

# CENTRELINE

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine



**Dr Ramez Alraee**

**Syria and Pakistan  
strengthen relations**



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# Pakistan's foreign office faces mounting criticism



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO), the institution tasked with representing the country's image abroad, is facing growing criticism from diplomats and foreign missions stationed in Islamabad. Concerns have been raised over inefficiency, lack of cooperation, slow pace of work, and recurring corruption scandals that have tarnished the reputation of the office.

Diplomats from several countries have expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Foreign Office handles routine matters. According to officials, the FO often demonstrates a lack of interest in resolving issues promptly, leading to delays in communication and coordination. This slow pace of work has

become a source of frustration for foreign missions, who expect efficiency and professionalism in their dealings with Pakistan's premier diplomatic institution.

One of the most pressing grievances voiced by diplomats relates to Goods and Services Tax (GST) refunds. Diplomats argue that while in their home countries such refunds are processed swiftly, in Pakistan the process is either delayed indefinitely or not honored at all. This issue has become a major source of contention, with foreign missions repeatedly raising the matter with the authorities. The lack of resolution not only inconveniences diplomats but also reflects poorly on Pakistan's commitment to international norms and diplomatic privileges. Adding to the discontent is the recent corruption scandal in the attestation department of the Foreign Office. Reports suggest that malpractice in this department has been ongoing for years, with officials allegedly demanding bribes to expedite routine attestation services. Such practices have eroded trust and created a perception of systemic corruption within the institution.

The attestation scandal is not the first time the Foreign Office has been embroiled in controversy. In the past, corruption was reported in the allocation of liquor quota permits for foreign missions, as well as in the import of vehicles under diplomatic privileges. These scandals led to disciplinary actions, with some FO officials being dismissed from service. In certain cases, even diplomats themselves were sacked for their involvement in corrupt practices. The Foreign Office is often described as the "face of Pakistan" to the outside world. Its role in facilitating diplomatic relations, ensuring smooth communication, and projecting a positive image of the country is critical. However, recurring inefficiency and corruption have undermined this role, creating a negative impression among foreign missions. Diplomats argue that if Pakistan wishes to strengthen its global standing, the FO must operate as a model institution efficient, transparent, and corruption-free.

The dissatisfaction of foreign missions carries significant consequences. Diplomats are not only representatives of their countries but also key stakeholders in fostering bilateral relations. Their negative experiences with Pakistan's Foreign Office risk influencing their governments' perception of Pakistan. This, in turn, could affect cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and cultural exchange. A tarnished image of the FO reflects directly on Pakistan's credibility in the international community. Observers believe that the Foreign Office must urgently address these issues to restore confidence. Reforms aimed at improving efficiency, ensuring transparency, and eliminating corruption are seen as essential.

Despite the challenges, there is hope that better sense will prevail and the Foreign Office will set its house in order. Pakistan's leadership has often emphasized the importance of diplomacy in advancing national interests. To achieve this, the FO must embody professionalism and integrity. The criticism directed at Pakistan's Foreign Office serves as a wake-up call. Diplomats and foreign missions expect efficiency, cooperation, and respect for international norms. The persistence of inefficiency and corruption not only inconveniences them but also damages Pakistan's global image.

**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 launched Diplomatic News Agency (DNA) in 2012. In May 2020 he launched Pakistan's First & only Diplomatic Newspaper Daily Islamabad POST.



Dr Ramez Alraee

# Syria and Pakistan strengthen relations

Exclusive Interview with Dr Ramez Alraee,  
the Ambassador of Syria to Pakistan



**Ansar M Bhatti**

**1: Your Excellency, thank you for speaking with us. Syria is often described as the cradle of human civilization. How do you explain this unique identity to the world?**

Thank you for having me. Indeed, Syria is not just a country; it is a living archive of human history. Cities such as Damascus and Aleppo are among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with histories spanning over 11,000 years. Syria has hosted dozens of civilizations – Roman, Greek, Byzantine, Islamic, Umayyad, Ayyubid, and many others. Each left behind its architectural, cultural, and linguistic imprints. This deep heritage is why we proudly call Syria the cradle of civilization. “Syria is a museum under the open sky.”



**2: Damascus is highlighted as one of the oldest cities in human history. What makes it so special?**

Damascus is often described as a city where time folds in on itself—layers of civilizations stitched together in stone, wood, and light. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, its Old City holds more than 125 archaeological landmarks within walls that have witnessed Aramean, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic eras. Step through one of its ancient gates and you pass from modern bustle to a living museum of streets, courtyards, minarets, and markets. At the heart stands the Umayyad Mosque, a masterpiece of early Islamic architecture. Its vast marble courtyard gleams under the sun; golden and emerald mosaics portray paradisaal gardens; and within lies the





revered shrine associated with John the Baptist (Prophet Yahya).

Nearby rests the mausoleum of Salah ad-Din (Saladin), a reminder of Damascus's role on the world stage. The mosque is not merely a monument—it is a breathing center of worship, scholarship, and community life. Radiating from this core are souqs that have hummed for centuries. Hamidiyah Market stretches like a river of sound beneath a perforated iron canopy: the rhythm of cobblers' hammers, the call of spice merchants, the perfume of cardamom, sumac, and rose. Under its archways, you'll find hand-beaten copper, Damascus inlay, silk brocade, and the famed pistachio-rolled ice cream at Bakdash. Caravanserais such as Khan As'ad Pasha still stand, their domed halls once sheltering traders from Aleppo, Baghdad, and beyond.

The palatial Al-Azm complex, once home to Ottoman governors, captures Damascene domestic elegance: ablaq stonework in alternating light and dark, carved wooden ceilings, latticed mashrabiya screens, and courtyard fountains ringed with jasmine. Traditional houses turned inward, around cool, shaded patios where citrus trees and water basins temper the desert heat—architecture as climate wisdom and social fabric. Churches and chapels, such as those along the Straight Street (Via Recta) and the Chapel of St. Ananias, speak to the city's deep Christian heritage; old quarters like Bab Touma and Bab Sharqi keep distinct identities while blending into the whole. From the slopes of Mount Qasioun, the city unfurls in a tapestry of roofs and minarets, with the Barada River and the orchards of the Ghouta plain historically feeding Damascus's gardens and kitchens.

Food here is culture made edible: herb-

laced fattoush, kibbeh in countless regional forms, trays of ma'amoul dusted in sugar, and coffee scented with cardamom—rituals of hospitality that have survived every century's turn.

Damascus has endured earthquakes, empire shifts, and modern conflict. Yet restoration efforts, the resilience of craft-people, and the continuity of worship and trade have kept its soul remarkably intact. The Old City is not a relic behind glass; it is a lived-in palimpsest where shopkeepers inherit their stalls, families their courtyards, and artisans their tools and secrets. This is why Damascus feels timeless: its past is not past at all, but present—spoken through stone arcades, whispered in jasmine-scented evenings, and echoed in the rhythms of its markets and prayers.

**3: Syria's other cities, such as Aleppo and Homs, are also historically significant. Could you elaborate?**

Aleppo's story stretches to the second millennium BC, layered with Hittite, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic legacies. Crowned by its hilltop Citadel—an Ayyubid-Mamluk masterpiece with a monumental bent entrance, bridge, and gatehouse—the city radiates through quarters once lined by khans, hammams, and the vaulted Souq al-Madina.

The Great Mosque of Aleppo, caravanserais like Khan al-Wazir, and delicate stone façades attest to a mercantile metropolis on the Silk Road. Despite the scars of recent conflict, conservation has revived alleys, workshops, and spice-laden stalls, restoring the cadence of a city long renowned for craft, cuisine, and music. Homs, by contrast, is a crossroads of Syria's religious and ethnic mosaic.

Its skyline is marked by the Mosque of Khalid ibn al-Walid, whose twin minarets and domed sanctuary house the revered companion's shrine, drawing pilgrims and

students alike. Westward rises Krak des Chevaliers (Qal'at al-Hosn), a UNESCO-listed crusader stronghold commanding the Homs Gap. With concentric walls, arrow slits, and a formidable donjon, it is a textbook of medieval military architecture, later adapted by Mamluk hands. Together, Aleppo and Homs embody Syria's endurance: urban centers where markets, mosques, churches, and fortresses narrate a civilization that survives, restores, and remembers. Their stones hold memory and meaning.

**4: Palmyra holds special importance. How would you describe its global relevance?**

Palmyra is a world treasure. Located in the heart of the Syrian desert, it served as a major caravan stop between East and West from 44 BC to 272 AD. Its Roman temples, the Great Colonnaded Street, the theater, tombs, and the famous Fakh al-Din al-Maani Castle have made it a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1980. Palmyra is a testimony to the grandeur of ancient Syrian civilization.

