

# HORIZON



MARCH 2025

**PAKISTAN ON THE RISE**  
A YEAR OF EXCELLENCE  
IN ECONOMY, DIPLOMACY,  
AND SPORTS

RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

**PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ**

# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

In February, Pakistan marked a year under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government whose decisive leadership and sweeping reforms saved the country. Guided by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the government has adeptly navigated formidable challenges — averting an imminent economic default, reinvigorating diplomatic channels, and strengthening national security — while simultaneously laying the groundwork for socio-economic advancement. This period has been marked by rigorous economic stabilisation, the revival of international partnerships, and strategic policy measures designed to bolster investor confidence and restore public trust. The administration's forward-thinking vision and resolute approach have not only fortified Pakistan's institutional framework but have also rekindled a pervasive spirit of progress across all sectors of society.

Building upon these firm foundations, Pakistan continues to make significant headway in its economic journey. Azerbaijan's commitment to invest \$2 billion in the country is a landmark development in this regard — a clear endorsement of Pakistan's emerging economic potential. This substantial financial infusion is set to drive transformative projects in infrastructure, energy, and trade, thereby reinforcing the government's broader strategy for sustainable growth.

In the realm of international security, Pakistan's collaborative efforts have been recognised on the global stage. US President Donald Trump, in his recent address to Congress, lauded Pakistan for its instrumental role in apprehending Mohammad Sharifullah, the key suspect behind the 2021 Kabul airport bombing. This joint operation, based on intelligence shared by the CIA, not only brings justice to the victims but also signifies the robust cooperation between Pakistan and the US in combating terrorism.

On the domestic front, the successful hosting of the Champions Trophy bears witness to Pakistan's capability to organise major international sporting events. The tournament concluded without any incidents, with foreign teams expressing immense satisfaction over their experience. The enthusiasm and sportsmanship displayed by Pakistani spectators, who filled the stadiums and extended support to all teams, were particularly commendable. On International Women's Day, it is time to celebrate the significant strides made towards women's empowerment. Maryam Nawaz spearheaded transformative initiatives in Punjab, enhancing women's access to education and employment opportunities. The international conference on women's education held in Islamabad, graced by Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, highlighted Pakistan's commitment to advancing women's rights.

In preparation for the holy month of Ramadan, the government proactively implemented measures to stabilise the prices of essential commodities, aiming to alleviate the financial burden on citizens during this sacred period. These efforts, including the introduction of Ramadan Relief Packages to support low-income families across Pakistan, reflect a dedication to ensuring the populace can observe the month with spiritual peace and economic ease. We wish a blessed Ramadan to Muslims around the world!

Sincerely,  
Saira Bano  
Editor-in-Chief

---

## EDITORIAL BOARD

---

Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Saira Bano, Attaullah Tarar, Badar Shahbaz





# PAKISTAN ON THE RISE

## A YEAR OF EXCELLENCE IN ECONOMY, DIPLOMACY, AND SPORTS

**RANA KHALID & MUHAMMAD OMER**

As the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government completes its first year in office, a comprehensive assessment of its performance across economic, diplomatic, security, and social sectors is essential. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the government has focused on stabilising the economy, revitalising foreign relations, enhancing security, and fostering youth development. This review presents key accomplishments and challenges faced during the past year.

### ECONOMIC STABILITY

One of the most pressing challenges inherited by the PML-N government was the threat of economic

default. Through decisive measures, Pakistan successfully avoided this crisis and entered a phase of economic recovery. Key indicators of this progress include:

- Inflation fell below 5 per cent in the first quarter of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
- Interest rates lowered from 22 per cent to 11 per cent, promoting investment and business confidence.
- A positive economic growth trajectory, reflecting renewed investor trust.
- Record remittances from overseas Pakistanis, demonstrating confidence in government policies.

“THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO LAUNCHED THE “URAAN PAKISTAN” INITIATIVE TO BOOST EXPORTS, AIMING FOR A 6 PER CENT GDP GROWTH RATE BY 2028, POSITIONING PAKISTAN AS A KEY PLAYER IN THE GLOBAL MARKET.”



- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved an additional grant, and the World Bank pledged billions of dollars in development funding.

The government has also launched the “Uraan Pakistan” initiative to boost exports, aiming for a 6 per cent GDP growth rate by 2028, positioning Pakistan as a key player in the global market.

## DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Pakistan’s diplomatic engagements saw significant momentum in the past year. The country successfully hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Islamabad, marking the first high-level summit in 27 years. This reinforced Pakistan’s role in regional security and economic cooperation.

Bilateral relations with China, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Malaysia, UAE, and Western nations strengthened, with notable advancements in the second phase of

the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Infrastructure projects, including the completion of Gwadar International Airport, positioned Pakistan as a critical transit hub.

Additionally, Pakistan hosted the Commonwealth Asia Youth Summit 2025, attended by youth delegations from over 12 countries. This event provided Pakistani youth with networking, problem-solving, and leadership development opportunities on a global platform.

## REVIVAL OF SPORTS

A remarkable highlight of the past year has been Pakistan’s resurgence as a global sports destination. Pakistan has secured the hosting rights for the ICC Champions Trophy, a significant milestone that reaffirms international confidence in the country’s security and sports infrastructure. Additionally, Pakistan welcomed the German and Dutch hockey teams for competitive matches, signalling the revival of international sports events on home soil.



“

**A REMARKABLE HIGHLIGHT  
OF THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN  
PAKISTAN'S RESURGENCE AS A  
GLOBAL SPORTS DESTINATION.**

”



## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES

The Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) has introduced several initiatives to empower young people across various sectors. Through digital learning and IT training, thousands of students have gained essential skills in freelancing and technology, enabling them to compete in the global digital economy. The laptop scheme has further supported education by providing students with the necessary digital tools. To expand access to higher education, the Punjab Education Endowment Fund has been transformed into a national scholarship initiative. The Youth Business Loan Scheme has helped young entrepreneurs to establish and grow their businesses. In the fields of tourism and environmental sustainability, PMYP has launched hospitality training programmes and the Green Youth Movement, promoting eco-friendly practices and awareness.

## STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Despite political differences, the government has ensured that opposition parties have a voice in

parliamentary proceedings. Key measures include the formation of a parliamentary committee to enhance dialogue between government and opposition, protecting media freedoms, allowing open debate and discussion, and engaging with opposition leaders before passing significant constitutional amendments, such as the 26th Amendment.

## SECURITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

Pakistan continues to battle security threats, particularly from extremist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The government's dual approach includes targeted actions against terrorist groups to ensure national security and engaging regional partners to curb cross-border militancy.

The PML-N government, under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, has demonstrated pragmatic governance, focusing on economic recovery, diplomatic resurgence, security enhancements, and youth empowerment. While challenges remain, the steady progress made over the past year lays a solid foundation for Pakistan's future as a stable and prosperous nation ■

# وزیر اعلیٰ پنجاب مریم نواز کی آسان کاروبار فنانس سکیم 2025 خوشخبری



## TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT PUNJAB'S VISION

MUHAMMAD MUGHEES ARIF

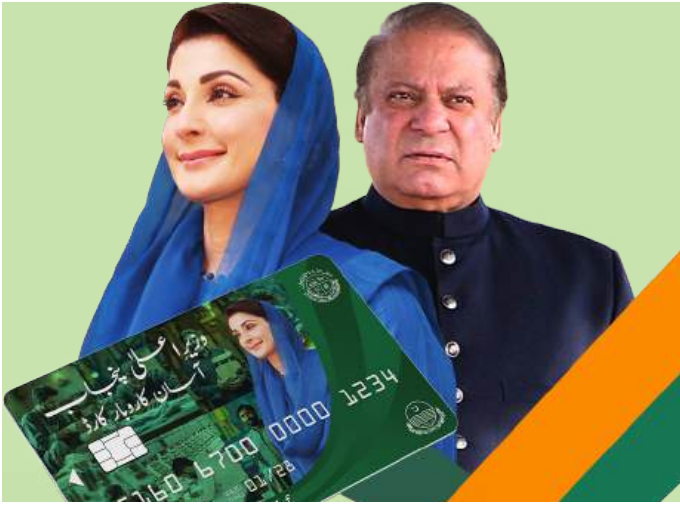
Pakistan is one of the world's biggest youth force countries, with almost 70 per cent of its population in the youth age bracket. Being the most populated province in the country, Punjab bears the responsibility for taking the lead in tackling the youth's problems. As a youth, I feel we are surrounded by the shadow of hopelessness cast by minimal chances of development and stability as perceived by the political and economic scenario. Here, stability is meant in financial and long-term standing.

