



AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



2026 Newsletter
Summer Edition

His Highness the Aga Khan's Official visit to Pakistan



His Highness the Aga Khan is welcomed to Islamabad by the President of Pakistan, His Excellency Asif Ali Zardari.



His Highness the Aga Khan is presented with a guard of honour upon arrival at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the President's Official residence.



The Honourable Prime Minister presenting a commemorative stamp to His Highness the Aga Khan, issued in honour of His Late Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV in recognition of his services to Pakistan.



His Highness the Aga Khan during his meeting with the Governor of KP Faisal Karim Kundi and Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi at Chitral Airport.

His Highness the Aga Khan's Official visit to Pakistan

His Highness the Aga Khan concluded a seven-day official visit in May 2026 to Pakistan at the invitation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, marking his first official visit to the country since assuming his role as the 50th Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim community.

The visit was an important moment in the longstanding relationship between the Ismaili Imamate and Pakistan. From meetings with the senior Officials of the Federal and Provincial Governments to gatherings with the Ismaili community in Islamabad and the mountainous regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, the visit brought together government leaders, communities and institutions around a shared commitment to peace, development and progress.

His Highness arrived in Islamabad and was received at Nur Khan Airbase by President Asif Ali Zardari and First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari before travelling to Aiwan-e-Sadr, where he was presented with a guard of honour. The President later hosted a state banquet in honour of His Highness, attended by Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir, senior ministers, parliamentarians and members of the diplomatic community. During his meeting with President Zardari, His Highness reaffirmed the Aga Khan Development Network's commitment to supporting Pakistan's development and humanitarian efforts.

At a breakfast hosted by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the Prime Minister acknowledged His Highness's commitment to peace, stability and development. On the occasion, he presented His Highness with a commemorative stamp issued by Pakistan Post in honour of the legacy of His Late Highness Aga Khan IV, recognising his extraordinary humanitarian vision and his longstanding contributions to Pakistan.

On 22 May, His Highness travelled to Gilgit-Baltistan, where he was welcomed by the Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan and senior civil and military officials. Over the next three days, he met thousands of members of the Ismaili community at gatherings in Passu, Gilgit, Gahkuch Bala and Taus. For communities spread across some of Pakistan's most remote and mountainous areas, the visit was a deeply meaningful and historic occasion.

He emphasised the importance of unity, lifelong education – particularly for girls – peaceful coexistence, and ethical conduct in professional and civic life.

His Highness then travelled to Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where he was received at Chitral Airport by Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi, alongside Deputy Speaker of the KP Assembly Suraya Bibi and other senior officials.

Meetings with the provincial leadership focused on opportunities for continued collaboration and development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During his time in Chitral, His Highness also met with members of the Ismaili community in Parwak and Garamchashma, continuing a journey that brought him closer to communities across Pakistan's northern regions.

At the conclusion of his visit, His Highness was seen off at the airport by Federal Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, alongside leaders of the Ismaili community. Through his engagements with Pakistan's leadership and communities, His Highness reaffirmed the enduring bonds between the Ismaili Imamate and the people and Government of Pakistan. The visit also highlighted the Aga Khan Development Network's longstanding partnership with Pakistan and its continued commitment to working alongside government and communities to support development, strengthen resilience and improve the quality of life for people across the country.

As His Highness concluded his first official visit to Pakistan as the 50th Imam, the journey from Islamabad to the northern mountains served as a powerful reminder of a relationship built over decades one rooted in shared values, mutual respect and a common hope for a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive future.

Princess Zahra Aga Khan Installed as AKU Pro-Chancellor



Princess Zahra Aga Khan was officially installed as AKU's first Pro-Chancellor at the University's 38th Convocation in January 2026.

The Aga Khan University graduated 461 students from 18 degree programmes at its 38th Convocation on 17 January 2026 in Pakistan and formally installed Princess Zahra Aga Khan as the University's first Pro-Chancellor. As Pro-Chancellor, Princess Zahra will guide AKU in its continuing efforts to improve quality of life.

In his message, AKU's Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, noted that the Aga Khan University and its graduates carry "both an extraordinary responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity: to create, to disseminate, and to apply knowledge in ways that improve the quality of human life." This year also marked the graduation of the inaugural cohort of the Institute for Educational Development's Bachelor of Education programme, preparing graduates through a blend of academic and practical learning to teach effectively in diverse school settings.

