



Daily Voice of Masses  
**Independent**

**Budget and politics**

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday expressed his 'resolve' to increase Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio to 13pc in the next three years. Addressing a post-budget media briefing, he said: "Our basic principle while framing this budget was to expand the tax base."

Given this statement and his earlier declaration at the launch of the Economic Survey that "countries cannot be run on charity but taxes", it was expected that the new budget would have significant measures to broaden the tax base. The reality of the taxation measures announced by him in the budget, however, does not match his rhetoric. Before we delve into the reasons for this gap, it should be acknowledged that the budget does propose the revocation of certain tax exemptions being enjoyed by certain privileged sectors of the economy. That, though, has been done to raise the annual tax collection to Rs12b.97tr, a sine qua non to qualify for the three-year Extended Fund Facility being sought from the IMF.

One does not have to be a financial wizard to see that the budget still follows the same tried, tested, flopped and, therefore, oft-rejected trope of milking those already in the tax net even more. A large part of the additional revenue measures being proposed target the same two segments — the salaried classes and documented businesses — which already pay the bulk of personal and direct taxes.

At best, the government can only hope that its proposal to levy higher taxes on non-filers trying to buy or sell property will force them to join the tax net voluntarily. At worst, it will force more people to engage in cash transactions and, thus, increase tax evasion.

The next budget, in fact, reflects the ruling PML-N's political concerns more than its economic reform agenda. For one, it has left its traditional support — traders — virtually untouched. Nothing except such political imperatives explain why the finance minister did not levy any direct taxes on retail trade even when the government has talked a lot about it of late.

Similarly, while there is a proposal to levy federal excise duty on property, real estate developers and agents have been shielded from any additional tax burden. This, too, stems from political expediency: the PML-N cannot afford to anger the middle class other than those sections that have already turned against it. The budget, therefore, lacks both imagination and courage. It shows that the finance team did not envision any structural changes to broaden the tax-to-GDP ratio and, instead, chose to stick to old formulae. It also shows that the ruling party is scared of taking bold steps lest it loses whatever little public support and legitimacy it has. Consequently, the budget it has presented signifies nothing but a lost opportunity to fix the system.

**A helping hand**

Zubeida Mustafa

In a country without institutionalised social security, how do people of limited means survive in an emergency? A wage earner might lose his job unexpectedly, a young woman with small children may be widowed, or a serious illness might strike. The well-to-do have their savings and insurance to help them tide over the emergency. But for the indigent, the options are limited. At best, they can beg, borrow or steal.

It is in this context that the social network system has assumed great significance. Many large communities existed even before Pakistan, such as the Ismailis, Memons, etc. Several biradaris are relatively new, having been formalised after 1947 when populations were uprooted and needed support. The fact is that communities have stepped in to fill the vacuum created by the failure of the state to provide economic and social security to its citizens. A well-known community is the Saudagrani-Delhi.

These communities are structured diversely and perform complex functions. I learnt more about them from Seema Liaquat of the Anjuman-i-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, Partabgarh [Awadh]. Seema's father died in 1974. She is grateful to the AIMPG as it came to her mother's rescue when she was left with four young children. The community assigned her a stipend, which arrived, without fail, every month at her doorstep until her eldest son began to work and support the family. "When my mother requested for the stipend to be discontinued, a committee member was dispatched to check if all was well," Seema recalls.

The AIMPG is an urban community though its founding members traced their origins to various villages of Partabgarh, a district of Awadh. It was not based exclusively on common paternal descent but included the fraternity of households of the area.

Following partition, 100-odd Part-ab-gar-hians migrated to Karachi to test the greener pastures promised by the Muslim League. Then followed the migration of families. Meanwhile, the sight of a woman from Partabgarh begging on a Karachi street upset the pioneers so much that they decided to set up a welfare society in 1955 so that no one would have to beg. The idea was also to connect members with relatives with whom they had lost touch. There was no looking back after that.

The community's membership has risen to 6,000, comprising a number of highly educated and socially and economically well-placed individuals. It had started as a group of illiterate men, mostly unskilled workers such as gardeners, peons, drivers and chowkidars. The Anjuman now boasts a 99 per cent literacy rate and has PhD doctors, a veterinarian, an MPhil (to be), an MNA, two MPAs and lawyers in its ranks. For many, it has been a story of from rags to riches.

I was impressed by the AIMPG's self-help spirit. Its focus has been on humanitarian service, the Shoba-i-Khidmat-i-Khaliq being its most important department. When I asked the organisation's president Khalil Qureshi what he took most pride in, he replied: "We have delivered stipends or assistance to those on our list on the first of the month for the last 69 years without fail. Today, 82 families between them receive Rs1,000,000 every month."

Mr Qureshi, who is commercial manager at Port Qasim, also speaks proudly of the 60-bedded Awadh General Hospital,

a healthcare centre and the Awadh Public School that provides education to 400 children — 100 of them receiving fee subsidy.

The Anjuman raises its own funds. The membership fee is a token one rupee, which was fixed in 1955. But members and non-member beneficiaries are generous with their zakat, fitra and other donations.