Youth need resources to thrive and to eradicate the disappointment and insecurity of the future. Due to the economic turmoil caused by questionable decisions made in the PTI era, our markets still struggle to generate sufficient capital and jobs to facilitate the youth. The system fails to fulfil the employment demands, leaving many behind. The youth expect the necessary investment to help them stand. Will the youth forever remain as helpless as today, surrounded by miseries?

The day CM Maryam Nawaz was elected, her determination to serve the people of Punjab shone through her inaugural address. After a year of her in power, the public can witness many practical projects for all social classes and departments. The Air Ambulance Service, Free Medicine Delivery Project, Honhaar Scholarship, e-bikes for students, School Nutrition Programme, revamping of infrastructure, construction of new roads, Apni Chhat Apna Ghar, laptops for students, Pink Games, women safety initiatives, establishment of cancer and cardiac hospitals, IT City, climate sustainability initiatives, Maryam ki Dastak are just a few of many. All these initiatives are in action and their ground reality and benefits are now visible in Punjab.

These projects are not just a projection of the government but are producing hundreds of opportunities for youth and professionals, enabling them to serve the nation and make themselves financially stable. Every new initiative creates many jobs for the freshers and





experts, a chance for the businesses to avail tenders and engage the youth productively. The facilitation of a single youngster from a family is a step taken to bring the whole family out of crisis and towards stability. CM Maryam Nawaz's vision and measures for a better Punjab have created many opportunities like this.

One of the key issues young graduates face in the market is experience, and no firm offers paid internships for freshers. Given this major hurdle in the youth's career development, CM directed different government departments to make space for paid internships – paving the way for the first-ever batch of climate programme internships with a minimum stipend of Rs60,000. Many other departments, like livestock and health, are now introducing paid internships. This is a wonderful step in equipping youth with the hands-on experience required to compete in the job market.

To financially support the youth, CM Maryam brought forth two prestigious and large finance schemes, one of which being the 'Asaan Karobar Card'. The scheme offers interest-free loans of up to Rs1 million through a digital SME card. It supports small entrepreneurs in expanding and sustaining their businesses, ensuring structured growth through digital channels (e.g. mobile applications, point of sale [POS], etc.) and transparent utilisation of funds. One can easily apply online with the provided instructions.

The 'CM Punjab Asaan Karobar Finance' scheme is the second and largest financial programme. The 'CM Punjab Karobar Finance' scheme approved in the 22nd Provincial Cabinet Meeting on 14 January 2025,

is the first-of-its-kind multi-million-rupee scheme launched by the Government of Punjab. The project provides interest-free loans of up to Rs30 million (Rs3 crore), giving financial assistance to entrepreneurs across various sectors, including agriculture. The scheme aims to drive economic development, boost exports, and create jobs. CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz also announced the provision of free land for Asaan Karobar Finance scheme. Moreover, a target was set to establish 100,000 business start-ups in Punjab. She also directed to provide business plans for start-ups across the state. This project is a huge game changer because it is Sharia-compliant being interest-free and no extra burden is placed on the borrower.

These schemes provide more than just a loan. They are a chance to grow, a solution to the plight of the unemployed, a new start for those in financial peril, and an opportunity that every skilled youngster must avail to elevate their financial position and the country's economy. A single successful business established by utilising government-sponsored funds can do a lot for the borrower and others becoming parties to his venture, either in the form of customers, contractors, or employees. A single loan borrower can trigger a positive change in society by becoming a source of employment for other people. This is a well-appreciated step by the Government of Punjab to improve the employment indicators. All that is required is a feasible idea, filling out the form, and waiting for your turn to be obliged. With such ease, what are you waiting for? ■

*The writer is a political activist dedicated to advancing SDG implementation, with a strategic focus on nutrition governance and food safety reforms.*



# MEENA BAZAAR 2025 OPENING THE DOORS FOR WOMEN IN PP-172

**ISHRAT SALEEM**

Under the crisp sunshine that followed a week of heavy rain, the Meena Bazaar and Job Fair at PP-172 Lahore came alive with the laughter of women and children dressed in their finest outfits. The event, organised by Zoha Foundation in partnership with Agahe, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, and the Prime Minister's Youth Programme on 21-22 February offered an exclusive space for women to explore economic opportunities, showcase their talents, and enjoy a day of entertainment and camaraderie. The spirit behind this event was Chairperson Zoha Foundation Farhat Mashhood and Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, who was elected as member of the Punjab Assembly from this constituency in the 2002, 2008, 2013 and 2018 general elections.