"The University's geographic expansion has seen AKU's presence expand across Pakistan, into more cities and villages than ever before," said AKU's Pro-Chancellor, Princess Zahra Aga Khan. "From Karachi to Matiari, from Lahore to Gilgit, the University's health care professionals, educators, and researchers are part of the fabric of people's lives."

The Aga Khan University continues to address Pakistan's critical development challenges through a commitment to access and excellence. With nearly 70 percent of the graduating class being women, the University is actively addressing the gender gap in a country where millions of girls remain out of school. AKU graduates are addressing critical workforce gaps, with alumni leading approximately 80 nursing and midwifery schools across Pakistan. In 2025, the University secured over US\$100 million in research funding, while 27 faculty members were ranked among the world's top two percent of scientists.

"Pakistan's young people are inclusive, comfortable across faiths and perspectives, and aware that a divided society cannot meet shared challenges. Digitally fluent, they see technology not as disruption but as opportunity — to expand knowledge, build skills, and apply learning in practical ways," noted Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President of AKU.

To ensure talented students with limited financial means are able to attend AKU, the University provides financial assistance, to a large portion of the student body. In the last academic year, the University provided assistance to 72 percent of students across all classes and programmes in Pakistan.

HBL to Chair the SCO Interbank Consortium



Members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Interbank Consortium (SCO IBC) at the Annual Council Meeting held this year in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



Sultan Ali Allana, Chairman – HBL, addresses the media during the SCO IBC Annual Council Meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

HBL has been nominated as the Chair of the Council of the Interbank Consortium of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO IBC) on 2 July 2026 for the forthcoming year 2026-2027. The nomination was announced at the Annual Council Meeting of the SCO IBC, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, marking an important milestone in the Bank's continued contribution to regional financial cooperation.

The SCO is the world's largest regional body, uniting ten member states—including Pakistan, China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—to advance political, economic, and security cooperation. The SCO IBC serves as a key platform, through partnerships with leading banks, for financial collaboration among member states. HBL joined the SCO IBC as a partner bank in 2014 and became a Member Bank in 2018. This year's meeting is especially significant as Pakistan

prepares to assume the Chairmanship of the SCO Council of Heads of State in September 2026.

Speaking on the occasion, Sultan Ali Allana, Chairman – HBL, said, "The SCO IBC has shown how regional cooperation can drive inclusive growth and strengthen economic connectivity. It is a great honour for HBL to be nominated as the Chair of the Council of the Interbank Consortium of the SCO (SCO IBC) for the forthcoming year 2026-2027."

He added, "As a member bank of the SCO IBC, HBL has long been a trusted partner in promoting regional financial integration, investment and facilitating trade among SCO member countries. We will continue to work closely with member institutions in supporting the broader goals of cooperation, connectivity, and shared prosperity across the SCO region."

Conservation of Lahore Fort's Iconic Picture Wall Completed



Conservation experts working on the picture wall.

The conservation of Lahore Fort's iconic Picture Wall, considered among the world's largest murals, was completed in April this year. Forming the north-western façade of the Lahore Fort, the monumental structure stretches almost half a kilometre in length and rises to approximately 60 feet.

Built during the reigns of Mughal emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the Picture Wall is a significant element contributing to Lahore Fort's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The conservation approach prioritised preservation over reconstruction. Later plaster additions were removed, biological deterioration such as biofilm was treated, fragile frescoes and tile mosaics were stabilised, and decorative surfaces were carefully restored.

Implemented in phases, the conservation of the western section commenced in 2015 and was completed in 2019, followed by conservation work on the remaining northern section. UNESCO described the initiative as "one of the most ambitious heritage

conservation endeavors in Pakistan's history." Led by Aga Khan Cultural Service - Pakistan, in collaboration with the Walled City of Lahore Authority, the project brought together experts across architecture, conservation science, fine arts, traditional crafts, and engineering. It was supported by international donors including the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, and the German Federal Foreign Office through the German Embassy. The Picture Wall's two thousand decorated panels showcase diverse artistic influences through Kashi Kari, frescoes, filigree work, dressed brickwork, and stone latticework, depicting human figures, animals, floral motifs, geometric patterns, and hunting and battle scenes.