The administration is democratically structured. It is divided into 19 wards in the city (Karachi) with a representative to monitor the well-being of the members under his jurisdiction. Above the wardens is a three-member council consisting of a president, general secretary and finance secretary assisted by an auditor. Elections are held every two years.

Events held periodically are well-attended and help the members bond. Membership is entirely voluntary and those who choose to join demonstrate a strong sense of brotherhood, which means a lot in a country that has failed to give its people a sense of ownership. The AIMPG has been progressive in its outlook and had managed generational change effectively. No wonder all children are attending schools, and the emancipation and empowerment of women in an extremely patriarchal community has proceeded smoothly. How does the government feel about such communities? Obviously, it welcomes them because they are apolitical and do not challenge the state's power.

The wealthier communities contribute a lot to the national economy. But with membership hardly amounting to anything in a country of 241 million, the communities make no impact on the social security situation in the country. -- Courtesy Dawn

**Protecting the coast**

Umar Farooq

Pakistan's coastal and marine ecosystems, such as the Indus delta, Karachi's mangroves, and the Makran coast, are not merely scenic beauties but foundational to the country's environmental and economic stability. The Indus delta mangroves alone encompass about 130,000 hectares (321,237 acres) serving as vital carbon sinks that store approximately 14.4 million tonnes of carbon annually. Yet, these ecosystems face critical threats — industrial pollution, rampant overfishing, and the overarching impacts of climate change compromise their ability to perform essential functions.

In Karachi, the unchecked discharge of industrial pollutants has severe consequences on its marine ecosystems. Notably, the city's release of about 90 per cent of its untreated wastewater into the Arabian Sea introduces pollutants such as heavy metals and hydrocarbons, with the tanning industry releasing toxins that have been shown to damage sensitive mangrove roots and reduce the water quality, affecting the health of fish and other marine life. The recent controversial construction of the expressway along the route of the Malir river, poses a direct threat to these ecosystems resulting in increased sedimentation that might suffocate the mangrove forests, which are crucial nurseries for many species of fish.

One solution to these problems is the establishment of a national marine data repository. This centralised data system would enable better management and monitoring of marine environments by providing accurate and timely information on pollution levels, biodiversity health, and the effectiveness of conservation efforts. The data on pollution levels, including concentrations of heavy metals and chemicals from industrial discharges, will help identify pollution hotspots and guide regulatory enforcement. Biodiversity data, tracking species populations and health, monitoring the health of the mangroves and coral reefs through satellite imagery, and field surveys and data on water quality indicators such as pH, dissolved oxygen, and nutrient levels would help in tracking the broader environmental health of the blue ecosystems.

Strengthening regulatory frameworks is essential to addressing the threats faced by Pakistan's marine ecosystems. One specific policy would be the introduction of a 'marine pollution control act' which would mandate industrial facilities to install and maintain wastewater treatment plants to remove harmful pollutants before discharge. The act should be reinforced with the setting and offsetting of toxin release. Additionally, a permit system for factories along the coast, mandating the treatment of wastewater before the release and investment in catchment restoration, should be introduced. This would be in the form of 'marine credits' for funding coral reef restoration or seagrass meadow rehabilitation, which could then be used to offset their pollution footprints. These permits would be linked to regular inspections and hefty fines for non-compliance, ensuring a deterrent effect that would encourage industries to adopt cleaner practices.

Community involvement is equally critical for sustainable outcomes. Local and indigenous communities, which have depended on Pakistan's coastal and marine ecosystems for generations, are often overlooked in policymaking processes. These communities are key stakeholders, possessing invaluable traditional knowledge and a deep connection to the environment. Yet, policymakers from urban centres frequently impose regulations without consulting them, leading to ineffective and unsustainable outcomes. True progress can only be made by genuinely engaging these communities, earning their trust, and implementing tailored awareness campaigns where needed. Without their involvement, no policy will be effective or enforceable.

Looking at international examples, community-led initiatives were one of the key components in the success of Marine Protected Areas, which helped to revitalise coral reefs. Ensuring justice means recognising these communities' rights, incorporating their insights, and creating inclusive conservation strategies that honour their roles as stewards of the environment. In the words of a local fisherman, "We protect what we love, and we love what we understand." Just as the tides sustain the shores, so, too, we must sustain our efforts to protect these vital ecosystems. For the future of our oceans, and the communities that depend on them, is a shared responsibility we cannot afford to ignore. -- Courtesy Dawn

**Commerce News**

**Masood Khan urges greater US investment in Pakistan, trade to boost bilateral ties**

WASHINGTON (APP): Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan, has called for greater American investment in Pakistan and more trade between the two countries in an effort to further strengthen their relations.

Speaking at the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia, he urged US businesses to increase their investment portfolios, especially in tech-startups, renewable energy, agriculture and extractive industries.

