



NEWSLETTER

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Annual Awards Ceremony 2026 hosted by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, celebrating the achievements of professionals contributing to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, the event concluded with a special ceremony honoring Pakistani and Chinese professionals whose expertise and dedication continue to drive the success of CPEC projects across the country.

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SPOTLIGHT STORY

CPEC 2.0 Gains Momentum as Pakistan–China Partnership Enters a New Phase



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FEATURED STORY

Pakistan Accelerates Digital Transformation and AI Strategy for National Development



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Preface: February 2026: Advancing Governance Reform and Strategic Partnerships

February 2026 continued the momentum of Pakistan's development agenda, with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives placing strong emphasis on governance reform, institutional coordination, and strategic economic transformation. A central highlight of the month was the convening of the National Governance Forum, where Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal outlined a national roadmap aimed at steering Pakistan toward a trillion-dollar economy by 2035. Anchored in the government's Five Es framework, Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment and Climate Change, Energy and Infrastructure, and Equity and Empowerment, the dialogue underscored the importance of merit-based governance, transparency, digital transformation, and cooperative federalism in strengthening Pakistan's development trajectory.

Alongside governance reforms, February also witnessed progress in strengthening institutional capacity, expanding economic partnerships, and addressing structural challenges in areas such as human development, fiscal sustainability, and climate resilience. Policy discussions highlighted key national priorities including population management, education access, export competitiveness, and improved public sector efficiency. Together, these initiatives reinforced the government's commitment to data-driven policymaking, accountable governance, and long-term economic stability, laying important groundwork for the development initiatives and international engagements that continued to unfold in March.



SPOTLIGHT STORY

CPEC 2.0 Gains Momentum as Pakistan–China Partnership Enters a New Phase



A major highlight of March was the Annual Awards Ceremony 2026 hosted by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, celebrating the achievements of professionals contributing to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and reinforcing the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China.

During the ceremony, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary and the Ambassador of China to Pakistan Mr. Jiang Zaidong signed important agreements, marking a new chapter in the continued advancement of CPEC Phase II.

Addressing the gathering, the Planning Minister highlighted the transformative role CPEC has played in Pakistan's development landscape. He noted that 43 major projects worth approximately USD 25 billion have been completed under CPEC Phase I, significantly strengthening Pakistan's infrastructure, energy security, and regional connectivity. These projects have also added nearly 9,000 MW to the national power grid, helping address long-standing structural challenges in the energy sector.

Looking ahead, the government is advancing CPEC 2.0 under the URAAN Pakistan framework, guided by a comprehensive Five-Year Action Plan (2025–2029). The next phase will focus on industrialization through Special Economic Zones, digital integration through the Digital Silk Road, renewable energy and climate resilience initiatives, and livelihood-focused programs that directly benefit communities.

The ceremony also marked the signing of the minutes of the 14th Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting and the acceptance of several new technology and climate-related initiatives, including Solar Home Systems, Intelligent Ground Meteorological Observation Stations, and Cloud-Based Early Warning Systems.

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FEATURED STORY

Pakistan Accelerates Digital Transformation and AI Strategy for National Development



Pakistan's journey toward a knowledge-based and digitally empowered economy gained momentum during a high-level meeting between the Planning Minister and a delegation from VEON Group, led by CEO Kaan Terzioglu, alongside senior leadership from Jazz.

The discussion focused on strengthening collaboration in artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, and innovation-driven development, reflecting the government's commitment to leveraging technology for public service delivery and economic transformation.

A key theme emphasized by the Minister was Pakistan's vast data potential. "Pakistan is a data-rich country; our priority is to convert this data into intelligent decisions for national progress," Prof. Ahsan Iqbal stated.

The meeting explored practical pathways to integrate artificial intelligence across key sectors including healthcare, education, and governance, enabling faster, smarter, and more efficient public services. Discussions also highlighted the importance of expanding internet access, upgrading networks, and introducing 5G technologies to support innovation and entrepreneurship.

Another priority identified was the development of AI tools in local languages, ensuring that digital technologies remain inclusive and accessible to all citizens. "Transformation is not just about technology; it is about disciplined execution, clear ownership, and a whole-of-nation approach," the Minister emphasized.

