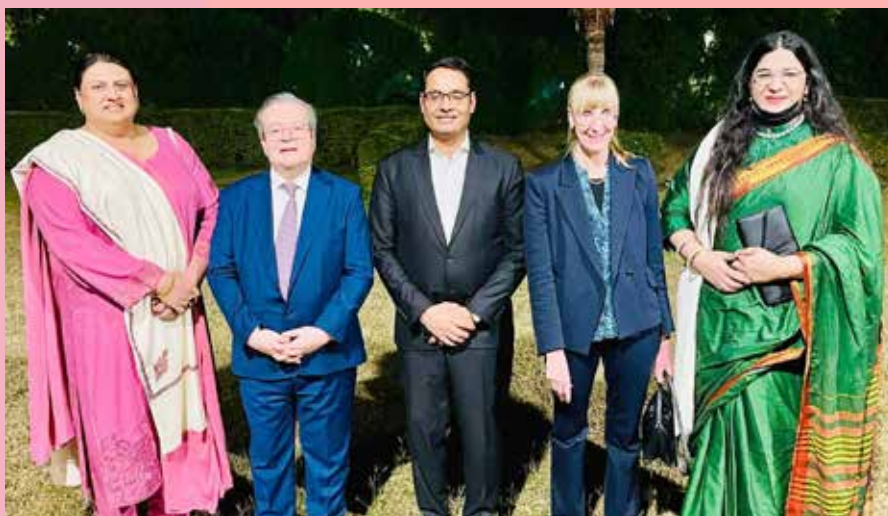
ISLAMABAD: The French and German Embassies in Pakistan jointly hosted a ceremony to present the 2025 Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law to Mr. Pirbhu Satyani, a distinguished human rights advocate from Sindh. The award was formally presented by French Ambassador Nicolas Galey alongside German Ambassador Ina Lepel, in the presence of civil society representatives, previous award recipients, diplomats, journalists, and members of Mr. Satyani's family.

Ambassador Galey congratulated Mr. Satyani for being selected among 14 laureates worldwide, noting that embassies from both countries had submitted numerous nominations. "Only 14 individuals were selected, including Mr. Satyani – félicitations!" he said. He warmly acknowledged the presence of Satyani's children, remarking that they could be proud of their father's unwavering commitment to human rights.

The Ambassador highlighted that since 2016, France and Germany have marked International Human Rights Day, observed on December 10, by honoring individuals who have shown exceptional courage in defending fundamental rights. The prize recognizes journalists, activists, and civil society leaders who work against torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, discrimination, and violence, while promoting equality, dignity, and freedom of expression.

Recalling the previous Pakistani recipients, Ambassador Galey acknowledged Sarah Belal, founder of Justice Project Pakistan (JPP), awarded in 2016, and Nayyab Ali, a prominent transgender and minority rights activist honored in 2020, who was also present at the ceremony. He commended JPP for its continued partnership and impactful work.

Addressing the contributions of this year's laureate, Ambassador Galey described Mr. Pirbhu Satyani as a "fervent defender of minority, women's,



and children's rights, particularly in Sindh," noting his extensive work with the National Commission for the Rights of the Child. The Ambassador also paid tribute to the Commission's Chairperson, Ayesha Farooq, for her ongoing commitment to child rights.

Mr. Satyani's research and advocacy for the Dalit community, which faces double marginalization within religious minority groups, were highlighted as key factors in his selection. Ambassador Galey praised his "discreet yet persistent and efficient" efforts to champion

minority rights – an issue of significant importance not only to France and Germany but to the broader European Union, particularly within the context of the GSP+ monitoring framework.

He expressed hope that the award would inspire human rights defenders across Pakistan to continue their work with renewed strength, knowing that their contributions are recognized globally. The ceremony concluded with Ambassador Lepel's address and the formal presentation of the medal and diploma to Mr. Satyani.