**5: Syria is home to remarkable religious sites, both Islamic and Christian. How important is this aspect?**

Our religious heritage is a symbol of coexistence. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus stands not only as an architectural masterpiece but also as a cultural symbol where different faiths intersect. Nearby is the shrine of Sayyida Ruqayyah. A few kilometers away lies the revered shrine of Sayyida Zainab, visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, India, and beyond. Christians also find deep roots in Syria. From the Church of Saint Simon the Stylite and the ancient monasteries of Maaloula and Saydnaya, to the earliest-known house-church of Dura-Europos — Syria is integral to early Christian history.



## Cover Story

### Syria and Pakistan strengthen relations



#### 6: How do you evaluate Syria's relationship with Pakistan?

Pakistan is not just a friendly nation—it is a brotherly partner with whom Syria shares deep-rooted cultural, historical, and political ties. The warmth and goodwill consistently shown by the Pakistani people toward Syria reflect a relationship built on mutual respect, solidarity, and shared values.

We hold in high regard Pakistan's unwavering support for Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. This principled stance has reinforced the trust and affection between our peoples, reminding us that true friendship is tested and proven in times of challenge.

Looking ahead, Syria is committed to expanding cooperation with Pakistan across diverse fields:

**Tourism:** Facilitating easier travel for Pakistani visitors to Syria's sacred sites and historic landmarks, while encouraging Syrians to explore Pakistan's natural beauty and cultural richness.

**Education:** Promoting academic exchanges, scholarships, and joint research programs to strengthen intellectual and scientific collaboration.

**Culture:** Organizing festivals, exhibitions, and artistic exchanges to celebrate the shared heritage and creativity of our nations.

**Archaeology:** Partnering in the preservation and study of ancient civilizations, recognizing the importance of both countries as custodians of world history.

**Trade:** Expanding economic ties, encouraging investment, and opening new markets to benefit both nations.

Pakistanis have always shown deep affection for Syria's holy sites, including revered shrines and places of worship, as well as its rich cultural history. This spiritual and cultural connection forms a strong foundation for people-to-people ties, which we are determined to strengthen further.

By facilitating easier travel, encouraging cultural exchanges, and deepening academic cooperation, Syria and Pakistan are laying the groundwork for a future of even closer partnership. Together, we aspire to build bridges of understanding, prosperity, and solidarity that will serve generations to come.

#### 7: What message would you like to convey to Pakistani tourists, students, and researchers?

I warmly invite the people of Pakistan to visit Syria — a land where every stone speaks history, and every city tells a timeless story. Syria is not only a country of resilience, but also a cradle of civilizations, faith, and culture.

From the ancient streets of Damascus,

the world's oldest continuously inhabited capital, to the majestic ruins of Aleppo, from the legendary temples of Palmyra to the serene waters of Hama, Syria offers a journey through centuries of human achievement. The coastal charm of Tartus and Latakia, the spiritual depth of Suwayda, the vibrant heritage of Homs, and the historical richness of Deir ez-Zor together form a mosaic of experiences awaiting discovery.

Syria today is rebuilding and revitalizing its heritage. Our monuments, mosques, churches, and archaeological treasures are being restored with care, ensuring that visitors can witness both the grandeur of the past and the promise of renewal.

Above all, Syria welcomes visitors with the warmth of its people. Syrian hospitality is legendary — guests are treated not as strangers but as family. We look forward to embracing our Pakistani brothers and sisters, strengthening bonds of friendship, and sharing with them the beauty of Syria's soul.

**8 : Your Excellency, how do you view Syria's new path of economic development as we approach the year 2026, when Syria will host the largest international textile exhibition in the region starting on April 1, 2026, and engage with global markets?**

## Cover Story

### Syria and Pakistan strengthen relations

**Answer:** To begin, I would like to point out that the Syrian Arab Republic has suffered in recent years from a deteriorating economic situation that was unsuitable for the Syrian state and the Syrian people due to previous economic sanctions. However, by the end of last year and the start of the new year, the new Syrian leadership began to take action in various fields, particularly at the international level, to lift the sanctions on Syria. Through numerous visits carried out by the new leadership, and with the support of many countries around the world standing by Syria and the Syrian people, part of the economic sanctions imposed on Syria has been lifted, and we hope that the remaining sanctions will be lifted soon. From here began the movement of organizing international exhibitions and advancing economic development in Syria, so that the country could play its role through these international exhibitions held on Syrian soil. They represent a major opportunity for businessmen from the friendly Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as well as entrepreneurs from all over the world, to participate in these international exhibitions in Damascus. This, in turn, forms a strong bridge for fostering and expanding cooperation between Syria and the rest of the world. The International Textile Exhibition is one of the most important of these events, scheduled to take place from April 1 to 4, 2026. We have invited Pakistani companies, institutions, and businessmen to participate, given that Syria is a pioneer in the textile sector, and likewise, our sister country Pakistan is also a leader in textile manufacturing.

**9 : How will the “NASTEX 2026” exhibition serve as a valuable platform for Pakistan’s textile and industrial sector to enhance cooperation between the two sides?**

**Answer:** As I mentioned earlier, this exhibition to be held in Damascus is one of the most important economic and industrial events that will take place at the Damascus Fairgrounds, and it will enjoy international participation. Since Syria is a global leader in the textile sector, and likewise Pakistan is also a leader in textile manufacturing, this represents a major opportunity for Pakistani participation in the exhibition. It will enable direct engagement with Syrian institutions, companies, and businessmen, which will positively contribute to developing economic and trade relations between Syria and Pakistan across various sectors, foremost among them cooperation in textile industries and other related activities and events. Therefore,

we once again warmly welcome our brothers in Pakistan—textile companies, businessmen, and various entities—to participate in this exhibition.

**10: Your concluding remarks?**

Syria is a nation that has stood the test of time. For thousands of years, it has endured wars, invasions, and natural challenges, yet it continues to rise with dignity and strength. The true power of Syria lies not only in its ancient monuments and historic cities, but in its people — a community bound by culture, faith, and

this timeless journey.

To our brothers and sisters in Pakistan, readers of Daily Islamabad Post and Centreline, we extend a heartfelt invitation: come and rediscover Syria, the land where history began. Walk through the ancient streets of Damascus, marvel at the grandeur of Palmyra, feel the spirit of Aleppo, and witness the rebirth of a nation that continues to inspire.

Syria is not only rebuilding its cities and monuments, but also revitalizing its cultural and spiritual life. We wel-

“ The palatial Al-Azm complex, once home to Ottoman governors, captures Damascene domestic elegance: ablaq stonework in alternating light and dark, carved wooden ceilings, latticed mashrabiya screens, and courtyard fountains ringed with jasmine. Traditional houses turn inward, around cool, shaded patios where citrus trees and water basins temper the desert heat—architecture as climate wisdom and social fabric. Churches and chapels, such as those along the Straight Street (Via Recta) and the Chapel of St. Ananias, speak to the city’s deep Christian heritage; old quarters like Bab Touma and Bab Sharqi keep distinct identities while blending into the whole. From the slopes of Mount Qasioun, the city unfurls in a tapestry of roofs and minarets, with the Barada River and the orchards of the Ghouta plain historically feeding Damascus’s gardens and kitchens ”

an unshakable spirit of resilience.

Today, Syria stands as a living testament to perseverance. We are determined to preserve our heritage, safeguard our traditions, and build a peaceful future for generations to come. Every stone in Syria tells a story, every city carries the memory of civilizations that shaped the world, and every visitor becomes part of

come scholars, pilgrims, tourists, and explorers alike to experience Syrian hospitality warm, generous, and deeply rooted in tradition. Let Syria be your destination for discovery, reflection, and connection. In visiting Syria, you will not only witness history, but also share in the hope of a nation determined to shape a brighter tomorrow.





## Independence Day of Myanmar celebrated in style

In his statement, Ambassador Wuuna Han reflected on Myanmar's rich cultural heritage, from the golden spires of Bagan to the serene waters of Inle Lake, describing it as a mosaic of traditions and resilience

### Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Myanmar marked the 78th Independence Day with a message from Ambassador H.E. Mr. Wunna Han, celebrating the nation's long journey of freedom and unity while highlighting the enduring friendship between Myanmar and Pakistan. In his statement, the Ambassador reflected on Myanmar's rich cultural heritage, from the golden spires of Bagan to the serene waters of Inle Lake, describing it as a mosaic of traditions and resilience. He emphasized that Myanmar's arts, dance, crafts, and Buddhist architecture remain living testaments to a nation that treasures its past while embracing the future.

