

HORIZON

June 2025

ISRAEL'S
INVINCIBILITY
MYTH
SHATTERED

RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT
PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

June proved to be one of the most turbulent months in recent global history that tested the resolve, principles, and diplomatic maturity of nations. For Pakistan, it was a month of principled stances, measured responses, and growing recognition of its role as a responsible state in an increasingly polarised world.

The Middle East stood at the edge of a dangerous precipice when Israel launched unprovoked attacks on Iranian targets, triggering a rapid escalation in regional tensions. The situation deteriorated further with the United States' bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities in Fordow and other locations. The spectre of a full-scale war loomed large.

Pakistan, true to its longstanding commitment to regional stability and Islamic solidarity, strongly condemned the Israeli aggression and asserted Iran's right to respond in self-defence at the UN Security Council. At the same time, it unequivocally denounced the US strikes, which violated international norms and threatened to further inflame the region. Pakistan stood firmly by Iran's right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes under the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Amid this crisis, Pakistan's diplomatic and military leadership rose to the occasion. The Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, who was on an official visit to the United States to apprise American officials of Pakistan's security concerns vis-à-vis India, held a significant meeting with President Donald Trump. Over a lunch that extended for more than two hours, Pakistan's position on the Middle East crisis and regional stability was communicated in clear terms. President Trump, in a subsequent press briefing, acknowledged Pakistan's nuanced understanding of Iran and the broader dynamics of the Muslim world. This rare recognition signals the growing weight of Pakistan's voice in global affairs.

Israel's belligerence against Iran followed closely on the heels of India's misadventure, a reckless act of aggression that Pakistan thwarted with resolute strength and strategic restraint. Pakistan's military response was swift and decisive, sending a clear message that any violation of its sovereignty would not go unanswered. But beyond the battlefield, it was Pakistan's diplomatic front that shone. A high-level delegation visited key global capitals and the United Nations headquarters in New York, successfully countering Indian propaganda about the Pehalgam incident. The world was reminded that Pakistan is not a sponsor of terrorism, but a victim of it, particularly in Balochistan, where India continues to foment unrest through covert means.

Amid these geopolitical challenges, domestic developments offered hope and pride. Parliament passed the federal budget for FY2025, which outlined continued efforts at macroeconomic stability, social sector investments, and support for Pakistan's hardworking citizens.

June also brought moments of joy on the sports front. Arshad Nadeem made the nation proud by winning a gold medal at the Asian Athletics Championship held in Gumi, South Korea, cementing his status as one of the world's top javelin throwers. Meanwhile, Pakistan's hockey team rekindled hope by defeating France to reach the final of the Nations Cup, giving the country a much-needed morale boost.

Sincerely,
Saira Bano
Editor-in-Chief

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ISRAEL'S INVINCIBILITY MYTH: SHATTERED

RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

Israel launched an unprovoked and calculated strike deep into Iranian territory on the night of 13th June, killing several senior military commanders and nuclear scientists, along with scores of ordinary civilians. The world watched with bated breath to see how Tehran would respond. For several hours, what looked like bluster on social media concealed the storm that was quietly being prepared. As dawn approached, the myth of Israel's invincibility was about to be shattered. When Iran finally responded, it did so with overwhelming force: a carefully sequenced barrage of missiles and drones that pierced Israel's vaunted air defences and exposed its strategic vulnerabilities.

Iran's response was not immediate, but when it came, it was devastating. Within hours, waves of missiles and drones began inundating Israel's multilayered defence systems. The first wave consisted of

relatively cheap, expendable missiles and drones whose primary purpose was saturation. Their job was to deplete Israel's stock of interceptors — Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow systems — all of which rely on a finite and expensive inventory of anti-missile munitions. Once these interceptors had been significantly exhausted, the real game began.

A second wave followed, this time comprising Iran's more advanced ballistic and cruise missiles. These targeted highly sensitive strategic military installations, some located deep within Israeli territory. There was almost no mainstream media coverage, but according to reliable regional sources and independent analysis, some of these strikes had knock-on effects on civilian infrastructure. In Be'er Sheva, for example, the Soroka Medical Centre reportedly suffered collateral damage, as an Iranian

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technology park. In a conflict marked by information warfare and deliberate opacity, such incidents reveal the hidden costs of escalation, especially when military assets are embedded in or near civilian zones. The psychological impact of the Iranian retaliation was enormous. Israel's image as an untouchable fortress, a perception carefully cultivated over decades, was punctured. Iran had shown that not only could it absorb a preemptive strike, it could also retaliate with enough volume, range, and precision to overwhelm the most sophisticated missile defence architecture in the world. While Israel's systems performed impressively in percentage terms, their inability to fully shield the country from hundreds of simultaneous attacks was a reality check. The myth of total protection was exposed as just that, a myth.