As I entered the venue, I was met with a heartwarming sight — a cricket ground bustling with families,

where dozens of children eagerly awaited their turn on massive jumping castles and merry-go-round. The area was lined with vibrant stalls run by local women, featuring handmade crafts, food, and merchandise, alongside booths set up by various organisations offering training and employment opportunities. A large stage stood at one end, where a young resident of PP-172 engaged the crowd, and local women and girls took turns entertaining the audience with singing and other performances.

“**THE TWO-DAY EVENT  
FEATURED A VARIETY OF  
COMPETITIONS, ALLOWING  
WOMEN TO DEMONSTRATE  
THEIR SKILLS AND CREATIVITY.**”





Beyond the lively atmosphere, Meena Bazaar was also a platform for life-changing opportunities. A panel interviewed 10 applicants each, shortlisted from a pool of 460 eligible candidates, for laptops and e-bikes, assessing their academic, employment, and financial needs. One young woman, a bachelor's student in graphic design, expressed her struggle to afford a laptop — an essential tool for her studies. It was a difficult decision for the panel, as many applicants met the rigorous selection criteria, which required proof of residency in PP-172 and demonstrated need. The same careful evaluation applied to the distribution of e-bikes, ensuring that the recipients were deserving young women in need of independent mobility.

A key highlight of the event was the participation of various organisations dedicated to women's

professional and personal growth. From tech and vocational training institutes to entrepreneurship support initiatives, the booths provided women with information on career development, financial assistance, and business opportunities. Organisations like NAVTTC, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Saylani Welfare, and JDC Foundation showcased their programmes, offering guidance on IT skills, e-commerce, and startup mentorship. Companies such as Assort Tech and Axxon Group conducted on-the-spot job screenings, while institutes like PNY Trainings and COTHM presented career counselling sessions and discounted vocational courses.

The two-day event also featured a variety of competitions, allowing women to demonstrate their skills and creativity. Cooking contests challenged



“A KEY HIGHLIGHT OF THE EVENT WAS THE PARTICIPATION OF VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS DEDICATED TO WOMEN’S PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH. FROM TECH AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTES TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT INITIATIVES, THE BOOTHS PROVIDED WOMEN WITH INFORMATION ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT, FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.”



participants to prepare the best snacks, main dishes, and desserts, while arts and crafts competitions included sketching, painting, embroidery, and glasswork. Bridal makeup and mehndi design competitions drew significant interest, alongside a singing contest that entertained the audience. Winners of these competitions were awarded cash prizes, recognising their talent and dedication.

Throughout the two days, women and young girls explored the event, some searching for training and job prospects while others indulged in delicious homemade delicacies from various stalls. The aroma of biryani, dahi bhallay, brownies, and Kashmiri tea filled the air, adding to the festive spirit. I, too, couldn’t resist a bowl of neatly packed dahi bhallay — a rare treat in an environment where women could enjoy themselves freely.

Many attendees reminisced how Meena Bazaar was once a vibrant part of local culture but gradually faded, becoming limited to the privileged few. By offering free stalls, no entry fees, complimentary rides for

children and food for the deserving, this event revived that tradition, ensuring accessibility for women from all backgrounds and truly making it a celebration for everyone. Around 150 women entrepreneurs and home-based businesses set up stalls, while 160+ women actively participated in various competitions, attracting an estimated 40,000 attendees over two days.

As the event drew to a close, Chairman Prime Minister’s Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan addressed the audience, reflecting on his longstanding commitment to empowering women and fostering economic growth in PP-172. He thanked the participating organisations, volunteers, and attendees for making Meena Bazaar a resounding success. His speech was followed by a prize distribution ceremony, where winners of various competitions and the laptop and e-bike recipients were awarded their prizes. Even though Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan was not elected in the last election, he has remained committed to serving his constituents by organising initiatives that directly uplift the community, at a time when election campaigns remain in the distant future ■





# DAIRY REFORM FOR A STRONGER PAKISTAN

## RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

In a pivotal move for Pakistan's agricultural economy, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, led by Rana Tanveer Hussain, has reaffirmed its commitment to addressing the challenges faced by the dairy sector. Amid growing concerns regarding food security and the economic plight of millions of dairy farmers, the government is set to reassess the taxation and other policies concerning the dairy sector.

Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain has been actively engaging with stakeholders, including the Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA), to explore ways to unlock the full potential of Pakistan's dairy industry. The minister's recent statement underscores the government's resolve to ensure that the tax burden on packaged milk is reviewed in light of the current economic landscape. Despite financial constraints, the government remains focused on creating policies that will enhance food security and dairy farmers' livelihoods.

The government's proposed tax relief aims to make nutritious milk more affordable for consumers while encouraging investment in the formal dairy sector. The formal sector plays a critical role in ensuring consistent milk supply, food safety, and fair pricing

for farmers. As the industry grows, so too will the sustainability of farmer incomes and the national food security framework.

### A LIFELINE FOR FARMERS AND CONSUMERS

Dairy is the backbone of the livelihoods of eight million Pakistani farming families, who rely on livestock to feed their families and sustain rural economies. However, challenges such as high production costs, poor infrastructure, and limited access to modern farming techniques have hindered the growth of the dairy sector. The government is cognizant that the imposition of a sales tax on packaged milk adds to the financial strain on both farmers and consumers while compromising the formalisation of the sector and the consumers' health.

Yet, despite these challenges, the government remains committed to finding solutions that balance the interests of farmers, consumers, and the wider economy. Minister Tanveer Hussain has recognised the formal dairy sector's vital role in ensuring safe, hygienic, and nutritious milk reaches consumers. The government is now evaluating the 18 per cent sales tax, as per global best practices, with the awareness

“

**THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO THE DAIRY SECTOR INCLUDES INVESTMENTS IN COLD CHAIN INFRASTRUCTURE, IMPROVED MILK COLLECTION SYSTEMS, AND INCENTIVES FOR FARMERS TO ADOPT MODERN FARMING TECHNIQUES.**

”



that a lower tax could increase consumption and tax revenues over time, benefiting both the dairy sector and the nation's economy.

Looking forward: a stronger dairy sector for Pakistan  
Pakistan's dairy sector, while facing significant challenges, holds immense potential. With a milk production volume of over 70 million tonnes annually, the industry is poised to become a key driver of economic growth. By addressing the issue of taxation, the government aims to foster a vibrant dairy sector, boost exports, and create long-term job opportunities for farmers, processing plants, and associated industries.

The government's commitment to the dairy sector includes investments in cold chain infrastructure, improved milk collection systems, and incentives for farmers to adopt modern farming techniques. The formal sector — which processes and ensures milk safety — has long been the backbone of Pakistan's dairy economy. The government aims to strengthen this sector by creating stable market conditions, providing fair milk prices, and improving rural farmers' income. The minister has also urged PDA and its members to enhance support for the farmers and infrastructure development.

## BALANCING POLICY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

In line with its commitment to food security, the government is also prioritising consumers' health and safety. To make nutritious milk affordable for the general population, tax and other policy incentives are crucial so that every Pakistani has access to safe dairy products. The current evaluation to move towards equitable dairy taxation will lower the price of packaged milk, encouraging people to opt for safe, regulated milk over informal and potentially unsafe alternatives.

By fostering collaboration between the government, industry, and stakeholders, the government is positioning the dairy sector as a key pillar of Pakistan's economic resilience. Minister Tanveer Hussain has assured that the government is fully committed to ensuring Pakistan's dairy sector becomes a leader in both regional and global markets, while also supporting farmers and safeguarding consumer health.

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As Pakistan's dairy industry continues to face multiple hurdles, the government's active engagement with the Pakistan Dairy Association and other stakeholders offers hope for a more sustainable and prosperous future for the dairy sector, including local consumption and exports.

Under the able leadership of Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Rana Tanveer Hussain, the government's proactive stance in reassessing the dairy tax and the phase-wise implementation of the minimum pasteurisation law/regulations signals a commitment to building a stronger, healthier future for Pakistan. By ensuring the growth of the formal dairy sector, the government aims to improve consumer health and farmer livelihoods, while strengthening Pakistan's economy for years to come ■





# SARGODHA'S CITRUS CRISIS

## A BATTLE TO RECLAIM THE 'CALIFORNIA OF PAKISTAN'

**UROOJ FATIMA**

For decades, Sargodha stood as Pakistan's citrus capital, earning the title "California of Pakistan" for its flourishing orchards of oranges and kinnow that supplied both local and international markets. The citrus industry was more than just agriculture — it was an economic lifeline that supported thousands of farmers, traders, labourers, and exporters.