Ambassador Wunna Han paid tribute to Pakistan's role in Myanmar's history, recalling that Pakistan was the first country to recognize Myanmar in 1947, with diplomatic relations established on the very day of Pakistan's independence. He noted that My-

anmar's first Ambassador, U Pe Khin, was the first envoy to present credentials to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and later served as the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Karachi for nearly a decade. The Ambassador also highlighted cultural ties, mentioning the tomb of Bahadur Shah Zafar in Yangon as a symbol of shared history, and praised Pakistan's preservation of Gandhara Buddhist heritage sites in Taxila, Swat, and Peshawar.

Looking ahead, Ambassador Wunna Han outlined a vision for deeper cultural diplomacy, expanded economic collaboration, stronger educational partnerships, and enhanced regional cooperation to ensure stability and prosperity across South and Southeast Asia. He expressed confidence that Myanmar and Pakistan, working hand in hand, can contribute meaningfully to a more peaceful and interconnected world. Concluding his message, he declared, "Myanmar-Pakistan Dosti Zindabad," reaffirming the commitment to friendship and cooperation between the two nations.









# Independence Day of Kuwait

The State of Kuwait celebrated its 65th National Day (often referred to as Independence Day) and the 35th anniversary of Liberation Day. In Islamabad, Pakistan, the Embassy of Kuwait hosted a special event to mark these milestones. Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal served as the Chief Guest, joined by Kuwait's Ambassador to Pakistan, Nassar Abdulrahman Almutairi, and other dignitaries. The ceremony included a cake-cutting. This gathering highlighted the strong diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Kuwait, with warm wishes exchanged for continued peace, prosperity, and bilateral cooperation. – DNA







# Thailand hands over the ASEAN Committee chairmanship to Indonesia



## DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan, in his capacity as Chair of the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad (ACI), presided over the ACI Heads of Mission Meeting No. 01/2026 at the Royal Thai Embassy. The meeting reviewed ACI's activities over the past six months and addressed organizational matters related

to upcoming initiatives. Diplomats from ASEAN member states discussed ways to further strengthen cooperation and visibility of ASEAN in Pakistan.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Thai Ambassador formally handed over the chairmanship of ACI to Indonesia.

H.E. Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) Chandra Warsenan-to Sukotjo, Ambassador of Indonesia to Pakistan, assumed the role of ACI Chair

for the first half of 2026. The handover ceremony was witnessed by H.E. Mr. Imran Ahmed Siddiqui, Additional Secretary (Asia-Pacific), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. The transition marks Indonesia's leadership in coordinating ASEAN's diplomatic engagements in Islamabad, continuing the Committee's mission of fostering regional cooperation and strengthening ties with Pakistan.

## Japan extends a grant aid of 2,910 mn Yen for child healthcare

Saifullah Ansar

JAPAN has extended a grant aid of 2,910 million Japanese Yen to Pakistan for the Project for the Improvement of Child Health Care Facilities in South Punjab. Notes to this effect were signed and exchanged between H.E. Mr. AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan and Mr. Muhammad Humair Karim, Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, in Islamabad on January 13th, 2026. Subsequently, Grant Agreement was also signed and exchanged between Mr. MIYATA Naoaki, Chief Representative of JICA Pakistan Office and Mr. Miran Mohiyuddin Soomro, Senior Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

In this project, a new child health care facility will be constructed at Children Hospital Multan which is a public medical institution serving as the regional hub hospital in Multan district. The new facility will have the departments of Emergency, Pediatric ICU, Neonatal ICU, Surgery and Laboratory.

The objective of the project is to strengthen the diagnostic and treatment systems in the Children's Hospital and the Institute of Child Health Multan. This project also seeks to improve its function as a specialized tertiary care hospital and a disaster response hub hospital in the region through the expansion of the facility and the provision of medical equipment. These improvements are necessary to provide the healthcare services



for high-risk neonates, infants and children with serious illness or injuries. This project will contribute to improving the quality of healthcare services for children in south Punjab and neighboring provinces.

H.E. Mr. AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan said: Today's signing marks an important step in our continued cooperation to improve the quality of health services for children in Pakistan. I am confident that this project will make a significant contribution to pediatric health care in South Punjab and beyond."



# FASP Mangolia Chapter Holds Monthly Meeting

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Floral Art Society of Pakistan (FASP) Magnolia Chapter convened its monthly meeting on January 21, 2026, at the Serena Hotel in Islamabad, bringing together enthusiasts and seasoned floral artists for an enriching session focused on creativity, learning, and community.

The gathering commenced with a solemn recitation of verses from the Holy Quran by Hina Kamran, setting a reflective tone for the proceedings. This was followed by the reading of the minutes from the previous meeting by Bushra Maqsood, ensuring continuity and transparency in the chapter's activities. The highlight of the evening was a hands-on learning session led by Ghazala Abdullah, a senior founding member of FASP Magnolia and a highly regarded ace floral artist. Known for her expertise and contributions to the society—including her role in national coordinating committees and as a certified international judge—Ghazala demonstrated the sophisticated “Monobotanic” technique.

A Monobotanic design is an advanced floral arranging method that restricts the designer to using multiple parts (blooms, stems, foliage, roots, etc.) from plants belonging to only one family or genus. This approach emphasizes unity, texture, form, and innovation while showcasing the full potential of a single botanical source. Ghazala created several striking and innovative arrangements that captivated attendees, blending artistic vision with technical precision.

The session proved to be an invaluable learning experience for both newcomers and long-time members alike. Participants appreciated the opportunity to deepen their skills in this challenging yet rewarding style, which promotes thoughtful use of plant material and elevates floral art to new levels of sophistication.

In keeping with tradition, the meeting included a warm celebration of members born in January, who received thoughtful birthday gifts from the chapter. The program concluded on a convivial note with tea served, allowing members to network, share insights, and enjoy fellowship amid the beauty of floral creations.

FASP Magnolia, the Islamabad-based chapter of the Floral Art Society of Pakistan—an organization affiliated with the World Association of Flower Arrangers (WAFA)—continues to promote floral art as a means of fostering creativity, cultural appreciation, and goodwill. Through regular workshops, demonstrations, and exhibitions, the chapter nurtures talent and keeps the tradition of artistic floral design thriving in Pakistan. Such monthly gatherings not only hone technical abilities but also strengthen the bond among members passionate about transforming nature's beauty into expressive art forms.





# Asan Khidmat Markaz opened

## PM Shehbaz praises Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev support

The prime minister directed Federal Minister Ahad Cheema, in coordination with the Capital Development Authority (CDA), to further expand the facility and ensure its swift replication



### Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday extending his gratitude to the President of Azerbaijan for his extraordinary support in establishing Pakistan's first Asan Khidmat Markaz being inaugurated here amid describing it as a key intervention towards citizen-centric governance, improved public service delivery and ease of doing business. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony after touring the facility, the prime minister thanked Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev in establishing the centre modelled on Azerbaijan's internationally acclaimed public service



system. He said the initiative would not have been possible without Azerbaijan's cooperation and guidance. Prime Minister also acknowledged the role of the Chairman of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations (SAPSSI) of Azerbaijan, the Pakistani ambassador, and other stakeholders for their unwavering support. He lauded the minister and secretary of information technology, along with allied departments, for their collective efforts in operationalising the centre. PM Sharif underlined that the Asan Khidmat Markaz got multiple public services under one roof, including those of Nadra, the Foreign Office, Police department, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other departments, aimed at facilitating citizens and businesses through efficient, transparent and courteous service delivery. He noted that the staff deployed at the centre had received specialised training in Azerbaijan from master trainers, and stressed that courtesy, professionalism and a welcoming demeanour must be the hallmark of public service. "Your behaviour should inspire the people who come here and raise the overall quality of services," he told the staff. The prime minister mentioned that he was deeply impressed by the efficiency and responsiveness of Azerbaijan's public service institutions during his visit to SAPSSI Centre in Baku, and upon returning to Pakistan had directed to replicate the similar system. "There is a clear lesson in public service, one must remain ready at all times to serve the people," he said. The prime minister directed Federal Minister Ahad Cheema, in coordination with the Capital Development Authority (CDA), to further expand the facility and ensure its swift replication. He also ordered the immediate establishment of Asan Khidmat Markaz centres in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as a gift from the federal government to the people and administrations of the two regions. PM Sharif said the model would eventually be replicated across the country, adding that Azerbaijan's support had been instrumental in making this possible. He expressed special appreciation for the visiting SAPSSI chairman and his delegation, terming their contribution commendable. "Your smile, alertness and dedication to service will not only earn you success in this world but also in the hereafter," the prime minister remarked, urging officials to ensure that the centre fully benefits the public and strengthens trust in state institutions. Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov also attended the inauguration ceremony.