Book 'New Uzbekistan: the Path of Shavkat Mirziyoyev' launched

Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Ambassador Alisher Tukhtaev, stated that Uzbekistan has entered a new era of growth marked by comprehensive reforms across governance, economy, science, and development



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ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, in collaboration with the Embassy of Uzbekistan, hosted a book launch ceremony for *New Uzbekistan: The Path of Shavkat Mirziyoyev*, bringing together diplomats, policymakers, scholars, and members of civil society. The event underscored Uzbekistan's reform-driven transformation under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and highlighted the deepening partnership between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

Ambassador Jauhar Saleem President IRS termed the book an intellectually rich and well-articulated account of Uzbekistan's reform trajectory. He described the launch as a meaningful diplomatic and intellectual moment between two brotherly nations, bound by shared faith, history, culture, and civilizational ties. Highlighting Uzbekistan's emergence as a regional hub since independence, he noted that the book goes beyond political narrative to present a profound reflection on leadership anchored in service to the people.

Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Ambassador Alisher Tukhtaev, stated that Uzbekistan has entered a new era of growth marked by comprehensive reforms across governance, economy, science, and development. He noted that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's leadership has renewed public confidence in the country's future, reflected in tangible economic gains, including an increase in GDP from USD 115 billion to USD 140 billion and foreign exchange reserves from USD 48 billion to USD 59 billion. Highlighting bilateral relations, Ambassador Tukhtaev described Pakistan and Uzbekistan as genuine partners bound by a long-term cooperation framework and mutual trust. He noted positive developments such as visa facilitation for Pakistani nationals through e-visa regimes, expanded direct flight connectivity between Tashkent and Islamabad and Lahore, with Karachi to be added next year, and growing trade volumes expected to rise from USD 404 million in 2024 to USD 450 million this year.

Mr. Hassan Irmatov, Member of the Senate Committee of Uzbekistan, described the book as a leadership-oriented and analytical work that provides insights into contemporary governance and state transformation. Recalling the book's earlier launches in the United



States and at the United Nations Headquarters, attended by senior lawmakers, UN officials, and civil society representatives, he termed the Islamabad launch an important milestone in the book's growing international outreach and a reflection of strengthening Pak-Uzbek relations. Mr. Eldor Tulyakov, Executive Director of the Development Strategy Center, elaborated on the profound transformation of Uzbekistan's public administration over the past eight years. He emphasized that governance reforms have redefined the relationship between the state and citizens, placing human dignity at the center of policymaking. Transparency, participatory budgeting, institutionalized accountability, and service-oriented governance were highlighted as key pillars of reform. Spokesperson to President of Pakistan and former Information Minister, Mr. Murtaza Solangi, emphasized the deep cultural, historical, and geographical affinities between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba assumes charge as Ethiopian Ambassador to Pakistan

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ISLAMABAD: H.E. Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba has formally assumed his role as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Upon his arrival at the Ethiopian Mission in Islamabad, the Ambassador was received with a warm reception and provided with an extensive briefing on the Embassy's initiatives and milestones achieved over the last three years.

A Distinguished Career in Leadership

Ambassador Oba brings a wealth of high-level administrative and diplomatic experience to his new post. His notable previous roles include:

- Minister of Agriculture for Ethiopia.
- Minister of Revenue and Customs.
- Vice President of the Oromia Regional State.
- Ambassador of Ethiopia to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Strengthening the Ethiopia-Pakistan Partnership

The transition comes at a pivotal time for bilateral relations. Dr. Oba expressed his eagerness to lead the next chapter of this historic partnership, aiming to elevate cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, trade, and regional development.

Under his guidance, both nations look forward to reaching "new heights," building upon the foundation of mutual respect and shared economic interests that have flourished in recent years.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Ireland Mary O Neil, Global CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani and others posing for a picture on the occasion of a talk by Prof. Salima Hashmi organized by the Satrang Art Gallery, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. DNA

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