However, in recent years, a grim reality has set in. Citrus production has plummeted, with 25-35 per cent of farmers abandoning orange and kinnow cultivation, and replacing orchards with wheat, sugarcane, and other crops. Once dominated by citrus, the region is rapidly changing as farmers struggle with rising temperatures, water shortages, crop diseases, and an unstable export market. Without immediate intervention, Sargodha's legacy as Pakistan's citrus powerhouse is at risk.

### THE RISE AND FALL OF SARGODHA'S CITRUS INDUSTRY

Sargodha's citrus legacy dates back to British colonial rule when irrigation infrastructure was first established in the early 20th century. The Punjab Canal Colonies, introduced by the British, transformed barren lands into fertile agricultural hubs, allowing citrus farming to flourish. By the 1950s and 1960s, Sargodha had established itself as the centre of Pakistan's citrus production, with kinnow cultivation gaining momentum due to its high yield, resistance to disease, and distinct taste.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Pakistan experienced an agricultural boom, as better irrigation systems and fertilisers boosted citrus yields. Exports grew, and Sargodha's oranges became well-known in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

“**SARGODHA’S CITRUS LEGACY DATES BACK TO BRITISH COLONIAL RULE WHEN IRRIGATION INFRASTRUCTURE WAS FIRST ESTABLISHED IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.**”



But over the past two decades, this progress has reversed. Climate change, outdated farming techniques, and poor infrastructure have led to declining yields and shrinking profits. Today, Sargodha is struggling to maintain its place in the global citrus market, facing stiff competition from countries that have modernised their citrus industries.

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

Citrus crops thrive in temperatures between 25°C and 35°C, but in recent years, Sargodha has experienced prolonged heatwaves, with temperatures exceeding 40°C during critical fruit development months. This excessive heat has led to higher fruit drop, sunburnt produce, and reduced quality, making it harder for farmers to meet export standards.

More heat also means greater water demand, forcing farmers to rely on irrigation far beyond what was needed a decade ago, resulting in increased expenses. Traditionally, Sargodha’s farmers relied on Punjab’s canal irrigation system, but inconsistent monsoon patterns, declining water flows, and outdated infrastructure have made irrigation increasingly unreliable. Without modern water conservation techniques, such as drip irrigation, citrus farming is becoming unsustainable for many growers.

Farmers are battling citrus canker, citrus greening disease (Huanglongbing), and citrus tristeza virus — diseases that lower fruit quality and cause premature fruit drop. Many growers, lacking access to disease-resistant citrus varieties and proper orchard management training, struggle to control the spread of these infections.

Pakistan has no large-scale initiative to protect its citrus industry, unlike other countries that have

invested in nationwide pest and disease management programmes. The crisis will continue to worsen without a coordinated effort to provide disease-resistant saplings, modern spraying techniques, and farmer education programs.

## THE EXPORT DECLINE: A MARKET IN CRISIS

For decades, Sargodha’s citrus was a prized commodity in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, but today, Pakistan is losing its competitive edge.

While citrus is still exported to 48 countries, including Afghanistan, Russia, the UAE, the Philippines, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Iraq, and the Netherlands, export growth has stagnated. The reasons are clear:

First, stricter quality standards in international markets have made it difficult for Pakistani citrus to compete. Many importing countries have tightened regulations due to concerns over fruit diseases, pesticide residues, and inconsistent grading standards, causing higher rejection rates for Pakistani citrus.

Second, the lack of modern processing and packaging facilities has placed Pakistan at a disadvantage. Pakistan still relies on outdated processing methods, unlike Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, and South Africa, which have invested in advanced sorting, grading, and cold storage facilities. Without large-scale citrus processing plants to enhance shelf life and product presentation, Pakistani citrus struggles to meet the demands of high-end buyers.

Logistics further complicate the situation. High freight costs, poor port infrastructure, and limited refrigerated



transport mean that much of Sargodha's citrus loses freshness before reaching export markets. With rising operational costs and shrinking profit margins, many farmers and exporters are stepping away from citrus in search of more reliable income sources.