# Republic Day of India celebrated









# Vietnamese Lunar New Year

Ambassador of Viet Nam Pham Anh Tuan and his spouse hosted a grand reception to mark the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. A large number of guests hailing from various walks of life attended the reception. – DNA









# Serena Hotels, Behbud join hands for a noble cause

Aziz Boolani, CEO of Serena Hotels, reiterated the group's dedication to social development via cultural diplomacy, stressing that strategic partnerships and cultural platforms can generate enduring positive change for communities



**Saifullah Ansar / DNA**

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels and the Behbud Association have joined forces in a meaningful collaboration to bolster maternal and child health services in Pakistan. Through Serena Hotels' Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, the two organizations hosted a special fundraising gala at the Serena Hotel in Islamabad on February 3, 2026, with all proceeds supporting the Behbud Maternity and Children Hospital in Rawalpindi. This vital facility delivers essential healthcare to women and children from underserved communities, helping to improve access to quality medical care. The event seamlessly blended culture, education,

and philanthropy. A major highlight was a captivating presentation by renowned Egyptologist Salima Ikram, titled "A Journey Through Ancient Egypt," which provided guests with a fascinating dive into ancient history, art, and civilization. Ms. Abida Malik, President of the Behbud Association, thanked Serena Hotels for the partnership, noting how such initiatives are crucial for sustaining Behbud's ongoing mission to deliver high-quality maternal and child healthcare. H.E. Dr. Ihab Abdel Hamid, who served as the chief guest, praised the role of cultural dialogue in promoting international understanding and lauded the event for advancing a worthy social cause. Aziz Boolani, CEO of

Serena Hotels, reiterated the group's dedication to social development via cultural diplomacy, stressing that strategic partnerships and cultural platforms can generate enduring positive change for communities. The evening wrapped up on a vibrant note with a soulful performance by acclaimed Pakistani artist Abrarul Haq, infusing the fundraiser with additional cultural energy. This collaboration underscores Serena Hotels' continued efforts to foster cultural exchange while driving inclusive community development and supporting critical health services for vulnerable populations. For more details on the event, check recent coverage from sources like the Islamabad Post and Serena Hotels' official channels.







# Rising Stars Hockey Club hosts hockey fiesta, wins first match

Saifullah Ansar / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Rising Stars Hockey Club Islamabad successfully organized a vibrant Hockey Fiesta featuring a Home & Away series. In the opening phase, Meer Latif Hockey Club Gujranwala visited Islamabad, where an exhilarating and competitive match unfolded between the two sides.

Rising Stars Hockey Club Islamabad showcased outstanding skill and determination, clinching victory with a narrow 3-2 scoreline. Adnan, Asad and Nadeem scored one goal each from the Rising Stars Hockey Club. From Mir Latif club their center forward scored both the goals.

The second phase of the series is scheduled for January 10, when Rising Stars will travel to Gujranwala to face Meer Latif Hockey Club on their home turf.

To mark the occasion, the Rising Stars management presented commemorative shields to the esteemed guests accompanying the Gujranwala team:

Khawaja Zarar Kaleem – Chairman, Meer Latif Hockey Club; Former President, Punjab Hockey Association  
Khawaja Faiq Kaleem – President, Meer Latif Hockey Club; Chairman, Pakistan-Romania Business Council (FPCCI)  
Allah Ditta Bhatti – Former International Hockey Player; Manager/Coach, Meer Latif Hockey Club  
Hifz Ur Rehman – Secretary, District Hockey Association (DHA), Gujranwala

The Chief Guests of the match were His Excellency Kamal Ahmed Basha, Ambassador of Brunei, and Edward Preda Deputy Head of Mission from the Romania Embassy.

On behalf of Rising Stars Hockey Club, commemorative shields were presented by Patron-in-Chief Asif Masood Bhatti President, Mehmood Ahmed, General Secretary Sohail Akram Janjua, Ex President Ansar Mahmood Bhatti. The match was officiated by Wajahat Munir and Imran Akram as umpires. Following the thrilling encounter, a dinner was hosted in honor of both teams and the distinguished guests, celebrating sportsmanship and camaraderie.









## Ethiopia, Pakistan forge strategic cooperation

ISLAMABAD: The premier think tanks of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Thursday signed a Memorandum of understanding (MoU) to institutionalize intellectual and policy cooperation for driving innovation and growth in both nations.

The MoU was virtually signed by H.E. Jafar Bedru Geletu, Executive Director of the Institution Foreign Affairs (IFA) Ethiopia, and H.E. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman Board of Governors of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI).

H.E. Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba, Ambassador designate of Ethiopia to Pakistan witnessed the ceremony here at the ISSI, Islamabad, while his counterpart Ambassador Atif Sharif Mian was present at the IFA Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

The MoU will allow the two institutions to establish a framework for cooperation in the fields of diplomatic training, professional development, research and analysis through delegations' exchange, conferences, co-publications and joint researches.

Felicitating both sides on achieving a milestone in the bilateral relations, the Executive Director IFA said Ethiopia and Pakistan have walked a long road together, guided by mutual respect, South-South solidarity, and a shared hope for a more stable, prosperous world. "By combining IFA's deep knowledge of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea with ISSI's regional research strengths, we are building a platform that can do real work: align our views on maritime security and trade routes, craft joint approaches to stability and counter-terrorism, and deliver policy recommendations that reflect today's realities," H.E. Jafar Bedru remarked.



Ethiopia is a gateway to Africa, said the ISSI Chairman while emphasizing on establishing robust academic linkages that are crucial to foster joint research, delegations exchange and policy dialogues for benefit of both the nations. H.E. Ambassador Dr. Oumer Hussein highlighted the positive trajectory of relations between the two countries and called for the two think tanks to actively collaborate to utilize each other's potentials. He stressed the importance of reinforcing all existing pillars of the relationship particularly in political and economic spheres and urged both the institutions to work closely within this framework that is imperative for strengthening bilateral relations. Pakistan's Ambassador in Ethiopia H.E. Atif Sharif noted growth in Pakistan-Ethiopia relations, highlighting opening of the Ethiopian Embassy Islamabad, start of Ethiopian Airlines operations in Karachi, delegations exchange in various sectors and the recent Pakistan Single Country Exhibition that held in Addis Ababa in October, 2025. – DNA

## Thai ambassador meets Speaker National Assembly



ISLAMABAD: Rongvudhi Virabutr, Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan, paid a courtesy call on Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, to discuss the promotion of issues of common interest between the Parliaments of Thailand and Pakistan. The meeting under-

scored the importance of parliamentary cooperation through the Pakistan-Thailand Parliamentary Friendship Group as well as collaboration in multilateral arenas. Both sides also exchanged views on enhancing touristic and trade cooperation, highlighting cultural connections such as the Gandhara civilization and the ongoing efforts toward concluding a Free Trade Agreement

between Thailand and Pakistan, while also recognizing the need to jointly address global challenges like climate change. Another key area of discussion was women empowerment, particularly the role of women in politics and the importance of gender mainstreaming across various contexts. Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq acknowledged the significant role of the Parliamentary Friendship Group in fostering bilateral relations and emphasized that the Parliaments of Thailand and Pakistan should work together more closely to achieve mutual benefits for both countries. – DNA



ISLAMABAD: The National Defence University (NDU) Pakistan hosted the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) for a joint roundtable seminar. The Danish Ambassador to Pakistan, Maja Mortensen, participated actively in the program, delivering a compelling keynote address. – DNA





## ICCI hosts German envoy, discuss bilateral cooperation

German Ambassador, ICCI President agree to act as bridge between German investors, Pakistani enterprises

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Pakistan, H.E. Ina Lepel accompanied by Ms. Janine Rohwer, Counsellor Political and Economic Affairs and Climate Change visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and held an interactive session with the business community of Islamabad, reaffirming Germany's strong commitment to further strengthening bilateral economic relations

with Pakistan. Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Ina Lepel reiterated Germany's readiness to enhance cooperation with Pakistan in key areas including climate change, health and social protection, private sector development, and the upgradation of vocational and technical education institutions. She emphasized that these collaborative efforts would contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth and deeper economic ties between the two countries. The Ambassador noted that vast untapped potential exists for cooperation between Pakistan and Germany and expressed her keen interest in exploring new avenues of collaboration in close coordination with Pakistan's business community. Highlighting the critical role of the private sector, she stressed that businesses from both countries can play a pivotal role in expanding trade and investment relations. She assured the business community of the German Embassy's full support, particularly in strengthening business-to-business (B2B) linkages and identifying promising sectors for cooperation. Ambassador Lepel also acknowledged the importance of trade fairs and exhibitions as effective tools for promoting trade, investment, and mutual understanding between nations. She appreciated ICCI's proactive initiatives, especially its efforts to support women-led enterprises and promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

## Advisor to Chairman Senate meets UAE Ambassador

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Chairman Senate and Ambassador to the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC), Ms. Misbah Khar, held a meeting with the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Islamabad and exchanged views on Pakistan-UAE bilateral relations. During the meeting, both sides discussed avenues for enhancing cooperation in investment, trade, and broader economic opportunities. Emphasis was placed on further strengthening collaboration across diverse sectors to unlock mutual benefits and promote sustainable economic growth. Ms. Misbah Khar underscored that Pakistan greatly values its close and time-tested relations with the UAE, which are rooted in shared history, mutual respect, and strong people-to-people bonds. She highlighted the importance of high-level exchanges and sustained engagement at multiple levels, including government-to-gov-

ernment, people-to-people, and parliament-to-parliament interactions, to further deepen bilateral ties. The UAE Ambassador congratulated Ms. Misbah Khar on the successful hosting of the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC) in Islamabad last November and appreciated Pakistan's efforts



in promoting parliamentary diplomacy. Both sides agreed that parliamentary exchanges have proven to be a fruitful means of bringing people closer and strengthening mutual understanding. The meeting reaffirmed the shared commitment of Pakistan and the UAE to enhancing cooperation through high-level engagements and parliamentary collaboration, thereby boosting bilateral relations and expanding cooperation across diverse fields.