As the salvos continued, Israel's desperation became evident. Despite its formidable capabilities, it was unable to neutralise the scale of Iran's response without external help. The country lacked strategic depth, and every strike brought the war closer to the heart of its population centres. Realising the limits of its endurance, Tel Aviv turned to Western capitals for rescue. US President Donald Trump obliged by deploying B-2 stealth bombers from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, which flew a non-stop global strike mission to hit Iran's nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan with 30,000-lb bunker-buster bombs.

In response to the US airstrike on its nuclear facilities, Iran launched a medium-range ballistic missile toward the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, home to US Central Command. Though intercepted before impact and causing no casualties, the strike served as a calibrated warning. The message was received. A regional ceasefire, brokered through backchannel diplomacy involving Gulf states and European intermediaries, followed swiftly, reflecting a shared understanding that continued escalation risked a broader regional war with incalculable consequences.

Markets reacted swiftly. Tech investors, long the backbone of Israel's innovation economy, began reassessing their risk exposure. Insurance costs for infrastructure and logistics spiked. Civil defence protocols were activated across major cities, disrupting normal life and contributing to a national mood of anxiety not felt since the Gulf War or the 2006 Lebanon conflict. It was not just the physical damage that mattered; it was the shift in perception. Israel had initiated a conflict expecting a decisive advantage, but ended up absorbing blows that challenged its deterrent credibility.

Pakistan's stance was notably restrained yet principled. The Foreign Office condemned the Israeli strikes as a violation of international law and affirmed Iran's right to self-defence under the UN Charter and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the same time, Islamabad



“ THE WAR MAY HAVE PAUSED, BUT THE ILLUSION THAT ISRAEL CAN STRIKE WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE IS OVER. ”



denied rumours, circulated by some Iranian media outlets, that Pakistan had pledged nuclear support or warned Israel of consequences. Instead, Pakistani authorities focused on stabilising the situation along the Iran-Pakistan border, especially in Balochistan, where smuggling routes, refugee flows, and militant infiltration threatened to spill over. Joint coordination mechanisms were reactivated, and backchannel contacts between Islamabad and Tehran intensified to prevent any local escalation.

This careful posture reflects Pakistan's broader diplomatic calculus: reaffirm solidarity with Muslim countries in the face of aggression while avoiding any action that could entangle the country in a wider

regional war. Islamabad also discreetly engaged in diplomatic outreach with Gulf allies and multilateral forums, hoping to contain the fallout through backdoor mediation. This understated role, often overlooked in international coverage, underscored Pakistan's preference for de-escalation and regional stability over rhetorical brinkmanship.

Two days after Israel's attack, Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir arrived in Washington primarily to engage with US military leaders on regional security and the India-Pakistan situation. However, amid the unfolding Iran-Israel conflict, American officials, aware of Pakistan's longstanding ties with Iran, sought his perspective on the crisis as



well. President Trump acknowledged Pakistan's deep understanding of Iranian strategic thinking, and Field Marshal Munir's counsel was seen as a valuable input in Washington's internal deliberations during the critical days of escalation.

Regionally, the conflict sent shockwaves through Arab capitals. The Gulf monarchies, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have long banked on Israeli air superiority as a de facto shield against Iran's missile arsenal. But after 13 June, they began recalibrating their assumptions. Analysts report that confidential meetings in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have explored joint defence procurement, new missile interceptor systems, and expanded American defence guarantees. The calculus is simple: if Israel's defences can be overwhelmed, no one is fully protected.

Meanwhile, the economic and strategic impact on Iran itself cannot be ignored. The initial Israeli strike dealt a significant blow to Tehran's military leadership and nuclear infrastructure. But by absorbing the damage and responding with calibrated force, Iran reasserted its deterrence and political legitimacy at home. The state-controlled media framed the response as a historic moment, the first time a Muslim nation had retaliated against Israel with such depth and audacity. Still, Tehran remains under pressure: rebuilding damaged facilities, managing international fallout, and avoiding further escalation that could invite US intervention.

The US bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities caused significant damage, disrupting uranium enrichment

activities and damaging key infrastructure. In response, Iran formally withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) through a parliamentary vote and suspended all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections. Officials in Tehran argued that the attacks had rendered international oversight meaningless. The move raised concerns among global non-proliferation advocates, with some suggesting that the effort to contain Iran's nuclear programme may have undermined the very framework that once helped regulate it.

The war, for now, appears to be in a tenuous pause. But there is little doubt that both Israel and Iran are preparing for the next round. Iran is rebuilding its missile infrastructure, likely experimenting with new launch platforms and increasing the survivability of its systems. Israel, meanwhile, is rapidly replenishing its interceptor stockpiles and may well be planning a second strike to reassert dominance.

This episode has changed the rules of the game. Israel remains a formidable military power, but no longer an invincible one. Iran, long considered vulnerable and on the defensive, has emerged as a credible retaliatory force capable of inflicting real damage. Pakistan, navigating its complex geopolitical terrain, has opted for balance and stability over provocation. And the region, still reeling from the aftershocks, braces for what may come next.

Although a fragile ceasefire is now in place, both sides remain on high alert, and the possibility of renewed confrontation looms large. The war may have paused, but the illusion that Israel can strike without consequence is over ■



BUDGET 2025 A ROADMAP TO RECOVERY AND REFORM

MUHAMMAD ALI BHALLI

As Pakistan presented its national budget for FY2025, it did so against a backdrop of cautious optimism, grounded in a year of macroeconomic stabilisation, fiscal prudence, and strategic reforms. The numbers speak for themselves: economic recovery is real, inflation is easing, revenue collections are rising, and investor confidence is returning. The federal budget is a signal that the government is committed to reform, resilience, and inclusive growth.

MACROECONOMIC STABILISATION

Pakistan's economy has turned a corner. The GDP growth rate modestly improved to 2.7 per cent in FY2025, up from 2.5 per cent last year, reflecting cautious recovery despite global and domestic headwinds. The size of the economy expanded to US\$411 billion, while per capita income rose by 9.7 per cent, reaching US\$1,824 — a sign that macro-level improvements are beginning to trickle down.

Perhaps the most dramatic development is on the inflation front. In a remarkable turnaround, headline inflation plummeted to 3.5 per cent in May 2025, down from 11.8 per cent a year earlier. April 2025 saw a near-historic low of 0.3 per cent inflation, a feat not witnessed in over six decades. These figures have directly benefited households grappling with rising costs in recent years, and signal the success of tighter monetary and fiscal coordination.

Other critical macroeconomic indicators also showed positive movement:

- 1: The fiscal deficit narrowed to 2.6 per cent of GDP (Jul –Mar FY2025), compared to 3.7 per cent the previous year.
- 2: Pakistan recorded its first fiscal surplus in 24 years, posting 1.7 per cent of GDP in Q1FY2025.
- 3: A strong primary surplus of 3 per cent of GDP (Jul

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–Mar FY2025) doubled the previous year’s figure.

4: The current account balance turned positive, registering a US\$1.9 billion surplus compared to a US\$1.3 billion deficit last year.

These achievements helped bolster the country’s external position. Pakistan’s foreign exchange reserves increased to US\$11.5 billion, and the central bank sharply reduced the policy interest rate from 22 per cent to 11 per cent within a year. This major cut made borrowing cheaper, encouraging businesses to invest, banks to lend more, and overall market activity to accelerate. This policy environment helped push the KSE-100 Index to an all-time high of 121,641 points, with market capitalisation reaching Rs 14.7 trillion, and 65,000 new investors joining the market, marking a 21 per cent expansion in the investor base.

The export sector also showed promise, with total exports climbing to US\$27.3 billion (+6.8 per cent) and IT exports reaching US\$3.1 billion (+21.1 per cent), reaffirming the government’s commitment to digital and knowledge-based economies. Remittances surged to US\$31.2 billion, marking a 31 per cent year-on-year growth, with a record inflow of US\$4.1 billion in March 2025 alone.

REVENUE REFORMS AND FISCAL DISCIPLINE

Central to the budget’s credibility is its focus on revenue mobilisation. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) collected Rs 10.23 trillion (Jul–May FY2025), marking a 25.9 per cent increase over the previous year. The tax-to-GDP ratio improved to 8.9 per cent, a substantial gain from 7.7 per cent last year. Simultaneously, non-tax revenues jumped by 68 per cent, providing much-needed fiscal breathing space.

These results indicate better enforcement and digitisation by the FBR and a broader commitment to documentation and economic formalisation. For a country historically plagued by low tax compliance and revenue gaps, this represents a structural shift.

