

Pakistan and Uzbekistan agree to expand bilateral trade to \$2bn

Baku (News Desk) Pakistan and Uzbekistan agreed on Wednesday to expand bilateral trade to \$2 billion as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent. The development comes days after a similar agreement to boost investments to \$2bn was reached with Azerbaijan during the premier's official visit there, which he concluded yesterday as he departed for Tashkent on a two-day state visit. Pakistan and Uzbekistan have strengthened ties through trade and economic cooperation. A

\$1 billion trade deal was signed in 2023, and plans for further collaboration, including a roadmap for industrial cooperation, show the two sides' commitment to boosting regional connectivity. Earlier today, PM Shehbaz and President Mirziyoyev held a bilateral meeting, which was followed by the signing of several memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between the two countries in various areas. Addressing a joint press conference with PM Shehbaz, President Mirziyoyev said: "We came to the conclusions on different spheres and mutual trade

turnover had exceeded \$400 million and we have plans to increase that to \$2bn." He termed the negotiations between them "very fruitful", adding that there was a "new direction" for future goals. The president said: "The modern state of Pakistan is our trusted partner, trusted by time, and a promising ally whose international reputation is steadily growing. [...] Despite current global challenges, the honourable prime minister is carrying out tremendous work to ensure peace and stability, improve the living standards of the population and accelerate

economic growth." Congratulating the Pakistani government on those "achievements", he noted that the relations between the two countries had been developing "dynamically". President Mirziyoyev noted that joint ventures between Pakistan and Uzbekistan have reached 130 while trade houses had been opened in Karachi and Tashkent. "Air travel has been launched between Tashkent and Lahore," he highlighted, adding that it was also agreed to open new routes, including flights between Samarkand, Bukhara and Karachi.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev exchange a joint declaration in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on Tuesday.

Karachi reports over 41,000 polio vaccine refusal cases

KARACHI: (News Desk) More than 41,800 children were denied polio vaccine by their parents in the metropolis when health workers visited their homes during the current year, it emerged on Tuesday. The provincial data showed that Sindh has reported 42,999 refusal cases this year and Karachi's share stands at 41,875. The number of refusals in remaining Sindh districts stands at a mere 1,124. With over 97 per cent share in refusal cases, Karachi remains a crucial battleground in the fight against polio and its 27 high-risk union committees are currently under intensive government efforts to enhance vaccine acceptance and strengthen community trust in the public health initiative, stated a senior government official. Irshad Ali Sodhar, the provincial coordinator of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), said that refusal cases were less than one per cent of the total eligible child population. In other districts of the province, parents of 1,124 children refused inoculation during recent drive, data shows.

SHC recommends withdrawal of administrative powers from judge who refused police Armaghan's remand



KARACHI: (News Desk) The Sindh High Court on Tuesday ruled that the orders passed by the administrative judge of anti-terrorism courts (ATCs) in Karachi about the judicial remand of suspect Armaghan and the formation of a joint investigation team in the Mustafa Amir murder case were against the law and recommended to withdraw the administrative powers from the judge. While referring the matter to the acting chief justice and home secretary, the SHC observed that the powers of administrative judge might be withdrawn from the judge of ATC-I and assign it to any other ATC in the public interest and administration of justice. A two-judge bench headed by Justice Zafar Ahmed Rajput also noted that initially, the administrative judge passed orders for police custody remand of the prime suspect, but a few hours later he used correction pen on words "police custody" remand and made hand correction "JC" remand, only initials. On Feb 18, the bench had allowed a set of criminal revision applications, filed by the prosecution impugning the orders of the administrative judge of the ATC denying physical custody of Armaghan and ordering the formation of the JIT to probe the case.

Pakistan still 'partly free' in political rights, civil liberties but drops 3 points: report

Islamabad (News Desk) As freedom declined around the world last year, Pakistan was ranked "partly free" by Freedom House and declined three points in conditions for political rights and civil liberties in the organisation's annual report published on Wednesday. Global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year in 2024, according to Freedom House, a Washington DC-based organisation that tracks democracy and threats to freedom around the world. People experienced dete-

rioration in their political rights and civil liberties in 60 countries, and secured improvements in only 34 countries, the Freedom House report said. "In settings where conditions worsened, key factors driving the degradation in rights and liberties included violence and the repression of political opponents during elections, ongoing armed conflicts, and the spread of authoritarian practices," it said. Pakistan was ranked "partly free" and declined three points from the year prior. The points reflected condi-

tions for political and civil liberties in a country. Pakistan was also ranked among the countries with the largest 10-year declines in freedom and declined by 10 points. The country with the greatest 10-year decline was Nicaragua (40 points), Tunisia (35 points) and El Salvador (28 points). The organisation noted that 2024 was marred by violence and repression around elections, ongoing armed conflicts, and the spread of authoritarian practices, all of which contributed to the decline of

global freedom. South Asian bright spots amid global freedom decline The Washington-based pro-democracy research group elevated two countries to the status of "free" — Senegal, where the opposition triumphed after the outgoing president's attempt to delay elections was defeated, and Bhutan, the Himalayan kingdom which consolidated a transition to democracy with competitive polls. Tiny Bhutan gained the distinction of being the only South Asian country classified as free.