## Ishaq Dar inaugurates Pathfinder group's Pakistan Pavilion

DAVOS: Deputy Prime Minister / Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar inaugurated the Pathfinder Group's Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos. DPM/FM appreciated the initiative to showcase Pakistan's vast economic potential and emerging opportunities on a global platform, while highlighting the dynamism and innovation of Pakistani start-ups.

He underscored the critical role of start-ups in advancing socio-economic development and driving innovation across diverse sectors. He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to facilitating and promoting entrepreneurs and start-ups, particularly those led by youth, to fully realize Pakistan's economic potential. – DNA



## ICCI President, Malaysian High Commissioner vow to enhance bilateral trade volume to \$3-4 billion

Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: Dato Muhammad Azhar Mazlan, the Malaysian High Commissioner to Pakistan, has emphasized the importance of further strengthening Pakistan-Malaysia economic relations by expanding cooperation in trade, investment, and people-to-people linkages, particularly in emerging and high-potential sectors. He expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), headed by its President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, which held a meeting with the High Commissioner at the Malaysian High Commission here on Monday. The ICCI delegation comprised Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, and Convener ICCI Standing Committee on ASEAN, Chaudhry Mohammad Ali. The Malaysian High Commissioner appreciated the proactive role of ICCI in promoting business-to-business engagement and reaf-

firmed Malaysia's strong commitment to deepening economic collaboration with Pakistan. He said Malaysia attaches great importance to Pakistan as a key economic partner and stressed the need for enhanced interaction between the private sectors of both countries. He also agreed to visit ICCI at the earliest to hold direct interaction with the business community of Islamabad. Both the sides agreed to undertake collaborative efforts to enhance the bilateral trade volume to \$3 to 4 billion. Speaking on the occasion, President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood highlighted the longstanding and cordial bilateral relations between Pakistan and Malaysia. He acknowledged Malaysia's significant commercial presence in Pakistan, particularly in palm oil, telecom, education, and the halal sector. However, he pointed out that despite strong ties, the trade balance remains tilted, underscoring the need to diversify Pakistan's exports toward value-added goods and services. The ICCI President identified the halal industry as a key area for immediate collaboration, proposing joint halal certification standards, establishment of halal parks, food processing facilities, and expansion of meat exports. He further stressed cooperation in the IT and digital economy, real estate, low-cost housing. He highlighted the importance of joint ventures for value addition in the agriculture sector and proposed structured B2B matchmaking between Pakistani and Malaysian companies to accelerate partnerships. Senior Vice President ICCI Tahir Ayub underscored the need to enhance agro-based exports, particularly mangoes, citrus fruits and other high-value produce—through greater focus on value addition, stating that such measures would not only boost export earnings but also generate mutual benefits for the business communities and people of both countries. Vice President ICCI Irfan Chaudhry stressed that stronger institutional linkages and regular business exchanges would help translate goodwill into tangible economic outcomes. ICCI delegation proposed organizing a Pakistan-Malaysia Business Forum in Kuala Lumpur and holding sector-specific virtual B2B meetings as effective trade promotion mechanisms. It also proposed signing a Memorandum of Understanding between ICCI and relevant Malaysian chambers and establishing a joint working group to ensure effective follow-up and implementation. Both sides agreed to work closely to convert discussions into concrete trade and investment opportunities and encouraged Malaysian entrepreneurs to get registered as ICCI members. The ICCI delegation formally invited the Malaysian High Commissioner to visit ICCI and engage directly with the business community of Islamabad. Convener ICCI Standing Committee on ASEAN, Chaudhry Mohammad Ali also shared his insights on occasion.





# Ali Farid Khwaja appointed as the SECP commissioner

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government of Pakistan has appointed Mr. Muhammad Ali Farid Khwaja as Commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) for a three-year term, effective immediately. The announcement comes via a notice from the Finance Division's Investment Wing. His remuneration and allowances will be governed by the relevant provisions of the SECP Act.

This appointment brings a seasoned private-sector leader to one of Pakistan's key financial regulatory bodies. Mr. Khwaja, a prominent Pakistani-British financier, investor, and entrepreneur, specializes in fintech, capital markets, and investment strategy. He is best known as the Co-founder and Chairman of KTrade Securities (formerly associated with KASB Securities), widely regarded as Pakistan's largest retail investment and trading platform. Under his leadership, KTrade has driven innovation in accessible stock trading, digital onboarding, and partnerships that have expanded financial inclusion, including collaborations

with fintech players like JazzCash.

With over 15 years of experience in equity research and investments, Mr. Khwaja previously served as a Partner at Autonomous Research in London (now part of AllianceBernstein), focusing on European fintech equities. He also held roles as CFO and Board Director at Safe Charge Group (a London-listed payments firm) and was a top-ranked technology analyst at firms like Berenberg and UBS. An alumnus of the University of Oxford (as a Rhodes Scholar) and Georgetown Leadership Seminar, he has been recognized for his contributions to Pakistan's financial sector, including receiving the Pride of Pakistan award.

The move is seen as timely amid efforts to modernize Pakistan's capital markets. Recent SECP developments include the appointment of Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu as Chairman earlier in January 2026, signaling a push toward stronger governance, market supervision, and reforms in areas like digitalization and investor protection. Industry observers, including former regulators and market participants, have welcomed Mr. Khwaja's entry, noting his "real



market experience" and "fresh ideas" could accelerate overdue changes in the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) ecosystem, boost investor confidence, and align regulation with global fintech trends. This appointment underscores the government's intent to infuse regulatory leadership with private-sector expertise, potentially fostering a more dynamic and transparent securities environment in Pakistan.

## Rwanda, Pak vow to strengthen cooperation in education, IT

A key highlight of the meeting was the reaffirmation of their strong resolve to advance girls' education, recognizing it as a cornerstone of inclusive and sustainable development

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Harimana Fatou, High Commissioner of Rwanda to Pakistan, paid a courtesy call on Ms. Wajiha Qamar, Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training of Pakistan. During the meeting, both sides reaffirmed their shared commitment to further deepen Rwanda-Pakistan cooperation, particularly in the fields of information technology, nursing, health, artificial intelligence, skills development, and teacher training. The discussions underscored the importance of building strong educational and professional linkages between the two countries, with a special emphasis on capacity building and knowledge exchange. A key highlight of the meeting was the reaffirmation of their strong resolve to advance girls' education, recognizing it as a cornerstone of inclusive and sustainable development. Both officials agreed



that empowering women through education is essential for driving social progress and economic growth. The meeting reflects the growing partner-

ship between Rwanda and Pakistan, as both nations seek to collaborate in areas that can uplift communities and strengthen human capital.



# ICCI President, Romanian Envoy set sights on EU trade corridor for Pakistan



## Saifullah Ansar

ISLAMABAD: The Romanian Port of Constanta can serve as a vital maritime gateway between Pakistan and Europe, significantly boosting bilateral trade and Pakistani exports to the European Union, said Romanian Ambassador to Pakistan His Excellency Dan Stoenescu during an interactive session at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Thursday. He informed that talks are in the final stages with the Karachi Port authorities to sign a Memo-

investment. He described Romania as a gateway to Central and Eastern Europe, adding that closer collaboration between the two countries can yield tangible economic benefits. Ambassador Stoenescu emphasized the importance of Romania-Pakistan IT Forum as a platform to promote digital cooperation, joint ventures, innovation, and knowledge exchange between technology sectors of both countries. Through an elaborate presentation, he also highlighted Romania's trade and investment potential and encouraged Pa-

ture, particularly the National Oil Refinery (NRL) in Karachi, by providing technical expertise, engineers, and turnkey solutions for fuel, lube, and cement projects, thereby cementing strong industrial ties. Earlier, in his welcome address, ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood said that the current bilateral trade volume does not reflect the true potential of Pakistan-Romania relations. He stressed the need for joint efforts to enhance annual bilateral trade to at least US\$500 million. Highlighting Pakistan's export strengths, he said that textiles and apparel can find strong markets in Romania and, through it, the wider European Union. He also emphasized opportunities for joint ventures, particularly in advanced manufacturing and healthcare products.