"Pakistan is a big market for American manufacturers," the ambassador told a gathering of scholars, policy-makers, legislators, entrepreneurs, business leaders and professionals. "If you manufacture state-of-the-art products, you have 240 million consumers in Pakistan," he said.

In his remarks, Ambassador Masood Khan dealt with Pak-US relations, war on terror, recalibration of their bilateral ties in the post-withdrawal period, Pakistan-India relations and the issues of regional stability. In this regard, he focused on the existing investment and trade opportunities between the two countries that provided new sinews to the relationship.

Tracing the roots of Pak-US relations, especially the US support during the initial days of Pakistan and the robust partnership of the two countries both in times of war and peace, the Ambassador presented a holistic view of the ties spanning over seven decades, saying the two countries are now investing in people-centric diplomacy.

"We have a big human capital and it is growing. Pakistan is digitally connected with the rest of the world and it is tech savvy, with hundreds of institutions which are investing in future technologies," he said.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja exchanging views with Julian Gorman, GSMA's Head of Asia Pacific during meeting held in Islamabad.

**Govt committed for transforming Pak into digital economy: Shaza**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan, GSMA, Saira Faisal was also present in the meeting.

She said Ministry of IT will play pivotal role in GSMA Digital Nation Summit. Ministry of IT & Telecom will extend full support and facilitation regarding GSMA Digital Nation Summit to be held on August 7.

Julian Gorman expressed his gratitude to MoITT for their support of the GSMA Digital Nation Summit in August and assured full support to the government in their digitization journey.

Country Lead Digital Transformation,

**Envoy Tirmizi, UAE minister discuss insurance, facilitation of Pakistani workers**

DUBAI (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Faisal Tirmizi on Friday met with the UAE's Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation Dr. Abdulrahman Al Awar wherein they discussed the issues of mutual interests especially those pertaining to Pakistani diaspora working in the multiple sectors.

Ambassador Tirmizi conveyed regards and gratitude on behalf of Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain to Dr. Abdulmannan Al Awar. He lauded and thanked the leadership of the UAE for reposing great trust in Pakistan as a brotherly and friendly country. He appreciated the government and people of the UAE for hosting about 1.7 million Pakistanis who were supporting their families and country by sending remittances back home.

Both sides underlined the significant role played by Pakistanis in the UAE's development, and the tremendous potential and opportunities for further enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields. The meeting focused on enhancing mutual collaboration aiming at the efficiency in visa processing, screening, attestation of documents, and others, with a view to facilitating Pakistanis seeking jobs in the UAE.

**RDA inflows rise to \$8.055 bn in May 24**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The inflow of remittances under Roshan Digital Account (RDA) has risen to US \$8.055 billion by the end of May 2024 as compared to US \$7.831 billion by April (2024) end, according to the latest data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The data showed that the inflows of remittances during April were recorded at US\$ 224 million as compared to US\$ 171 million in March and US\$ 182 million in February 2024. These accounts provide innovative banking solutions to millions of Non-Resident Pakistanis (NRPs), including Non-Resident Pakistan Origin Card (POC) holders, seeking to undertake banking, payment, and investment activities in Pakistan.

The number of accounts registered under the programme also rose by 12,960 to 702,610 in May 2024 from 689,650 accounts in April 2024.



ISLAMABAD: President of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Atif Ikram Shaikh addressing a press conference at his office in the Federal Capital.

**Pakistan Food Festival Inaugurated at Shangri-La Hotel, Chengdu**

BEIJING (APP): The Pakistan Food Festival was inaugurated on Friday at the prestigious Shangri-La Hotel in Chengdu, celebrating the rich culinary heritage and diverse flavors of Pakistan.

The festival with signature Muslim cuisine is jointly being presented by Shangri-La Chengdu and Pakistan Consulate General in Chengdu.

The event saw the participation of several distinguished guests and officials, including Director General Zhanqun Gou of the Sichuan Provincial People's Association of Friendship with Foreign Countries, Vice President Wang Guangjun of the China Council for Promotion of Investment and Trade - Sichuan Branch, Song Junwu, Deputy Director General of the Sichuan Provincial People's Department of Culture and Tourism, He Di, Director of the Office of International and Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Sichuan Provincial People's Congress, and Thomas Gou, Assistant General Manager of Shangri-La Hotel.



HYDERABAD: Family busy in selecting and purchasing sandal on a roadside stall in connection with Eid-ul-Azha at Resham Bazaar.

**Indonesia embassy, ACI hosts 'ASEAN Movie Night'**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, in collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee in Islamabad (ACI) has hosted a ASEAN Movie Night event featuring the award-winning Indonesian film "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap" directed by the Indonesian Producer Bene Dion Rajaguguk.

The event was a delightful fusion of cinema and cuisine, celebrating the rich cultural ties and immense similarities between Indonesia and Pakistan.

On this occasion, the Indonesia Chargé d' Affaires (CDA) Rahmat Hindiarta in his welcoming remarks apprised the distinguished guests from the diplomatic and Pakistani community that the ASEAN Movie Night reflects the spirit of continuously bolstering friendship among ASEAN family members.