Egypt's success story: a blueprint for Sargodha's revival

In the early 2000s, Egypt faced a crisis similar to what Sargodha is experiencing today — declining citrus production, climate stress, and poor export infrastructure. However, with a well-executed national agricultural strategy, Egypt transformed into the world's largest exporter of oranges by 2021.

### THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT:

- Invested in disease-resistant citrus varieties, reducing crop losses.
- Built state-of-the-art processing and cold storage units, improving export quality.
- Strengthened trade ties with Europe, China, and Russia, securing high-value markets.
- Provided training and financial support to citrus farmers, increasing productivity.

Today, Egypt dominates citrus exports, while Pakistan struggles to maintain its position. This example proves that policy intervention, infrastructure development, and farmer education can revitalise a struggling industry. Sargodha's citrus industry can be restored if Pakistan follows a similar roadmap.

### REBUILDING SARGODHA'S CITRUS INDUSTRY

Sargodha's citrus industry is at a crossroads, but there is still a clear path to reclaim its position in both local and international markets.

Modernising farming techniques must be the first step. The government and private sector must invest in disease-resistant citrus varieties and provide farmer training programs on effective pest control and

**“SARGODHA'S CITRUS INDUSTRY IS AT A CROSSROADS, BUT THERE IS STILL A CLEAR PATH TO RECLAIM ITS POSITION IN BOTH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS.”**

orchard management. Research institutions should be encouraged to develop new citrus strains suited for Pakistan's changing climate.

Reviving Punjab's canal system is another essential move. A shift toward efficient irrigation technologies like drip and sprinkler systems can help conserve water and reduce costs, making citrus farming more sustainable.

Equally important is the need to expand and improve citrus processing infrastructure. Establishing modern citrus processing plants in Sargodha — equipped with automated sorting, cold storage, and juice extraction facilities — could boost fruit quality, extend shelf life, and open doors to premium export markets.

On the export front, Pakistan must aggressively re-enter global markets by securing new trade agreements, improving compliance with international branding efforts. Marketing “Sargodha Kinnow” as a premium citrus variety — emphasising its unique taste and freshness — could help Pakistan regain market confidence.

### A RACE AGAINST TIME

The decline of Sargodha's citrus industry is not irreversible. Countries like Egypt and Morocco have successfully revitalised their citrus industries through research, investment, and policy support. Pakistan must act now to modernise its citrus sector, improve disease management, upgrade irrigation, and secure high-value export markets.

If the right steps are taken today, Sargodha's orange orchards will flourish again, securing a prosperous future for generations to come■

*The writer is a business development professional.*



Ehtesham Qureshi



Amjad Malik



Farhan Ramzan

Punjab Overseas  
Pakistanis  
Commission

Shamas Mehar



Tariq Butt

# PUNJAB OVERSEAS PAKISTANIS COMMISSION HOLDS E-KACHEHRI

**DR RANA KHALID MEHMOOD**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is making every effort to address the issues overseas Pakistanis face in line with the promises made in its manifesto. Overseas Pakistanis are a valuable asset to the country, and resolving their concerns on a priority basis is a key responsibility of the government. To achieve this, the PML-N government has adopted a policy to ensure direct engagement between government officials and the overseas Pakistani community every month.

Under the leadership of Chairperson Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Vice Chairperson Barrister Amjad Malik, the Punjab Overseas Pakistanis Commission (OPC) is actively working to resolve problems faced by overseas Pakistanis. As part of these efforts, an e-Kachehri, i.e. an online town hall meeting, was held on 28 February, allowing overseas Pakistanis to register their concerns while staying in their respective

countries of residence. The session was attended by Vice Chairperson OPC Barrister Amjad Malik and Commissioner OPC Mirza Naseer Inayat, while Pakistanis from various countries in the Gulf, Europe, the US, and Africa presented their issues. Immediate directives were issued to the commissioner of OPC for the swift resolution of these matters.

Following PML-N's 2024 election manifesto, the OPC is being modernised to function as a "one-window operation." This will not only streamline the process for lodging and resolving complaints but will also offer other essential services.

The reformation of OPC has had the following outcomes and impact:

- Overseas Pakistanis now have an effective and reliable platform where they can register complaints without hesitation.