PRUDENT DEBT MANAGEMENT

Fiscal consolidation is incomplete without responsible debt management. In a bold step, the government bought back Rs 1 trillion in local debt ahead of schedule, a first in the country’s history. There’s also a deliberate shift toward Islamic and long-term debt instruments, reducing reliance on short-term borrowing.

The result: debt-to-GDP ratio declined to 65 per cent, a five-year low, improving Pakistan’s fiscal sustainability outlook.

A BUDGET OF STABILITY, NOT POPULISM

This year’s budget avoids grandiose giveaways and instead focuses on building macroeconomic buffers, strengthening institutions, and enabling sustainable growth. Whether through stabilising inflation, attracting investors, or enhancing fiscal transparency, the government has demonstrated a rare resolve to make tough but necessary decisions.

Pakistan’s economic challenges are far from over. Structural reforms, job creation, and social protection remain key priorities. But the FY2025 budget sets the tone for a new narrative, one of discipline, credibility, and cautious optimism.

If implemented effectively, it may well be remembered not only as a stabilising budget but as a turning point for Pakistan’s economic resurgence■

The writer is a corporate financial specialist.



Members of a high-level Pakistani parliamentary delegation, led by former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari at the UN Security Council in New York, US, on June 2, 2025.

DIPLMACY IN ACTION

PAKISTAN'S GLOBAL EMERGENCE AFTER OPERATION SINDOOR

SAFDAR ALI DANISH

In the aftermath of Pakistan's swift and precise response to Indian aggression on 7 May 2025, the country has demonstrated remarkable agility on the diplomatic front. Pakistan has emerged as an important actor in international diplomacy, transforming post-conflict momentum into a series of diplomatic victories.

Pakistan has been elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2025–2026 term, securing an overwhelming 182 out of 193 votes. This achievement, despite sustained regional hostility, signals a decisive shift in Pakistan's global stature. In addition, Islamabad has been appointed vice chair of the UN's Counter-Terrorism Committee and now leads the key sanctions committee on the Taliban. These prestigious roles recognise Pakistan's principled commitment to peace and security and mark its elevation as a credible, multilateral voice in shaping the global order.

In the wake of unprovoked Indian aggression, recognising the urgency of global perception, Pakistan dispatched a high-powered diplomatic delegation led by former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. The delegation included veteran politicians Hina Rabbani Khar, Musadik Malik, Sherry Rehman, and

Khurram Dastgir, and seasoned diplomats Tehmina Janjua and Jalil Abbas Jilani. Bushra Anjum Butt and Faisal Sabzwari were also part of Pakistan's effort to present its case to the world.

The team engaged key stakeholders in Washington, DC, the UN Headquarters in New York, and London, within days of the conflict, effectively countering Indian propaganda. In meetings with the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the British House of Commons, and UN Security Council members, Pakistan exposed India's unprovoked aggression, violations of international law, and reckless nuclear rhetoric, including a fabricated missile launch claim, later debunked by independent satellite evidence.

Despite repeated misinformation campaigns from Indian officials and media, including exaggerated claims of Pakistani airbase destruction and false territorial gains, Pakistan's data-backed, media-savvy rebuttals quickly dismantled the disinformation.

At the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council, and through major global media channels including CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera, Bilawal Bhutto, Hina Rabbani Khar, Sherry Rehman, and others presented Pakistan's position with clarity

and confidence. They underscored Pakistan's right to self-defence, its adherence to humanitarian law, and the ongoing human rights abuses in Indian-occupied Kashmir, which intensified during the crisis.

Engagements with human rights watchdogs and Western think tanks helped further expose India's violations, drawing concern from several European and Nordic governments.

In an unprecedented diplomatic gesture, US President Donald Trump hosted Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for a high-level luncheon at the White House. The event served as a symbolic endorsement of Pakistan's professionalism and restraint during Operation Sindoor. President Trump praised Field Marshal Munir's leadership and crisis management, saying, "It is an honour for me to meet Asim Munir. I invited him to thank him for not going to war." Emphasising the nuclear status of both India and Pakistan, Trump noted ongoing trade discussions with Islamabad and commended Pakistan's leadership.

Amid the June 2025 Iran-Israel escalation, Pakistan assumed a vital mediatory role, leveraging its historic ties with Tehran and rising diplomatic stature. Engaging Qatar, Turkey, and China, Islamabad urged restraint to avert regional spillover. Coordinating intelligence sharing, humanitarian evacuations, and strategic messaging, Pakistan played a key part in de-escalation. Its support for a ceasefire through the OIC further underscored its emerging role as a regional stabiliser.

At the 51st OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Session in Istanbul (21–22 June 2025), Pakistan's rising diplomatic stature was on full display. The Istanbul Declaration, shaped significantly by Pakistan, strongly condemned Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza, violations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and recent strikes on Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. Pakistan's call for a permanent ceasefire under UNSC Resolution 2735 and support for the Palestinian government gained full OIC endorsement. The session also approved Pakistan's proposal to form a Ministerial Contact Group for regional de-escalation. In a powerful gesture of solidarity, the

OIC condemned India's strikes on Pakistani territory and lauded Islamabad's restraint following the 10 May ceasefire. The declaration reflected Pakistan's growing diplomatic maturity, moral leadership, and relevance in a shifting geopolitical order.

Earlier, at the OIC emergency summit in Riyadh, Pakistan had already cemented its image as a unifying force in the Muslim world. Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir emphasised the importance of regional solidarity in turbulent times, while Bilawal Bhutto proposed a collective economic and defence framework under an OIC Security Dialogue Forum. Pakistan's proposals, supported by member states from the Gulf, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, led to the establishment of the OIC Conflict Mediation Council, chaired by Pakistan for its inaugural term — a significant diplomatic achievement.

Advancing its regional engagement in May, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visits to Türkiye and Azerbaijan signalled a clear shift toward deeper economic diplomacy. In Türkiye, his warm interaction with President Erdoğan resulted in key agreements on defence, trade, and food security. In Baku, Pakistan and Azerbaijan reaffirmed their strategic partnership, with Shehbaz Sharif expressing gratitude for President Aliyev's unwavering support during the recent Pak-India conflict. He also extended heartfelt Eid-ul-Adha greetings to President Aliyev and the brotherly people of Kazakhstan during a separate telephonic exchange. President Aliyev expressed his intent to visit Pakistan by year's end, with both leaders expected to meet again at the upcoming ECO and SCO Summits. These high-level engagements highlight Pakistan's growing focus on regional integration across Central Asia and Eurasia.

Pakistan's diplomacy post-Operation Sindoor has re-energised its global image. The Global South, particularly African and Southeast Asian nations, has expressed admiration for Pakistan's balanced, peace-focused foreign policy. Furthermore, Pakistan's push for UN Security Council reform to include more Muslim and underrepresented nations has gained renewed traction. The Pakistani diaspora across

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Bilawal Bhutto Zardari briefing the UN Security Council.



Members of the delegation with UN Secretary General António Guterres in New York, US.

the West also played a crucial role in lobbying for Pakistan's positions, organising peaceful protests and academic conferences to counter propaganda and promote Islamabad's peace narrative.

Pakistan has capitalised on its post-conflict momentum to expand strategic partnerships. Dialogues with China, Russia, Turkey, and Central Asian states have led to agreements on military exercises, counterterrorism cooperation, and further infrastructure investment under CPEC Phase 2.

Defence analysts observed that Pakistan's Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos showcased Pakistan's technological edge in air defence and electronic warfare, cementing its status as a competent regional military force with strategic maturity.

Despite being a sovereign state that maintains constructive ties with global powers, including receiving commendations from President Trump and

the White House hosting a formal luncheon in honour of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Pakistan has upheld its principled foreign policy stance. Islamabad unequivocally condemned the recent illegal airstrikes carried out by the United States on three sites in Iran, deeming them a blatant violation of the UN Charter. The events following India's botched Operation Sindoor have demonstrated that Pakistan knows how to combine military precision with diplomatic finesse. Islamabad has proven that it is no longer merely responding to crises but shaping regional and international outcomes.

From Washington to Istanbul, from Ankara to Tehran, Pakistan's proactive diplomacy has redefined its identity, not as a security-obsessed nation, but as a mature, peace-driven, and geopolitically relevant actor in an increasingly multipolar world ■

The writer, who holds an MPhil in English Literature, is an educationist and youth activist affiliated with the PML-N.



Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Uzbekistan exchange documents formalising an action plan to strengthen bilateral collaboration and advance the UAP Railway Line project on the sidelines of the 51st OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Conference in Istanbul, 22 June 2025

UZBEKISTAN AND PAKISTAN FORGE A STRATEGIC FUTURE

DR RANA KHALID MEHMOOD

In the shifting sands of Eurasian geopolitics, few partnerships are evolving as rapidly and purposefully as the one between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Tied by history, geography, and shared ambitions, the two countries are rediscovering each other in the 21st century, not merely as neighbours in a wider regional landscape, but as partners in shaping a more interconnected, prosperous, and stable Asia.

The relationship between the two nations remained underdeveloped for decades following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. But in recent years, a quiet transformation has taken place. A series of high-level exchanges, the revival of historical trade routes, and a convergence of economic and strategic interests have brought Islamabad and Tashkent into close alignment. This emerging partnership took a major step forward in June 2025.

On 22 June, a crucial meeting between Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his Uzbek counterpart, Bakhtiyor Saidov, took place in Istanbul on the sidelines of the 51st Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC. Just days after this meeting, a 20-member Uzbek trade delegation arrived in Islamabad; part of a

schedule that had likely been arranged in advance, but whose timing nonetheless reinforced the momentum of growing bilateral ties.

Led by Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Pakistan Alisher Tukhaev, the visiting delegation, comprising representatives from sectors as diverse as textiles, agriculture, medical equipment, leather, and aquaculture, held extensive meetings with both the Islamabad and Rawalpindi Chambers of Commerce. The delegation included Deputy Chairman of Uzbekistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry Tukhtaev Akobirjon Khakimovich, Commercial Attache Bakhrom Yusupov and Deputy Chairman of Uzbek Textile Association Djumaniyazov Mukhammadjon Bakhramovich. These interactions were marked not only by cordiality but also by a clear, shared focus on results: joint ventures, technology transfers, and expanding market access.

What sets this new phase of Pakistan-Uzbekistan ties apart is its breadth. It is not confined to ceremonial niceties or memoranda of understanding that gather dust. The cooperation unfolding between the two countries spans diplomacy, logistics, education,



culture, and scientific research, with tangible initiatives already underway.

Among the most consequential of these is the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (UAP) railway project. This long-envisioned corridor promises to transform regional logistics by connecting Central Asia to Pakistani seaports through Afghanistan. The railway will reduce trade costs by up to 40 per cent, significantly shorten delivery times, and open up global markets for landlocked Central Asian economies. Equally important, it is expected to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs in the region and catalyse growth in sectors from construction to services. For Pakistan, the project breathes new life into its long-standing ambition to become a trade-and-transit hub, linking South Asia with Central and West Asia.

In the realm of education, a student exchange programme is being launched to enable young people from both nations to study, research, and live in each other's societies. The aim is to foster deeper cultural understanding, generate shared knowledge, and build long-term institutional relationships between universities. Joint research initiatives are also on the agenda, with a focus on science, technology, and innovation.

Culture and tourism are emerging as soft power pillars in this growing relationship. From architectural heritage to shared Sufi traditions, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have much in common. Both countries are now exploring ways to boost people-to-people contact through festivals, media collaborations, direct flights, and simplified visa regimes.

An often-overlooked but increasingly important aspect of the relationship is collaboration in healthcare. A delegation from Uzbekistan visited Islamabad's Health Services Academy to explore investment opportunities in the city's "Health Park," a state-of-the-art medical complex. The visit focused on developing a "Doctors' Enclave" that will provide residential, training, and research facilities to medical professionals.

This partnership is driven by more than mutual interest; it is shaped by shared geography. Both Pakistan and Uzbekistan border Afghanistan, and both recognise that peace and connectivity in the region are not possible without pragmatic engagement and economic interdependence. As such, they are increasingly seen as central players in a broader effort to stabilise and integrate South and Central Asia. Their cooperation is also aligned with regional initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), where both countries hold membership.

Looking ahead, several initiatives are on the horizon. The two sides are working toward increasing bilateral trade to one billion dollars in the near term, with a longer-term ambition of two billion. Discussions are underway to establish a joint industrial zone, expand cooperation in scientific and technological research, and deepen cultural diplomacy. Additional high-level visits are expected in the coming months, signalling the long-term strategic intent behind this growing partnership ■



PM'S YOUTH PROGRAMME BACKS CRICKET TALENT HUNT

SABA ALI

The Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) has launched a new initiative to promote sports among young Pakistanis, in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Lahore Qalandars franchise. The Prime Minister's Cricket Talent Hunt Programme aims to identify and train cricketing talent from across the country, with a particular focus on inclusivity and regional representation.

NATIONAL COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT YOUNG ATHLETES

The initiative was formally launched in Islamabad with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between PMYP, HEC, and Lahore Qalandars. The partnership brings together government and private stakeholders in a shared effort to promote youth development through sports. It follows the earlier launch of a Boxing Talent Hunt and signals a broader

commitment to combining physical education with wider opportunities in education, employment, and digital access.

TALENT HUNT TRIALS ACROSS PAKISTAN

The Cricket Talent Hunt will kick off in Quetta on June 26–27, with trials scheduled in 25 cities. The programme is open to both boys and girls and aims to ensure a merit-based, transparent selection process. Organisers hope this model will help decentralise talent scouting, reaching young athletes from areas that have traditionally been underrepresented in national sports.