Press freedom curbs to be met with legal action, protest

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The country's main union of journalists plans to launch legal challenges and a protest drive after Ramadan — to defend media freedom and ensure journalist safety and workers' rights — in the face of growing suppression of press freedom. In the 'Islamabad Declaration', released by Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) Secretary General Arshad Ansari after its three-day Biennial Delegates Meeting (BDM), the union flayed the current government's efforts to enact anti-media laws and target critical voices under the guise of stemming 'fake news'. "Pakistan is passing through one of the most difficult eras where democracy has seriously been under question since the induction of the so-called hybrid system," a PFUJ statement said, adding that parliamentary supremacy had been compromised and attempts made to control the two strongest pillars of the state.

SC 'dictated' law for army chief's extension: Justice Afghan

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The extension in the service of former army chief, retired Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, was mentioned in the Supreme Court on Tuesday as a precedent of the court directing administrative functions. The seven-judge constitutional bench resumed the hearing on a set of petitions challenging the court's Oct 23, 2023 order of nullifying the military trial of civilians involved in violence on May 9. During arguments, Justice Naem Akhtar Afghan recalled the issue of "an army chief's tenure," which was resolved by the Supreme Court's suggestion to the parliament. In August 2019, then prime minister Imran Khan extended the tenure of Gen Bajwa — set to retire on Nov 29, 2019 — for three years. On a petition challenging the PM's decision, a three-judge Supreme Court bench first suspended Gen Bajwa's extension but then allowed him to remain at the post for six months, during which parliament was asked to legislate on the tenure and terms and conditions of the army chief's service. "There was no provision of extension in service tenure of the army chief, but the law was enacted on Supreme Court's suggestion to the parliament in 2019," Justice Afghan observed on Tuesday.

KP govt officials told to quit PTI posts

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) PTI leaders who are holding official positions in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government will have to relinquish their party positions in a bid to reorganise the party in the province. The decision was announced by the PTI secretary general, Salman Akram Raja, on Tuesday after meeting the jailed PTI founder Imran Khan. While talking to reporters outside the Adiala Jail, Mr Raja said the decision has been made to empower PTI's KP chapter president, Junaid Akbar, to reorganise the party. Last month, Mr Akbar was made the party's president in KP in place of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who had "relinquished" the position. Replying to a question, he said that Mr Khan clearly stated that he would stand by party leaders and that those expelled from the party had nothing to do with PTI. This was an apparent reference to Sher Afzal Marwat and Fawad Chaudhry, who were sacked from the party. Mr Raja added that those who were not in contact with the party leadership during the voting on the 26th Constitutional Amendment in parliament would be given a personal hearing. The PTI leader said he briefed Mr Khan on the party leaders' recent visit to Sindh. Mr Khan has vowed to "keep fighting for the rights of the people of Sindh", Mr Raja claimed. Mr Raja added that the PTI founder was being denied his rights in jail and revealed that he would write a letter to the chief justice of Pakistan on Mr Khan's behalf.

Ex-PM Abbasi says democracy 'suppressed' as opposition alliance kicks off grand moot in Islamabad

Islamabad (News Desk) Former prime minister and president of the Awaam Pakistan party Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Wednesday said those in power were "suppressing democracy and dismantling the judicial system" as he addressed a moot organised by the opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan. After talks between the government and the opposition collapsed in January, the PTI made another

push to establish a joint front against the federal government and roped in Abbasi to become part of its anti-government movement. The two-day moot conference kicked off in Islamabad today, where opposition parties gathered to discuss the current political situation and national issues. Speaking during the conference, Abbasi — while referring to the ruling coalition of PML-N and

PPP — said, "These are the same people who used to talk about the same things that I am talking about today. They talked about these issues for ages but today, they are suppressing democracy, dismantling the judicial system, suppressing public opinion and are unsuccessful in ending political anarchy. What is compelling you to make such moves?" he questioned. "This is unfortunate be-

cause when those running the political system sell their conscience and when political parties abandon their principles, such countries don't function. These are evident facts in Pakistan today," he continued. "Today, there is no permission to even talk, laws are being made to stop people from talking and to dismantle the judicial system," he said, with an apparent reference to the recently promulgated



Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025, also known as Peca. Referring to the ruling coalition, he said that those who championed democracy in the past were now more invested in political power calling out the authorities.

Pakistan reaffirms commitment to protection of human rights: law minister

Islamabad (News Desk) Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar assured the international community of Pakistan's efforts in protecting human rights in the country, saying "robust legislative and policy measures" were in place to ensure that, a statement from the human rights ministry said on Wednesday. His remarks came as he addressed a high-level segment

of the United Nations Human Rights Council's 58th session in Geneva yesterday. Amnesty International, in a statement last year, observed that human rights abuses remained "rampant" in Pakistan. Reports of extra-judicial killings, harassment of human rights defenders, mass arrests, military trials of civilians and violation of freedom of the press were

some of the concerns listed by the rights group. Last month, the European Union warned Pakistan to reconsider its GSP+ status, citing human rights violations as one of the reasons. Pakistan has been a member of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for more than a decade. "Highlighting Pakistan's robust legislative

and policy measures, the minister underscored that over 70 human rights-related laws have been enacted in the past decade, with the recent 26th Constitutional Amendment recognising a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a fundamental right, a milestone in Pakistan's human rights framework," the statement said.