Pakistan's AI strategy is being supported by a national AI task force, evolving digital policy frameworks, and the proposed Pakistan Digital Authority, which aims to coordinate technology-driven reforms across government institutions.

In Other News

Major Reform to Strengthen Higher Education

A significant policy development in March was the eighth meeting of the Task Force on the Faculty Pay Scale System in Higher Education, chaired by Federal Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal. The meeting brought together representatives from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and provincial higher education departments to review challenges affecting university faculty compensation.

A key concern raised during the meeting was that Tenure Track System (TTS) salaries have remained frozen since 2021, resulting in the erosion of the previously established 35 percent differential within the pay scale. This situation has made it increasingly difficult for universities to attract and retain highly qualified academic professionals.

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Government Encourages Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal met two emerging Pakistani entrepreneurs, Raisul Rahman, Founder of Royella Foods, and Abdul Samad, Founder of NanoDrop, who have been selected to represent Pakistan in the Nestlé–UN-ESCO Youth Impact Program in Paris later this month.

During the meeting, the young innovators briefed the Minister about their ventures and their selection among more than one hundred global startups participating in the program. Royella Foods, an agri-based circular economy startup focusing on value-added date products with export potential, has also been shortlisted under the Ministry's Pakistan-1 initiative, which identifies and supports high-growth startups with export-oriented potential.

The Minister appreciated the role of youth-led enterprises in driving innovation, sustainability, and economic growth. He directed the Ministry to extend facilitation support to the entrepreneurs, including coordination with the Embassy of Pakistan in Paris to strengthen Pakistan's representation on international innovation platforms.

The engagement reflected the government's broader commitment to empowering young innovators and encouraging entrepreneurship as a key pillar of Pakistan's knowledge-based economy.

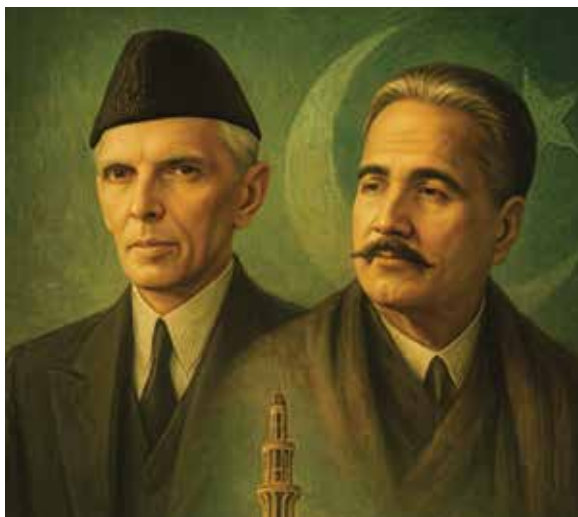


Preparations Begin for 150th Birth Anniversaries of National Leaders

A high-level meeting chaired by the Planning Minister reviewed preparations for the 150th birth anniversaries of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. Officials from relevant institutions presented proposals for commemorative events and national initiatives aimed at highlighting the vision and legacy of Pakistan's founding leaders.

During the meeting, the Minister directed that the physicians who cared for Quaid-e-Azam and responsibly kept his illness confidential should be formally recognized for their professional integrity and service to the nation. He announced that these physicians would be honored with national awards.

He also proposed organizing a special national event on March 23 to highlight Quaid-e-Azam's vision and educate the younger generation about his leadership and struggle for independence. The Minister further expressed concern that the position of Director General at the Quaid-e-Azam Academy has remained vacant for five years, directing authorities to address the matter immediately.



Additionally, he emphasized the need to produce a high-quality historical series on Quaid-e-Azam's life, based on authentic documentation, to help younger generations understand his leadership and vision. The meeting also discussed architectural development of the Iqbal Library, which should reflect a harmonious blend of Islamic heritage and modern design.

Development Strategy Recalibrated Amid Global Economic Pressures

The Senior Management Committee of the Ministry held an important meeting to review Pakistan's development strategy in light of evolving geopolitical tensions and global economic challenges. The meeting focused on ensuring that development priorities remain aligned with national interests while maintaining fiscal discipline.

A key issue highlighted was that PKR 100 billion had been deducted from the development budget due to increased fuel-related expenditures, which could affect the pace of development projects. The Planning Minister stressed that delays in development directly impact national economic growth and emphasized the need for efficient allocation of available resources.

To strengthen governance and monitoring mechanisms, the Minister issued several directives focusing on digital transformation within the development planning system. These included mandatory adoption of project management software across ministries, ensuring timely data uploads on the iPAS system, and revising PC-I and PC-IV documents within three days in accordance with modern information management systems.

The Minister emphasized that real-time data and digital monitoring are essential for reducing delays, preventing cost overruns, and ensuring transparent and efficient implementation of development projects.



Strengthening Pakistan–Kazakhstan Economic Cooperation

A meeting of the Working Group on enhancing trade and economic relations with Kazakhstan was held under the chairmanship of the Planning Minister. The meeting focused on preparing a five-year strategy to strengthen economic cooperation between Pakistan and Kazakhstan in line with directives from the Prime Minister.

The Minister emphasized that strengthening ties with Kazakhstan holds strategic importance for expanding Pakistan's engagement with Central Asia. Ministries were directed to submit practical, realistic, and time-bound proposals that could effectively enhance trade and economic collaboration between the two countries.

The meeting also explored opportunities for academic collaboration between the top universities of Pakistan and Kazakhstan, as well as increased cultural and media cooperation. The Minister suggested promoting joint drama productions, cultural exchange initiatives, and media partnerships to strengthen people-to-people ties.

Improving land connectivity and trade corridors with Kazakhstan was also highlighted as a key priority, as it would facilitate access to broader Central Asian markets and contribute to regional economic integration.



CPEC Progress Review Accelerates Major Infrastructure Projects

The 88th CPEC progress review meeting, chaired by Federal Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal, assessed the implementation of major projects under the CPEC Five-Year Action Plan (2025–2029) and issued directives to accelerate key infrastructure initiatives.

A central focus of the meeting was the Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway modernization project, with the Minister directing officials to fast-track the financing mechanism for the project. The modernization of Pakistan's railway network was described as a critical infrastructure priority that would significantly improve national logistics and connectivity.

The meeting also reviewed the realignment of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), which is necessary to support the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam and maintain uninterrupted trade connectivity in the region.

To ensure accountability and timely execution, all relevant ministries were instructed to submit detailed action plans by March 31, reinforcing a results-oriented approach toward the successful implementation of CPEC Phase II.



Governance Reform Dialogue Highlights Institutional Strengthening

Federal Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal delivered a keynote address at a governance dialogue organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in collaboration with UNDP Pakistan and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

The event marked the launch of the SNG-II Endline Evaluation Report, which assesses six years of subnational governance reforms in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The report provides insights into the effectiveness of governance reforms and identifies areas requiring further improvement.

In his address, the Minister emphasized that governance lies at the heart of national transformation and sustainable development. He stressed that citizens primarily experience the state through service delivery at the provincial, district, tehsil, and union council levels.

The Minister also highlighted ongoing reforms aimed at improving public services, strengthening local governance institutions, and introducing performance-based budgeting systems that focus on measurable outcomes rather than traditional line-item budgeting.



Strengthening National Coordination on Economic Stability

President Asif Ali Zardari convened a high-level consultative meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, federal ministers, and provincial leadership to review Pakistan's economic, energy, and regional outlook. Federal Minister for Planning Prof. Ahsan Iqbal participated in the deliberations.

The meeting focused on strengthening national coordination to address emerging economic challenges and ensuring effective policy responses. Discussions emphasized the importance of fuel conservation measures, improved energy management, and targeted initiatives aimed at providing relief to citizens facing economic pressures.

Participants also discussed the need for coordinated action among federal and provincial governments to maintain economic stability and protect vulnerable segments of society.



The consultative dialogue underscored the government's commitment to pursuing people-centered economic policies, strengthening resilience, and ensuring that national development strategies remain responsive to evolving economic realities.

Development Initiatives for Former FATA Districts



The second Joint Steering Committee meeting for the Special Development Program for Former FATA Districts reviewed progress on initiatives aimed at accelerating socio-economic development in the region.

The Planning Minister highlighted that the current government has released the highest-ever funding allocations for the development of the merged districts, ensuring equitable distribution of resources without political bias.

Several key initiatives were discussed during the meeting, including the allocation of PKR 8 billion to strengthen police infrastructure, aimed at improving law and order and enhancing security in the region. In addition, the government approved the immediate launch of a PKR 13 billion solar energy scheme, which will expand access to clean and reliable electricity in the merged districts.

The meeting also reviewed a proposal to provide IT training to 10,000 youth from terrorism-affected areas, equipping them with modern skills and improving employment opportunities. Another major initiative involves the establishment of a Minerals Center at FATA University with an investment of PKR 2.5 billion, designed to promote research, innovation, and economic development in the region.

The initiatives reflect the government's broader commitment to inclusive development, security enhancement, and youth empowerment in historically underserved areas.

Strengthening Disaster Recovery Planning



The Recovery and Reconstruction Unit of the Ministry, in collaboration with UNDP and development partners, convened a Core Committee Meeting on the 2025 Floods Validation Exercise. The meeting brought together representatives from the Economic Affairs Division, NDMA, provincial disaster management authorities, and international partners including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the European Union.

The exercise focuses on consolidating data, reviewing lessons learned from previous disaster response efforts, and aligning recovery strategies across provinces. Consultants have already been engaged to support the initiative, and coordination efforts are underway in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The initiative forms part of UNDP's broader Flood Recovery Programme and aims to strengthen evidence-based planning for recovery and reconstruction. By integrating accurate data and coordinated strategies, the exercise will help ensure more resilient outcomes for communities affected by floods.

International Women’s Day: Advancing Women’s Role in National Development

The Ministry observed International Women’s Day by reaffirming the government’s commitment to women’s empowerment as a central pillar of national development. The occasion highlighted the contributions of women across sectors who are driving Pakistan’s economic and social progress.

Under the URAAN Pakistan initiative, the government is working to expand opportunities for women in education, technology, and economic participation. The initiative aims to create pathways for women to lead, innovate, and contribute to sustainable development.

The message of the day emphasized that inclusive development cannot be achieved without ensuring that women are fully represented in economic and social life. By strengthening access to education, digital skills, and entrepreneurial opportunities, the government seeks to build a more equitable and prosperous future for Pakistan.



Address at Eidgah Rawalpindi Highlights Role of Youth in National Development



Federal Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal addressed a gathering at Eidgah Rawalpindi, emphasizing the importance of equipping Pakistan’s youth with modern knowledge, technology, and skills.

The Minister noted that the holy month provides an opportunity for reflection, spiritual growth, and unity within society. He highlighted that nations achieve progress not through slogans but through knowledge, research, planning, and sustained effort.

He also stressed that long-term development requires political stability, policy continuity, and strong national institutions. The Ministry of Planning, he noted, is working on a range of initiatives designed to strengthen the economy and guide Pakistan toward sustainable growth.

The Minister urged citizens to prioritize national interests and invest in the development of the younger generation, emphasizing that the future of Pakistan depends on the empowerment of its youth.



Equipping Youth for Pakistan’s Knowledge Economy



During a ceremony commemorating Pakistan Resolution Day, the Planning Minister paid tribute to the sacrifices made by the country’s founding generation and emphasized the enduring relevance of the vision articulated by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

He stated that Pakistan’s progress rests on three fundamental pillars: education, a strong economy, and a capable defense system. The Minister reaffirmed the government’s commitment to advancing these priorities in order to secure a prosperous future for the nation.

The ceremony served as a reminder that Pakistan’s independence was achieved through immense sacrifice and determination. Citizens were encouraged to uphold these values by contributing to national development through unity, hard work, and responsible citizenship.



Pakistan's Economy Shows Signs of Stabilization: February Development Update

Presenting the Monthly Development Update for February 2026, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal highlighted encouraging signs of economic stabilization during the first eight months of fiscal year 2025–26. He noted that prudent macroeconomic management and coordinated policy measures are helping steer the economy toward recovery. Average inflation eased to 5.5 percent during July–February, while prices of several essential food items declined. The Minister also pointed to a 4.8 percent year-on-year growth in Large-Scale Manufacturing, increased tax collection reaching Rs. 8.1 trillion, and rising remittances of US\$23.2 billion, reflecting improved economic activity and continued confidence among overseas Pakistanis. At the same time, he cautioned that global energy market volatility and regional oil price pressures could pose risks in the coming months, urging citizens to adopt responsible consumption practices.

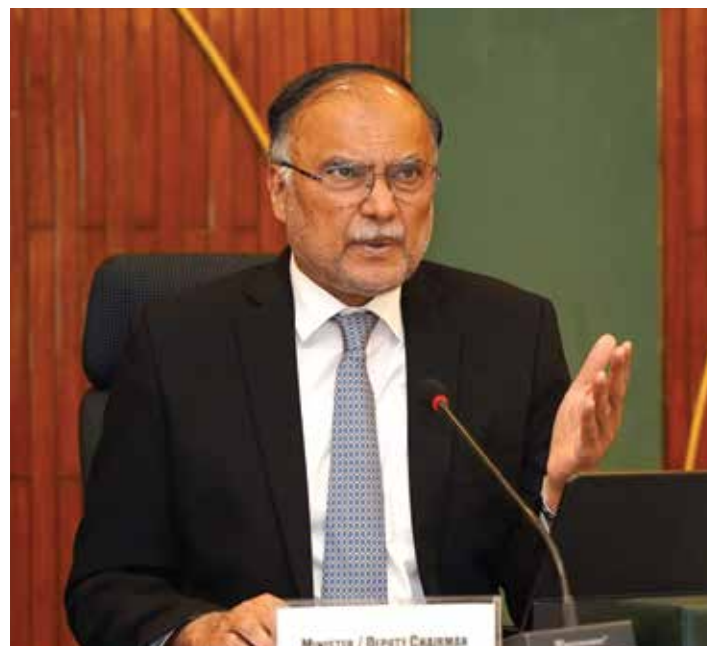


The Minister further noted steady progress in development planning and implementation. During July–February FY2025–26, Rs. 585 billion were authorized and Rs. 403 billion sanctioned for development projects, with PSDP utilization reaching 36 percent, significantly higher than the previous year. The Central Development Working Party approved and recommended several key projects expected to generate over 25,000 direct and indirect jobs, while improved cost management led to savings of Rs. 9.9 billion in development spending. International engagements also advanced Pakistan's development agenda, including progress on a Pakistan–Kazakhstan Five-Year economic cooperation roadmap, discussions with the Islamic Development Bank on the Member Country Partnership Strategy 2026–2030, and high-level dialogue in Dhaka to strengthen Pakistan–Bangladesh cooperation.

CDWP Approves Key Development Projects to Advance URAAN Pakistan Agenda

The Central Development Working Party (CDWP), chaired by Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives and Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Ahsan Iqbal, convened on 5 March 2026 to review a range of initiatives aimed at advancing Pakistan's development agenda. The forum approved seven development projects worth Rs. 15.17 billion, while four major projects totaling Rs. 108.16 billion were recommended to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for further consideration. Attended by senior officials including members of the Planning Commission, federal secretaries, provincial representatives, and sectoral experts, the meeting examined proposals spanning education, health, higher education, information technology, housing, power, and water sectors. These initiatives align with the government's broader reform framework under URAAN Pakistan, which emphasizes human capital development, digital transformation, improved governance, and sustainable economic growth.

Among the key approvals were the establishment of a Daanish School in Haveli–Kahuta, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, aimed at expanding access to quality education in underserved regions, and the National Health Support Programme (KP Component) to strengthen healthcare delivery. The forum also approved a HEC initiative to support students with physical challenges in universities, as well as projects to digitize rural land records in Islamabad and strengthen institutional infrastructure, including the construction of an administrative block for the Supreme Court Branch Registry in Quetta and the expansion of the Pakistan Audit and Accounts Academy. In the energy and agriculture sectors, projects focusing on renewable hydropower in Gilgit-Baltistan and irrigation improvements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were also reviewed, while large-scale electricity distribution improvement projects for HESCO and PESCO were referred to ECNEC. Addressing the meeting, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that these initiatives reflect the government's commitment to modernizing infrastructure, enhancing service delivery, and advancing inclusive development across the country.



NEWS IN PICTURES



Eighth meeting of the Task Force on the Faculty Pay Scale System in Higher Education, chaired by Federal Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal.



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