BUILDING ON PROVEN MODELS

Speaking at the launch, Chairman PMYP Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan said the programme reflects a broader strategy to invest in youth development.



CEO Lahore Qalandars Atif Rana highlighted the franchise's experience with open trials, which have produced players such as Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf. He described the new programme as a continuation of that approach, now supported by national institutions.

The PSL trophy's recent tour to the UK and USA was also noted as part of ongoing efforts to promote a positive image of Pakistan through sport.

VOICES OF INSPIRATION

National cricketer Shaheen Shah Afridi attended the event and shared his own experience of being selected through a talent hunt. "When people said Pakistan lacked talent, Lahore Qalandars proved them wrong," he said. "With PMYP, we're now taking that opportunity to every street and every city."

Selected athletes will undergo further training and grooming, with exposure to both national and international platforms.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND BROADER YOUTH POLICY

Chairman HEC Dr Mukhtar Ahmed emphasised that academic institutions will play a vital role in the programme. The effort is part of a wider push to link sports with education, employment, and digital inclusion — key pillars of PMYP's broader youth strategy.

“BY INTEGRATING PROGRAMMES LIKE THE CRICKET TALENT HUNT INTO THIS LARGER POLICY FRAMEWORK, PMYP IS WORKING TO CREATE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, ONE THAT SUPPORTS NOT JUST ATHLETIC POTENTIAL BUT SOCIAL MOBILITY AND NATIONAL PROGRESS.”

The government is also preparing to launch the Prime Minister's National Adolescent and Youth Policy (NAYP). Built around the four “Es”— Education, Employment, Environment, and Engagement — the policy has been shaped through consultations across the country to address the needs of youth aged 10 to 29.

By integrating programmes like the Cricket Talent Hunt into this larger policy framework, PMYP is working to create a more comprehensive system for youth development, one that supports not just athletic potential but social mobility and national progress.

A STEP TOWARDS INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

The PMYP's recent focus on sports is part of a broader effort to engage youth and provide structured avenues for their growth. Initiatives such as the Cricket Talent Hunt serve as a bridge between aspiration and opportunity, especially for young people in underserved areas.

By combining athletic development with access to education and employment pathways, the government aims to support a generation of Pakistanis ready to contribute to the country's future ■

The writer is a digital media executive at the Prime Minister's Youth Programme.



PML-N OVERSEAS CHAPTERS CELEBRATE YOUM-E-TASHAKKUR

DR RANA KHALID MEHMOOD

In solidarity with their homeland, the overseas chapters of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) marked “Youm-e-Tashakkur” (Gratitude Day) with a series of events across the globe. From Lahore to Tokyo and Jeddah, these gatherings paid tribute to Pakistan’s successful defence during the recent conflict with India, while also reaffirming the commitment of overseas Pakistanis to the country.

LAHORE: HONOURING SACRIFICE AND UNITY



On 12 June 2025, the Punjab Overseas Pakistanis Commission (OPC) organised a ceremony at Faletti’s Hotel in Lahore, chaired by OPC Vice Chairman Barrister Amjad Malik and attended by Punjab Finance Minister Muftaba Shuja-ur-Rehman as chief guest.

Acknowledging the services of Pakistan’s armed forces and nuclear leadership, Barrister Amjad Malik described 10 May and 28 May as defining moments in Pakistan’s history, citing them as days of national unity and sacrifice. He referred to overseas

Pakistanis as “soldiers of Pakistan” and emphasised their continued support for the country, regardless of where they live. He also highlighted the commission’s ongoing initiatives, including the establishment of special courts to resolve diaspora-related issues and round-the-clock availability of the OPC’s online portal.

The event drew participation from prominent overseas Pakistanis, including Shumaila Rana, Farzana Kausar (UAE), Tayyaba Cheema (USA), Sheikh Saeed (president PML-N Saudi Arabia), Ansar Butt (general secretary PML-N Germany), Rana Zahid (PML-N South Africa), Shehzad Bhatti (president minority wing PML-N Italy), Parvez Iqbal (Belgium), and others from Japan, Spain, the UK, and the UAE.

Barrister Malik also met PML-N President Mian Nawaz Sharif in London, where he presented a progress report on the commission’s performance and discussed its expanding role at the international level.

TOKYO: REAFFIRMING NATIONAL PRIDE



On 3 June 2025, Pakistani expatriates gathered in Tokyo to mark Youm-e-Tashakkur under the leadership of Rana Abrar Hussain, chief patron of the PML-N Japan Chapter. The event was attended by a large number of community members, who used the occasion to express solidarity with Pakistan and pay tribute to the armed forces and the country’s nuclear achievements.

Participants chanted slogans in support of Pakistan, the military, and the PML-N leadership. Speakers said the observance of Youm-e-Tashakkur symbolised national resilience and unity. Rana Abrar Hussain noted that overseas Pakistanis have consistently

supported the country in difficult times and will continue to do so in the future.

JEDDAH: PRAYERS FOR THE NATION



In Jeddah, a well-attended Youm-e-Tashakkur event was jointly organised by Malik Manzoor Hussain Awan, focal person for the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme and general secretary of PML-N Saudi Arabia, and Mehar Abdul Khaliq Lak, general secretary of PML-N Jeddah.

Members of the National Assembly, Azhar Qayyum Nahar and Chaudhry Nasir Iqbal Bosal, were the guests of honour. In their joint address, the lawmakers praised the bravery of the Pakistan Armed Forces and stated that the military had upheld the nation’s honour on the global stage.



Malik Manzoor Hussain Awan said that under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan had defended itself with strength and emerged victorious. He expressed gratitude to God for this outcome and noted that Pakistan was now in capable hands.

The event included a cake-cutting ceremony and a dinner reception. Certificates were also awarded to top-performing students from Quantum Kids School■

PICTURE GALLERY



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF HOSTS A DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE DIPLOMATIC DELEGATION THAT VISITED KEY WORLD CAPITALS TO PRESENT PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON RECENT INDIAN AGGRESSION. 24 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF CHAIRS A MEETING ON DANISH SCHOOLS AND THE PROPOSED DAANISH UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD. 19 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WITNESSES THE SIGNING OF AN MOU ON COOPERATION BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, ISLAMABAD. 16 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF POSES FOR A GROUP PHOTO WITH THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF THE FOUR PROVINCES AHEAD OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL MEETING. ISLAMABAD, 4 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF SIGNS THE DOCUMENT OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET 2025-2026. 10 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF OFFERS EID UL AZHA PRAYERS ALONG WITH FORMER CM PUNJAB HAMZA SHAHBAZ IN LAHORE. 7 JUNE 2025



CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ SHARIF INSPECTS THE CBD ROUTE 47 LAKE PROJECT ALONG WALTON ROAD, LAHORE. 23 JUNE 2025



PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER ISHAQ DAR AND UAE FOREIGN MINISTER SHEIKH ABDULLAH BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN EXCHANGE AN MOU AT THE 12TH SESSION OF THE PAKISTAN-UAE JOINT MINISTERIAL COMMISSION. ABU DHABI, 24 JUNE 2025



FOREIGN MINISTER OF IRAN SEYED ABBAS ARAGHCHI MEETS FOREIGN MINISTER ISHAQ DAR ON THE SIDELINES OF THE 51ST SESSION OF THE OIC COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS IN ISTANBUL. 22 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF APPROACHES THE OPPOSITION BENCHES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND GREETES CHAIRMAN PTI BARRISTER GOHAR ALI KHAN. ISLAMABAD, 26 JUNE 2025



CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF FIELD MARSHAL ASIM MUNIR AND FOREIGN MINISTER ISHAQ DAR MEET TURKISH PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN DURING THE 51ST SESSION OF THE OIC COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS IN ISTANBUL. 21 JUNE 2025



CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ AT THE PRESENTATION OF PROVINCIAL BUDGET 2025-2026 AT THE PUNJAB ASSEMBLY, LAHORE. 16 JUNE 2025



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF MEETS FORMER FEDERAL MINISTER KHAWAJA SAAD RAFIQUE IN LAHORE. 14 JUNE 2025



STUDENTS OF DERA GHAZI KHAN DIVISION WITH CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ SHARIF DURING A CEREMONY TO DISTRIBUTE LAPTOPS AND HONHAAR SCHOLARSHIPS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAYYAH. 30 MAY 2025



PAKISTAN'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN, AMBASSADOR ASIM IFTIKHAR AHMAD, CALLS THE SITUATION IN GAZA A STAIN ON THE CONSCIENCE OF HUMANITY AT THE TENTH EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. 17 JUNE 2025



PML-N CANDIDATE HINA WARAIKH LEADS A RALLY IN CELEBRATION OF WINNING THE SIALKOT BYE-ELECTION FOR PP-52. 1 JUNE 2025



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