- The resolution process has become more efficient, with immediate directives issued to concerned officials.
- The gap between the government and overseas Pakistanis has been reduced, leading to increased trust.
- The “one-window operation” model makes the OPC more active and effective.

To ensure the prompt resolution of issues overseas Pakistanis face, the Punjab government will continue to hold open forums (Kachehris) both within Pakistan and abroad every month.

### ISHAQ DAR MEETS OVERSEAS PML-N LEADERS IN NEW YORK



Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar met with the leadership of PML-N overseas chapters during his visit to New York. In this meeting, PML-N leaders from the US discussed party affairs and shared their perspectives on the challenges faced.

Ishaq Dar emphasised that the ethical standards of PML-N's politics must be higher than those of other political parties. He urged party workers to effectively counter the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) USA chapter's attempts to damage the image of Pakistan and its armed forces, ensuring that Pakistan's positive image and state institutions are presented to the world. During the meeting, leaders such as Danish Malik and others raised concerns regarding internal party

groupings. Ishaq Dar reassured them that all voices would be heard and that any solutions would be reached through consensus. He appreciated the contributions of PML-N overseas chapter members, acknowledging their significant role in the party and serving Pakistan.

### PAKISTAN ASSOCIATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA DELEGATION MEETS CHAIRMAN PMYP



A delegation from the Pakistan Association for South Africa, led by Zahid Iqbal, met with PMYP Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan. The meeting was attended by Nadeem Hafeez, General Secretary of the Bahrain chapter.



Additionally, Vice President of PML-N South Africa Zahid Iqbal, along with General Secretary of the Turkey chapter Tauseef Tahir, and Raja Anjum Chauhan from the Germany chapter, visited the Parliament. They met Dr Nafisa Shah, chairperson of the Pakistan-South Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group, along with MNAs Shaista Pervaiz and Sharmila Farooqi ■



# PICTURE GALLERY



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WITH THE PARTICIPANTS OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CEREMONY, HELD AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE IN ISLAMABAD. 8 MARCH 2025**



**A DELEGATION OF AI-BASED PLATFORM ALERIA AND INTERNATIONAL FREE ZONES AUTHORITY UAE CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF IN ISLAMABAD. 5 MARCH 2025**



**CHINA'S AMBASSADOR TO PAKISTAN JIANG ZAIDONG CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF IN ISLAMABAD. 18 MARCH 2025**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WITNESSES THE EXCHANGE OF AN MOU BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL FREE ZONES AUTHORITY OF UAE AND THE BOARD OF INVESTMENT OF PAKISTAN, ISLAMABAD. 5 MARCH 2025**



**RUSSIAN FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENERGY PAVEL SOROKIN CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF IN ISLAMABAD. 28 FEBRUARY 2025**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES A BREAKFAST SESSION WITH NEWLY INDUCTED MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL CABINET, ISLAMABAD. 28 FEBRUARY 2025**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WELCOMES CROWN PRINCE OF ABU DHABI SHEIKH KHALID BIN MUHAMMAD BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN AT NOOR KHAN BASE, ISLAMABAD. 27 FEBRUARY 2025**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES THE PAKISTAN-UZBEKISTAN BUSINESS FORUM, TASHKENT. 26 FEBRUARY 2025**





**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF AND PRESIDENT OF UZBEKISTAN SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV WITNESS THE SIGNING OF MOUS AND AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN TASHKENT. 26 FEBRUARY 2025**



**CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ LISTENS TO THE CONCERN OF PATIENTS, AND THEIR ATTENDANTS DURING A SURPRISE VISIT TO MAYOR HOSPITAL, LAHORE. 6 MARCH 2025**



**CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB WAVING TO THE PUBLIC AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF AT 12 HORSE AND CATTLE SHOW IN LAHORE. 25 FEBRUARY 2025**



**CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ RIDES AN ELECTRIC BUS AFTER INAUGURATING THE PILOT PROJECT IN LAHORE, WHICH CURRENTLY INCLUDES A FLEET OF 27 E-BUSES. 19 FEBRUARY 2025**



**CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ INAUGURATES A ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT IN NARWAL. 18 FEBRUARY 2025**



**CHIEF MINISTER MARYAM NAWAZ WAVES TO CROWDS AT A PUBLIC RALLY IN NAROWAL. 18 FEBRUARY 2025**



# HORIZON

Research and Policy Planning Unit  
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz