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(jaffrani@adpluse.pk)

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(afrazalishah@gmail.com)

Head Office: AIMS Building, Street No. 4, H-8/1, Islamabad.
spokesmanislamabad@gmail.com
Phone:+92 51 2227123,
WhatsApp +92 346 5008408
Karachi office: A111, Block C, Gulsha-e-Jamal, PRECHS,
Karachi Phone:021-33399390
Email: spokesmankarachi@gmail.com
Lahore Office: 7-E,Samanberg, Johar Town.
spokesmanlahore@gmail.com

Commonwealth Day 2025 to be celebrated under ‘Together We Thrive’ theme

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, has announced that ‘Together We Thrive’ will be the theme for Commonwealth Day 2025, set to be observed on Monday (March 10), across the 56-member nations.

A series of events and activities will take place throughout March, including civic and interfaith gatherings, school assemblies, debates, flag-raising ceremonies, and cultural celebrations. Millions across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Americas, the Pacific, and Europe are expected to take part in the annual observance.

This year’s theme, ‘Together We Thrive,’ highlights the enduring spirit of the Commonwealth – a global family of independent nations bound by shared values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. Rooted in the principles of unity, peace, and collaboration, the theme underscores the importance of fostering strong, connected communities that support and empower their members to drive meaningful progress.

Emphasizing the significance of this year’s theme, Secretary-General Patricia Scotland stated, “Commonwealth Day is an opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to the principles of unity, peace, and equality. ‘Together We Thrive’ encapsulates the strength of the Commonwealth Family – a network of nations working together to uplift all citizens and build a future defined by opportunity and resilience.”

A key aspect of the Commonwealth’s economic collaboration is the ‘Commonwealth Advantage,’ which reflects a 21% reduction in trade costs between member countries due to shared language, legal systems, and institutional frameworks. This advantage fosters smoother trade and investment, reinforcing the Commonwealth’s commitment to democracy, human rights, and sustainable development.

Commonwealth Day 2025 will be marked by a variety of activities, including official readings of the Commonwealth Proclamation, educational programs, and events designed to raise awareness of the organization’s values and achievements. In London, the Commonwealth Secretariat will host a reception welcoming representatives from across the member states, while Westminster Abbey will be the venue for a vibrant multi-faith service celebrating the Commonwealth’s diversity and unity. The service will feature reflections, performances, and the iconic procession of flags, with young flag bearers representing each member nation.

To support global participation, the Commonwealth Secretariat’s website will serve as a central hub for this year’s celebrations, providing free resources, including the newly designed Commonwealth Day logo, educational materials, and a social media toolkit. These tools will enable member states and communities worldwide to organize events and engage their citizens in commemorating the day.

As the Commonwealth Family comes together under the theme ‘Together We Thrive,’ it reaffirms its collective commitment to building a future where all 2.7 billion Commonwealth citizens can live in societies that are safe, equitable, and united in a spirit of peace and partnership.

AJK Leading Pakistan and IIOJK in Growth, Development, and Quality of Life

Some segments of Indian media, the Indian establishment, and anti-state elements in Pakistan claim that governance in IIOJK exceeds that of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). They promote the misleading notion that residents of IIOJK have better facilities and greater happiness than those in AJK. However, an unbiased comparison of governance and developmental achievements in both regions reveals significant disparities, with AJK demonstrating strong governance, while IIOJK faces numerous challenges.

AJK has prospered under a stable political environment marked by smooth power transitions and a functional democratic framework. This stability has allowed the government to prioritize development initiatives and welfare programs. AJK’s economy has steadily grown, driven by investments in hydroelectric power, infrastructure, tourism, and agriculture. The region has made substantial progress in healthcare, education, and social services, leading to higher human development indicators, including life expectancy, literacy rates, and per capita income, compared to IIOJK. In contrast, IIOJK has been plagued by political instability, frequent administrative changes, and strained relations with the Indian central government. The region has endured widespread human rights violations, including restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and movement, especially following the abrogation of Article 370. The situation has worsened with escalating violence by Indian authorities and armed forces against civilians. The economy of IIOJK has suffered from a lack of investment, limited job opportunities, and a decline in tourism, while social unrest persists, marked by frequent protests and harsh tactics by security forces.

In IIOJK, media is heavily restricted, while in AJK, the media is free. Forced disappearances are

routine in IIOJK, with estimates from the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) indicating that 8,000 to 10,000 Kashmiris have gone missing since 1989. On key indicators, AJK clearly outpaces IIOJK and even Pakistan in several areas, providing a stark contrast between the two regions. AJK, with a population of 4.45 million and a population density of 300/km², showcases effective planning and demographic stability, in contrast to IIOJK, which has a lower density of 245/km² and a growth rate of just 2.63%. AJK’s road network covers 8,865 km, with a density of 0.66 km/km², surpassing IIOJK’s 0.52 km/km² and Pakistan’s national average of 0.32 km/km². The 13th Amendment (2018) granted AJK greater legislative and financial autonomy, enhancing its self-governance. With a literacy rate of 76.8%, AJK outperforms Pakistan (62.3%) and

IIOJK (67%). Meanwhile, 800 schools in IIOJK report zero enrollment, highlighting significant administrative shortcomings. AJK benefits from initiatives such as the Rs. 750 million AJ&K Education Endowment Fund and a 2% higher education quota in Pakistan, which enhance educational opportunities. The region’s healthcare system is supported by a doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:2315, which is better than IIOJK’s 1:2660. AJK also has eight hospitals, 275 Basic Health Units, and 12,542 medical professionals. The poverty rate in AJK is 22%, significantly lower than IIOJK’s 49%, and 30% of AJK’s population holds government jobs, compared to only 3.8% in IIOJK. AJK enjoys 100% telecom coverage and over 90% satisfaction with 3G/4G services, ensuring strong connectivity and fostering economic growth. Rich in natural resources like rubies, sapphires, marble, and graphite, AJK has significant untapped potential, unlike IIOJK, where political instability has hampered resource utilization. AJK operates under democratic governance

that guarantees freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, in stark contrast to the repression in IIOJK following the 2019 revocation of autonomy. Since 2019, 859 Kashmiris have been killed, and Genocide Watch has warned of potential atrocities in IIOJK, where media freedoms remain severely restricted.

AJK’s achievements reflect Pakistan’s commitment to inclusive governance and sustainable development, offering a clear contrast to the challenges faced by IIOJK under Indian policies. This comparison highlights that Pakistan, with the support of its Army and the AJK government, is fulfilling its responsibilities far more effectively than India is in IIOJK. The people of AJK must also acknowledge and fulfill their responsibilities. While AJK lacks significant industries or agricultural output and relies on Pakistan for resources, it is important to recognize the contributions of provinces like Punjab and Sindh, which have thriving industries and agricultural sectors, significantly contributing to government revenue without seeking subsidies. AJK’s contribution to tax generation and revenue is minimal. When it comes to utilities such as electricity, it is essential to consider the complexities involved in providing them, including the costs of equipment, manpower, maintenance, and operation. Similarly, commodity pricing, such as flour, must factor in all associated costs. It is vital to approach demands with a realistic and logical mindset, considering all aspects of the situation. The state is diligently fulfilling its duties, and now it is up to the people to do the same. Rather than focusing on personal gains, individuals should adopt a positive outlook and actively contribute to the welfare and progress of the entire country and state.

The people of AJK are well aware of the facts and strongly reject the propaganda spread by enemies and anti-state elements to foster hate against Pakistan and its military. Kashmiris have deep love for Pakistan and its Army, and no force can break the bond of love between Pakistan and Kashmir.

Trump’s War on Institutions

President Donald Trump accused the U. S. bureaucracy of massive fraud, waste, and abuse, citing an investigation led by Elon Musk that uncovered billions of dollars in misused funds. He condemned judges for obstructing his reform agenda, calling their block on his \$3 billion federal grant freeze “intolerable judicial interference.” Trump also charged the Pentagon with corruption and financial mismanagement, referencing a 2023 audit that found \$2.1 trillion unaccounted for. He accused USAID of funneling billions into mainstream media as payoffs for pro-Democrat coverage, calling it “too big, too dirty” to ignore. Further, he alleged USAID provided over \$697 million to terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and ISIS under the guise of aid and meddled in foreign elections by sending \$15 million to Pakistan’s Election Commission to manipulate the 2024 vote, as exposed by journalist Ryan Grim and others.

He asserts that federal agencies have participated in unauthorized commissions and omissions, directed taxpayer funds towards inefficient projects, and established a bureaucratic grip that hinders economic and financial liberty.

He argues that instead of fulfilling their duty to serve the public, these institutions—including judges, bureaucrats, politicians, and the media—have formed a corrupt nexus to amass wealth, secure lavish perks, and misuse their power. This unchecked authority, rather than facilitating public welfare, has crippled economic activities through excessive regulations, leading to inflation, soaring unemployment, and an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis.

These institutional failures have not only burdened American citizens but also weakened the United States’ global leadership in military power, economic dominance, trade, and investment.

Once regarded as the world’s strongest economy, the U. S. now faces the reality of losing its competitive edge to rising powers like China, the Middle Eastern economic hubs, and industrial giants in South Korea, Japan, and Europe.

While these nations are constructing advanced infrastructure such as highways, airports, and ports, the infrastructure in the U. S. is rapidly deteriorating.

A firsthand experience of this decline can be seen in Michigan, where our family arrived in September 2024, only to find crumbling roads, broken highways, and entire neighborhoods—like Hamtramck in Detroit—worse than many underdeveloped countries.

Even major airports and subways in cities like New York, which should symbolize American progress, are far inferior to those in rising global economic centers. This visible decay has become a symbol of how mismanagement and corruption have weakened the country from within.

President Donald Trump has laid out a powerful argument against the unchecked power of the judiciary, questioning how an unelected, taxpayer-funded judge can override the orders of a democratically elected president. He argues that this authority is often motivated by self-interest—protecting judicial power, safeguarding the bureaucracy, and maintaining strong ties with economic and political elites.

Trump has rightly argued that if an unelected judge holds the power to veto presidential orders, it raises serious doubts about the integrity of the democratic system. A president, chosen by the people to enact policies in the public interest, should not have their authority unilaterally obstructed by an appointed judge. Such interference, he contends,

undermines the very foundation of democracy, shifting power away from the electorate and into the hands of unaccountable judicial figures.

His assertion is rooted in logic: either power must rest with the elected representatives of the people, or the current system is nothing more than an illusion of democracy, controlled by an entrenched elite that serves itself rather than the nation.

The very foundation of American democracy is now facing an unprecedented challenge. Instead of functioning as a government of, by, and for the people, the U. S. system has become a battleground where institutions operate with separate mandates and self-serving agendas, often at odds with the will of the public.

The bureaucracy—both civil and military—along with the judiciary, has consolidated power to such an extent that elected representatives have been reduced to mere figureheads, unable to implement meaningful change. As a result, the wealth and power of the country have been diverted away from the general public and into the hands of bureaucratic elites, further deepening economic inequality and weakening the nation.

This imbalance has led to a situation where the system exists to sustain itself, rather than to serve the citizens it was designed to protect. The more the bureaucracy tightens its grip, the more the country drifts away from its founding democratic principles.

In contrast, nations where government institutions function in harmony—where every pillar of the state aligns itself with the leadership’s vision—are proving far more effective in delivering stability, prosperity, and national progress. When

leadership sets a course, and institutions work collectively to implement it, these governments are able to build state-of-the-art infrastructure, boost economic growth, and enhance the well-being of their people.

The U. S., on the other hand, is witnessing institutional fragmentation, where different branches of government operate in conflict rather than in unison, obstructing national progress instead of facilitating it.

This is why Trump’s call for systemic reform is not merely about politics—it is about ensuring that power is exercised with accountability, that democracy is truly representative, and that government institutions work for the people, rather than against them.

Recognizing these deep-rooted structural failures, President Trump has declared war on nearly all pillars of the state and their subordinate institutions. His agenda aims to dismantle the bureaucratic stranglehold, expose the judiciary’s complicity, and challenge the media’s biased role in shaping public perception.

This is not just a political battle but a fundamental restructuring of how power is distributed and exercised in the country. Trump’s reforms are not merely cosmetic changes—they are surgical interventions aimed at breaking the alliance between corrupt bureaucrats, activist judges, and self-serving media elites.

Whether he succeeds in his mission or faces unprecedented resistance from these institutions, his presidency has already sparked the most radical political and institutional shake-up in modern U. S. history.

Writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Macomb, Detroit, Michigan



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Erdogan’s Historic Visit to Pakistan Marks a New Era of Cooperation

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

The visit of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to Pakistan has marked a significant milestone in the diplomatic relations between the two nations. This visit has not only strengthened the bond between Turkey and Pakistan but has also opened up new avenues for cooperation in various sectors. The historic significance of this visit lies in the potential it holds for fostering greater collaboration in areas such as trade, defense, culture, and education.

Exploring the key outcomes of Erdogan’s visit to Pakistan, we can understand how this event has laid the foundation for a new era of cooperation between the two countries. One of the major outcomes of President Erdogan’s visit to Pakistan is the signing of several bilateral agreements aimed at boosting cooperation between the two nations. These agreements cover a wide range of areas including trade, defense, education, and cultural exchange. For instance, both countries have agreed to enhance their trade relations by exploring new opportunities for collaboration and increasing bilateral trade volume.

The OIC enables both countries to collaborate on political, economic, and social issues of common concern, such as combating terrorism, promoting human rights, and resolving conflicts. For instance, Turkey and Pakistan

have worked together within the OIC to support the Palestinian cause, advocate for the rights of Muslims in various regions, and enhance Islamic solidarity. Aligning their positions and strategies through the OIC, Turkey and Pakistan amplify their voices on the global stage and advance shared interests within the Muslim community.

Similarly, the ECO plays a crucial role in facilitating economic cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan and other member states in Central Asia and the Middle East. Working together and supporting each other on regional and global issues, Turkey and Pakistan can amplify their voices and leverage their collective strength in the international arena.

Erdogan’s historic visit of Pakistan has indeed accompanied a new era of cooperation between the two nations. Through the signing of bilateral agreements, the strengthening of defense ties, the promotion of cultural exchange, and the strategic alignment on regional and global issues, Turkey and Pakistan have demonstrated their commitment to deepening their relationship. This visit has laid the foundation for a stronger partnership that has the potential to bring about mutual benefits and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the region. The diplomatic engagement between Turkey and Pakistan represents a promising chapter in their bilateral relations, setting the stage for enhanced cooperation in the years to come.

Writer is Post-Doctorate (Peace Education) at International Islamic University, Islamabad. He can be reached at drmsashfaq@gmail.com