He reiterated that ICCI stands ready to facilitate business to business linkages, organize sector focused delegations and create platforms where enterprises from both sides can cultivate long-term, profitable partnerships. Senior Vice President ICCI Sardar Tahir Ayub expressed confidence that the Ambassador's visit would serve as a catalyst in bringing the two countries closer and unlocking new avenues for mutual trade and investment. Chairman ICCI Diplomatic Committee Zafar Bakhtawari, Advisor to ICCI President Naeem Siddiqui, and a large number of business leaders, including women entrepreneurs from various sectors, actively participated in the question-and-answer session. Those present on the occasion also included Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, Executive Members Mian Shaukat Masood, Zulqurnain Abbasi, Imran Minhas, Waseem Chaudhry, Ishaq Sial, Raja Naveed Satti, Malik Abdul Aziz and others.

**“ The Ambassador said that Romania is among the fastest-growing economies in Europe and, owing to its strategic geographical location, offers immense opportunities to expand bilateral trade and investment ”**

randum of Understanding between the two ports, which will help establish maritime linkages and provide Pakistani exporters access to the EU market of over 450 million consumers with strong purchasing power. Deputy Head of Mission Mr. Eduard Robert Preda accompanied the Ambassador.

The Ambassador said that Romania is among the fastest-growing economies in Europe and, owing to its strategic geographical location, offers immense opportunities to expand bilateral trade and

kistani businesses to strengthen linkages with Romanian Chambers of Commerce and business associations, assuring full facilitation from the Romanian Embassy. He recalled that Romania and Pakistan shared a deep-rooted relationship spanning over sixty years, noting that Romanian workers and companies played a significant role in establishing Pakistan's industrial base during the 1970s. He said Romania contributed extensively to the development of Pakistan's oil refining infrastruc-



# All Pakistan Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry gather in Islamabad





# "Kashmir Pakistan Ki Sheh Rag Hai"

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah



**Asif Ali Zardari**

The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

The people of Pakistan across the globe observe Kashmir Solidarity Day to reaffirm our unwavering moral, diplomatic and political support for our Kashmiri brothers and sisters in their just cause to achieve the right to self-determination as enshrined in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. It was Shaheed Mohd. Benaazir Bhutto who began the observance of this day 36 years ago, following the historic uprising of the Kashmiri people in 1989, a struggle that continues to this day.

For nearly eight decades, the valiant Kashmiri people have stood tall against the illegal Indian occupation and have rendered countless sacrifices. On this day, we pay solemn tribute to their indomitable spirit and resilience.

The situation in Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) remains a matter of grave concern for global conscience. Since the illegal and unilateral actions of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, India has intensified its efforts to consolidate its occupation through administrative and legislative manipulation. By muzzling the media, incarcerating the Kashmiri leadership and attempting to dilute the Muslim majority through demographic changes, India seeks to disempower the Kashmiri people in their own land.

Indian occupation forces also continue to commit countless human rights violations in IOJK. The findings of recent international reports highlight the alarming rise in arbitrary detentions and collective punishment. The use of punitive house demolitions and the ongoing suppression of digital freedoms, including the blocking of thousands of social media accounts, are clear attempts to hide the reality in IOJK.

The recent profiling of mosques and mosque management committees in IOJK constitutes deliberate intimidation by the Indian authorities, aimed to obstruct the free exercise of religion by the Muslim majority population. Such actions form part of a broader pattern of religious persecution under the extremist Hindutva framework. The Kashmiri people have the inalienable right to practice their religion without fear, coercion or discrimination.

The dangerous military escalation initiated by India in May 2025 serves as a stark reminder that true and durable peace in South Asia remains impossible unless the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir is resolved.

I urge the international community to move beyond mere expressions of concern for the Kashmiri people and persuade India to stop the human rights violations in IOJK, allow unfettered access to international human rights observers and grant the Kashmiri people their promised right to self-determination.

On this day, I reiterate that we will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Kashmiri people until they realize their right to decide their own future through a free and impartial plebiscite.



**Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif**

Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Every year, 5<sup>th</sup> February is observed as Kashmir Solidarity Day, an occasion where the people and the Government of Pakistan reaffirm their principled and unwavering support for their Kashmiri brothers and sisters in their just struggle for the realization of their right to self-determination.

The Jammu and Kashmir dispute remains one of the oldest unresolved disputes on the agenda of the United Nations. Over the years, several United Nations Security Council resolutions have established, beyond doubt, the disputed status of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, while prescribing that its final disposition must be made in accordance with the will of the Kashmiri people, expressed through a fair and impartial plebiscite. However, for nearly eight decades, the Kashmiri people have been denied this fundamental right, due to India's intransigence.

Even after decades of bloodshed, brutality and terrorism, the Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) remains a hostile environment, marked by heavy repression, total repression and egregious human rights violations. Arbitrary political detentions, suppression of genuine political activity and severe restrictions on media, have become India's routine instruments to silence dissent in IOJK.

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, India took a host of illegal and unilateral administrative and legal measures, in an attempt to consolidate its forcible occupation of IOJK. These measures not only contravene the UN Charter, but completely defy the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Such hollow attempts by India to carry out demographic re-engineering, or to alter the legal and administrative status of Kashmir, cannot absolve it from its international commitments and obligations, nor could they diminish the inalienable rights of the Kashmiri people.

India's illegal actions in IOJK, driven by Hindutva ideology that seeks to normalize discrimination, curtail religious freedoms and criminalize dissent. The ongoing profiling of mosques and their management committees in IOJK represents a grave violation of the right to freedom of religion and highlights the persecution faced by the Muslim population. Regrettably, the Indian occupation has moved beyond military repression to ideological coercion, aimed at silencing and disempowering an entire people.

Despite enduring decades of oppression, the brave and valiant Kashmiri people, refuse to surrender their legitimate aspirations. Pakistan salutes their heroism, resilience, courage, and sacrifices.

As Prime Minister of Pakistan, I have been a strong advocate for the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people at every international forum including the United Nations General Assembly.

On this Kashmir Solidarity Day, I reassure my Kashmiri brothers and sisters that Pakistan will continue to extend its complete moral, diplomatic, and political support to the Kashmiri freedom struggle, until the Kashmiri people succeed in attaining their right to self-determination through a free and impartial plebiscite, as promised to them under the auspices of the United Nations.

Inshallah, the days of darkness shall give way to the dawn of freedom, and that day is not far, when the people of Jammu and Kashmir shall break the shackles of Indian occupation and live their lives in a future free from fear.



**Muhammad Ishaq Dar**

Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister

As we observe the Kashmir Solidarity Day today, Pakistan reiterates its firm and unwavering support for the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their just struggle for the right to self-determination. Under illegal Indian occupation, the Kashmiri people remain deprived of their fundamental rights. Yet, their resilience testifies the legitimacy of their just cause.

At the heart of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute lies India's failure to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions guaranteeing the Kashmiri people a free and impartial plebiscite. India's persistent defiance undermines the legitimacy of its occupation, as enshrined in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The situation on the ground in Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) has moved beyond episodic violations to a sustained system of repression. Since the unilateral and illegal actions of 5 August 2019, India has dismantled legal safeguards, weakened local institutions, and imposed measures aimed at consolidating its permanent occupation of the disputed territory, including artificially altering the demographic composition to change Muslim majority into minority, forcing media to follow the official line, and criminalizing any form of dissent. Under the Hindutva-driven framework, people in IOJK face constant discrimination. The recent profiling of mosques in IOJK where religious functionaries are forced to give their personal details, photographs and sectarian affiliations show the extent of institutionalized Islamophobia.

Grave human rights violations including fake encounters, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and restrictions on fundamental freedoms continue unabated. UN experts have recently noted the arbitrary detention of nearly 2,800 individuals, including journalists, students, and human rights defenders.

We urge the international community to take decisive actions to address the worsening human rights situation in IOJK, ensure accountability for India's illegal and unilateral actions, persuade India to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions and allow the Kashmiri people their promised right to self-determination.

Pakistan will continue to stand with our Kashmiri brothers and sisters politically, morally and diplomatically. Our efforts will remain focused on securing a peaceful and lasting resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.



**Amir Muqam**

Minister of Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit Baltistan, States and Frontier Regions

On 5<sup>th</sup> February every year, the people of Pakistan come together to stand firmly in solidarity with our Kashmiri brothers and sisters. We renew our unwavering support for their legitimate struggle to achieve the right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolution.

The Jammu and Kashmir dispute is one of the oldest disputes in the world and has been on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council since 1948. The dispute remains unresolved due to India's stubbornness to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions and give the Kashmiri people their promised right to self-determination.

Life in Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) remains extremely difficult and the Kashmiri people have suffered immense hardships because of the draconian Indian regime. True representatives of the Kashmiri people remain behind bars and thousands of Kashmiri political activists are detained arbitrarily.

Freedom of expression also remains restricted as the local media has been forced to follow the official line in particular. India attempted to consolidate its illegal occupation on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019 through illegal and unilateral actions, which aimed to alter the region's demographic landscape and disempower the Kashmiri people.

Yet, no amount of repression by the Indian occupation forces has managed to break the Kashmiri people's indomitable spirit or weaken their determination to achieve their right to self-determination. Pakistan honours their spirit and pays tribute to their countless sacrifices for the Kashmiri cause.

On this day, we remind the international community, especially the United Nations that the people of Kashmir still await the free and impartial plebiscite that was promised to them under the United Nations Security Council resolutions. We also urge the international community to take decisive action in IOJK to stop the human rights violations, force India to reverse its illegal actions, and implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

To our Kashmiri brothers and sisters, Pakistan will always stand shoulder-to-shoulder by your side. Pakistan will continue to raise your voice on every platform, supporting you morally, politically, and diplomatically until justice is done and you achieve your promised right to self-determination.



**Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon**

Federal Minister and Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir

On this day, the entire Pakistani nation expresses its unwavering solidarity with its Kashmiri brothers and sisters.

Kashmir Solidarity Day is a reaffirmation of our pledge that Pakistan stands shoulder to shoulder with the Kashmiri people in their just and legitimate struggle.

For decades, the Kashmiri people have endured illegal Indian occupation, oppression, violence, and grave human rights violations; yet their courage, resilience, and determination remain unshaken.

The sacrifices of the Kashmiri people constitute a bright chapter in history, and their steadfastness is an example for the world.

Pakistan fully supports the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination, which is their recognized and inalienable right under the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

India's illegal and unilateral actions, particularly the atrocities being committed in Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir since 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, pose a serious challenge to the conscience of the international community.

I urge the international community to take immediate notice of the ongoing human rights violations in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, ensure justice for the Kashmiri people, and enable them to exercise their right to decide their own future.

Lasting regional and global peace is contingent upon a just and durable resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the United Nations resolutions.

On this day, on behalf of the Government of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan, I pay tribute to the Kashmiri martyrs and express complete solidarity with their families.

The Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir will continue to be the voice of the Kashmiri people at every diplomatic, political, and moral forum.

May Allah Almighty grant the Kashmiri people freedom, peace, and dignity, and bestow upon Pakistan the resolve and strength to continue supporting the oppressed.

Ameen.

#79YearsOfIllegalOccupation  
February  
Kashmir Solidarity Day

Pakistan stands with Kashmiris in their struggle for freedom

Our relationship with Kashmir is not for just one day, but a soul-and-heart relationship.



#79YearsofIllegalOccupation

Our Promise, Our Faith  
Kashmir Will Become Pakistan

February  
**5**  
Kashmir Solidarity Day

# RAISING THE EMBLEM OF FREEDOM A SALUTE TO THE KASHMIRIS

February 5<sup>th</sup> is not just a date, but a vow of loyalty to those mothers, sisters, and warriors who have been holding the Emblem of Freedom for decades.



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**URAN  
PAKISTAN**  
12 PM to 11 PM PST

PID (I) 6454-D/25



# Aga Khan University Graduates Over 400 Students and Installs Princess Zahra Aga Khan as Pro-Chancellor



## DNA

**KARACHI:** The Aga Khan University graduated 461 students from 18 degree programmes at its 38th Convocation in Pakistan and formally installed Princess Zahra Aga Khan as the University's first Pro-Chancellor. As Pro-Chancellor, Princess Zahra will guide AKU in its continuing efforts to improve quality of life.

In his message, AKU's Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, noted that the Aga Khan University and its graduates carry "both an extraordinary responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity: to create, to disseminate, and to apply knowledge in ways that improve the quality of human life." This year saw the graduation of the first cohort from the Institute for Educational Development's Bachelor of Education programme. The programme offers a rigorous blend of academic and field-based learning that prepares graduates to teach effectively in diverse school contexts.

"The University's geographic expansion has seen AKU's presence expand across Pakistan, into more cities and villages than ever before," said AKU's Pro-Chancellor, Princess Zahra Aga Khan. "From Karachi to Matiari, from Lahore to Gilgit, the University's health care professionals, educators, and researchers are part

of the fabric of people's lives."

The Aga Khan University continues to address Pakistan's critical development challenges through a commitment to access and excellence. With nearly 70 percent of the graduating class being women, the University is actively addressing the gender gap in a country where millions of girls remain out of school.

Valedictorian Muhammad Taha Nasim thanked AKU's faculty, noting how they challenged graduates to "reach our highest standards while teaching us that excellence without empathy is empty."

AKU's graduates are filling important workforce gaps. For example, in a country with a nurse-to-population ratio of just 5.2 per 10,000, AKU alumni now hold high-level leadership positions in approximately 80 schools of nursing and midwifery. In 2025, AKU secured more than USD\$100 million in research funding, a sign that leading global institutions hold its research capabilities in high regard. Across AKU, 27 faculty members were ranked among the top two percent of scientists globally in a well-known study conducted by a researcher at Stanford University.

"Pakistan's young people are inclusive, comfortable across faiths and perspectives, and aware that a divided society cannot meet shared challenges. Digitally fluent, they see technology not as dis-

ruption but as opportunity – to expand knowledge, build skills, and apply learning in practical ways," noted Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President of AKU.

To ensure talented students with limited financial means are able to attend AKU, the University provides financial assistance, to a large portion of the student body. In the last academic year, the University provided assistance to 72 percent of students across all classes and programmes in Pakistan.

Noorish Khan, Syeda Tasmiya Mohiuddin, Dr. Hamzah Jehanzeb, and Sara Karim Sadruddin received Best Graduate Awards in their respective undergraduate programmes in Dental Hygiene, Education, Medicine, and Nursing.

Also present at the ceremony was Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, Founding President of AKU and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Central Asia, a sister university of AKU within the Aga Khan Development Network.

The University conferred Awards of Distinction upon several faculty and staff, recognising their sustained contributions to innovation, research and leadership. Professor Emeritus Mushtaq Ahmed received the President's Medal, one of AKU's highest honours, in recognition of his extraordinary service as an eminent surgeon and academic leader.





## Three Historic Monuments Unveiled at Lahore Fort

DNA

**LAHORE:** On Sunday, 25 January 2026, historic monuments at Lahore Fort, the Sikh-era Hammam, the Athdara Pavilion, and the Loh Temple, were officially inaugurated following extensive conservation work funded by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). The restoration was carried out by Aga Khan Cultural Service – Pakistan (AKCS-P) in partnership with the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA). The unveiling is part of a broader initiative, “Preservation and Promotion of Cross-Cultural Edifices of Lahore Fort,” which aims to safeguard and celebrate the Fort’s rich heritage. Previously, two other historic sites, the Sikh-era Temple and the Imperial Zenana Mosque, were restored under the same program. Together, these projects cover seven key monuments within the Fort, reflecting its layered history of Mughal, Sikh, Hindu, and British influences. The Loh Temple complex, near the Alamgiri Gate, includes interconnected chambers that contain ritual features indicative of Hindu practices, alongside elements associated with the Sikh Era. The Athdara Pavilion, located in the northwest precinct of the Shah Jahan Forecourt Quadrangle, was built during the Sikh period and historically functioned as a public court. The Sikh Hammam, situated at the northeast corner of the Sheesh Mahal Quadrangle, was

originally constructed during Emperor Shah Jahan’s reign and later adapted as a hammam during the Sikh era.

The inauguration ceremony, which took place at the Shah Burj Forecourt, was presided over by Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, as the Chief Guest. Sandeep Paul, Public Affairs Officer of the U.S. Consulate in Lahore, was the guest of honour. The event brought together a diverse group of guests from academia, government, and the arts community. Opening remarks were delivered by Tausif Khawaja, CEO of AKCS-P, followed by speeches from Public Af-

fairs Officer Sandeep Paul of the U.S. Consulate and Najam Saqib, Director General of WCLA, highlighting the cultural significance of the Fort and the importance of its preservation. Speaking on the occasion, Sandeep Paul highlighted the strategic partnership between the United States and Pakistan, noting heritage conservation as a key area of collaboration. “Preserving the past is not about nostalgia; it is about investing wisely in the future. These restored monuments will attract visitors, create economic opportunities, and stand as lasting symbols of what we can accomplish together,” he remarked.





# Australian envoy pays courtesy call on Malaysian counterpart



DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a display of growing diplomatic camaraderie among missions in Pakistan's capital, Australia's newly appointed High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr. Timothy Kane, paid a courtesy call on His Excellency Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan, on January 19, 2026, at the Malaysian High Commission in Islamabad. The meeting, held in a warm and cordial atmosphere, provided an opportunity for the two envoys to exchange views on a range of matters of mutual interest. Discussions focused on regional developments, the evolving diplomatic landscape in Pakistan, and potential avenues for enhanced cooperation between their respective countries and missions based in Islamabad.

Mr. Kane, who assumed his role as Australia's High Commissioner to Pakistan earlier in 2026 following his appointment announced by the Australian Government in August 2025, is a seasoned diplomat with extensive experience in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

His previous postings include ambassadorships to Brazil and Chile, as well as assignments in Spain, the United States, and Mexico. Since arriving in Pakistan, he has expressed enthusiasm for building ties in areas such as climate action, education, and shared cultural interests like cricket.

Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan welcomed his Australian counterpart warmly to Pakistan and extended

best wishes for a successful and productive tenure. He conveyed confidence that the bilateral engagement between Malaysia and Australia would continue to strengthen through ongoing constructive dialogue and collaboration in both multilateral and regional forums.

The courtesy call highlighted the value of sustained interaction among diplomatic representatives in Islamabad, fostering better understanding and coordination on issues affecting the region and beyond. Both High Commissioners reaffirmed their shared commitment to promoting mutual understanding, peace, and cooperation during their respective assignments in Pakistan. Such exchanges are routine yet significant in diplomatic practice, helping new envoys build networks, share perspectives, and explore synergies that can support broader bilateral and multilateral objectives. Malaysia and Australia, both active players in the Indo-Pacific region, maintain strong ties characterized by trade, investment, education exchanges, and people-to-people connections.

The friendly meeting concluded on a positive note, underscoring the importance of diplomacy in bridging nations and advancing common goals amid a complex global environment. This courtesy call comes amid Mr. Kane's active engagement in Pakistan, where he has already participated in various events and discussions, reflecting Australia's interest in deepening relations with the country.



# Ethiopian envoy underscores deep commonalities between Ethiopia, Pakistan

Ethiopian Ambassador Dr. Oumer hosts prominent Pakistani media Editor Ansar Mahmood Bhatti to boost bilateral media ties



## DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant step toward strengthening people-to-people and media linkages between Ethiopia and Pakistan, His Excellency Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba, Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Pakistan, hosted Mr. Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, Chief Editor of the Islamabad Post and Diplomatic News Agency (DNA), at the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad. The meeting provided a platform for in-depth discussions on matters of mutual interest, with a strong emphasis on exploring potential areas of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the media sector.

Both sides highlighted the growing opportunities to enhance collaboration that could bring the two nations closer through accurate and engaging storytelling. Ambassador Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba underscored the deep commonalities between Ethiopia and Pakistan in areas of culture, faith, and shared values. He pointed to the substantial untapped potential for expanded trade, investment, and people-to-people exchanges. Briefing Mr. Bhatti on Ethiopia's evolving media landscape, the Ambassador stressed the critical role of strategic media partnerships. He emphasized that collaborative efforts in journalism and content creation are essential for promoting Ethiopia's rich tourism offerings, historical significance, and vibrant cultural heritage to Pakistani audiences.

Mr. Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, a veteran journalist with over 35 years of experience and the Chief Editor of Daily Islamabad Post, Centreline magazine, and DNA News Agency, welcomed the initiative.

He noted the rising interest among Pakistani digital influencers and content creators in visiting Ethiopia, describing the country as a historically significant and culturally dynamic hub in Africa. Mr. Bhatti praised Ethiopia's appeal as a destination rich in heritage sites, diverse landscapes,



and warm hospitality. The Chief Editor assured the Ambassador of his full support in fostering media cooperation.

He committed to leveraging his platforms to promote positive narratives about Ethiopia-Pakistan relations, including coverage of tourism, cultural exchanges, and economic opportunities, thereby contributing to stronger diplomatic and economic ties. The discussions align with broader efforts to deepen bilateral relations since Dr. Oumer assumed his role in late 2025. Recent developments include increased engagement with Pakistani business chambers, think tanks, and diplomatic circles, as well as encouragement for Pakistani

participation in upcoming forums like the Invest in Ethiopia 2026 Business Forum scheduled for March in Addis Ababa.

This courtesy meeting reflects the growing momentum in Ethiopia-Pakistan ties, which have been bolstered by direct flights via Ethiopian Airlines, a bilateral trade agreement, and active embassy outreach. Media collaboration is seen as a vital bridge to enhance mutual understanding, counter stereotypes, and highlight shared interests in a rapidly changing global landscape.

The interaction concluded on a positive and forward-looking note, with both sides expressing optimism about future joint initiatives in media and beyond.



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# LET THE WORLD SEE THE REAL PAKISTANI!

Islamabad Tourism, Sports and Family Festival

31<sup>st</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2026

📍 Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad 🕒 10am to 10pm



 Cultural Performances and Folk Music

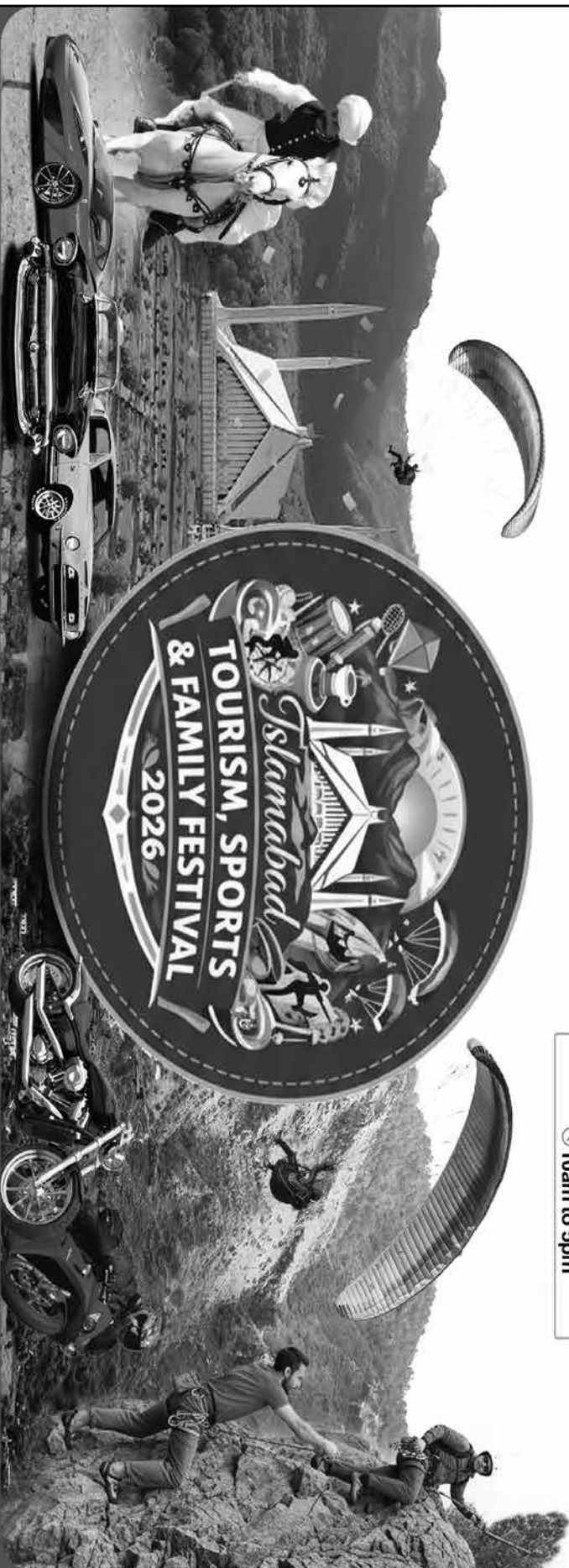
 Food Stalls with Regional Flavors

 Art, Crafts and Jewellery Exhibition

 Fun Activities for Children and Families

 Vintage Cars, Heavy Bikes, Cycling, Paragliding and Hot Air Balloon Show

**Tent Pegging**  
31<sup>st</sup> January, 2026  
  
**F-9 Park, Islamabad**  
🕒 10am to 5pm



PID (I) 6339-D/25

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