The conservation project received extensive national and international media attention, with features across major Pakistani print and broadcast media outlets as well as leading global news organisations, including the BBC, DW, Associated Press, Arab News, and Yahoo News Canada.

A School Transformed: Creating a Safer, More Sustainable Learning Environment in Sikarkui



Government Girls's High School Sikarkui retrofitted.

For years, the students of Government Girls' High School Sikarkui, on the outskirts of Gilgit city, came to school each day despite challenging conditions that affected their learning and wellbeing. The school, which serves hundreds of girls from the surrounding communities, struggled with some of the most basic facilities. A clogged drainage system had rendered parts of the sanitation infrastructure unusable, while the absence of a reliable water supply meant that the school had to depend on a neighbouring household for limited amounts of water.

For nearly 500 students and staff, access to water was a daily challenge. Classrooms also offered little protection from the region's harsh seasonal conditions. During winter, students studied in freezing temperatures, while the summer months brought hot and uncomfortable classrooms. Limited electricity, unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation further added to the difficulties faced by both students and teachers. That began to change through the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat Pakistan (AKAH Pakistan), with support from the European Union through the Energy Plus Project.

A water bore was drilled in the vicinity of the school, providing a reliable source of clean water and helping restore essential sanitation facilities. This intervention became the foundation for a wider programme of improvements designed to make the school safer, healthier and more conducive to learning. The school building was retrofitted through a range of energy-efficient and climate-responsive measures, including improvements to the building envelope, installation

of solar panels, double-glazed windows and heat-resistant curtains. Washrooms were repaired, exterior areas were improved, and classrooms were equipped with LED lighting and fans.

The changes have transformed the daily experience of students and teachers alike. Today, students have access to safe drinking water and clean washrooms, while brighter and more comfortable classrooms have created a better environment for learning. With improved lighting, students can clearly see their whiteboards, and teachers are able to conduct lessons more effectively.

The benefits extend beyond the classroom. Students have begun planting trees and taking greater pride in their school environment, reflecting a renewed sense of ownership and hope.

According to the school's principal, the improvements have strengthened both teaching and learning and enhanced the school's reputation within the wider community. Enrolment has increased from around 500 students to nearly 600—a clear indication of the confidence families now place in the school.

For the girls of Government Girls' High School Sikarkui, the transformation is about much more than improved infrastructure. It is about having a safe and dignified place to learn—a school with clean water, light, comfort and opportunity. Today, the students proudly see their school as a place where they can learn, grow and imagine a better future for themselves and their communities.

Light After Dark: How a Solar Micro-Grid is Transforming Lives in Coastal Sindh



For generations, the 40 households of village Lal Khan Luko in Union Council Qarampur, District Thatta, Sindh lived without electricity despite the national grid being only five kilometres away. Daily life ended at sunset, limiting education, livelihoods, healthcare, and household activities. Under the Danish-supported Sindh Coastal Resilience Integrated Programme (SCRIP), the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) installed a 15kW solar micro-grid with a 20kWh battery backup, providing reliable electricity to every household, day and night. The impact extends far beyond lighting homes. Children can now study after dark, women have more time to complete household tasks, and farmers can safely work at night using rechargeable lights. Dependence on kerosene has virtually ended, reducing household expenses, improving indoor air quality, and supporting cleaner energy use.

To strengthen women's economic opportunities, the project also established a sewing centre equipped with electric sewing machines powered by the solar micro-grid. Women who previously relied on hand stitching are now learning machine tailoring, increasing productivity and creating new income opportunities. The system is fully community-managed. Each household contributes a small monthly fee to cover operation and maintenance costs while also building a community repair fund, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the system. For residents, the project represents the first practical solution to a challenge that had persisted for decades. More than simply providing electricity, the initiative has improved education, livelihoods, safety, and dignity while demonstrating how community-owned clean energy can strengthen climate resilience and create lasting development opportunities for underserved coastal communities in Pakistan.

Chipursan Earthquake Response – Restoring Hope when Calamity Hits Hard



Relief items being distributed in Chipurson.



Tent schools established by FOCUS Pakistan to support the continuity of education for children during emergencies.

On 19 January 2026, an earthquake of 5.9 magnitude struck the remote Chipursan Valley in District Hunza, already undergoing a series of geotechnical events unfolding over months. Repeated aftershocks left families living in fear as homes, livestock shelters, and community infrastructure were damaged. In the middle of the harshest winter, more than 1,600 people were displaced, with 175 homes destroyed and another 76 partially damaged, leaving families stranded without shelter and livelihoods disrupted.

Despite the challenging terrain and severe weather, Focus Humanitarian Assistance Pakistan, with the support of AKDN partners and generous donors, responded. A helicopter mission reached the valley within the disaster, providing reassurance to community and enabling the rapid assessment of urgent needs. Emergency relief operations followed swiftly, including provisioning of 221 winterized tents, food assistance for 360 families, winterization kits for 195 families, 300 hygiene, dignity and maternity

kits to cater for the needs of women and children, provision of tents for education business continuity, 12 dry compost latrines and wash units, and communal livestock shelters to protect families' primary source of income. FOCUS Pakistan also facilitated the temporary relocation and shifting of families to safer locations.

For survivors like Abida Sultan, the assistance meant far more than emergency supplies. "In the freezing days that followed, the FOCUS Pakistan winterized tents became our entire world. It wasn't just a shelter; it was our last hope for immediate survival."

To pave the way to the rehabilitation of affected households and guide future construction, scientific assessments of the area were carried out through collaboration between FOCUS Pakistan and the Geological Survey of Pakistan, leading to the identification of locations that are assessed as relatively safe from seismic and other prevalent hazards.

Warmth, Reliability, and Hope: How Sustainability Transforms Maternal and Newborn Care in Hunza



Basic Health Centre Gulmit, equipped with solar panels to provide reliable renewable energy during critical times.



Sabrina with her daughter.

High in the mountains of Gulmit, Hunza, winter's bitter cold adds one more layer of worry to the journey of childbirth. For Sabrina Aslam, a 26-year-old mother of two, her first delivery meant a long, difficult journey to Gilgit. Her second was a different experience.

"My first child, Aiman Zafreen, was delivered in Gilgit, and travelling there was difficult," Sabrina recalls. Her second daughter, Noor-ul Ain, was born just a short walk from home, at the Aga Khan Basic Health Centre, Gulmit. "Everything was much easier," she says. "The Lady Health Visitor was highly skilled and compassionate. Thanks to the solarisation and improved insulation, the facility remained warm despite the cold, and both my baby and I received excellent care." Her experience reflects a broader shift in Pakistan's remote mountain communities,

where severe cold burdens patients and staff alike. For newborns, maintaining the right temperature is critical — hypothermia remains a leading, preventable risk. As part of its commitment to net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, Aga Khan Health Service, Pakistan is solarising its Basic Health Centres where possible.

At Gulmit, a new 10 kW solar power system with 10kW battery storage now provides reliable electricity, with an estimated 49% reduction in grid usage, and complete elimination of the need for a diesel generator. Due to improved insulation, the need for firewood has reduced by 61%. Overall, carbon emissions have fallen by 46% - equivalent to about 1 tonne of CO₂e.

For mothers like Sabrina, it's a proof that sustainability and quality healthcare go hand in hand.

Evolving Policies for Emerging Minds: The Sindh Education Dialogue



Emerging researchers and institutional stakeholders collaborating to analyse international comparative research and modernise the provincial education policy framework.

AKU-IED, in collaboration with the Sindh Education Policy Commission (SEPC) and the School Education & Literacy Department, recently co-hosted a high-level policy dialogue titled “Emerging Minds, Evolving Policy.”

This initiative bridged academic rigor and provincial governance, featuring a student-led “Green Paper”

that used international comparative research to evaluate and modernize the Sindh Education Policy. By focusing on critical gap analysis, strategic alignment, and knowledge leadership, the event successfully connected emerging researchers with industry veterans, reinforcing AKU-IED’s commitment to ensuring research-driven insights actively shape sustainable, systemic educational reform.

Raabta – Connecting People Through Meaningful Dialogue



At Serena Hotels, hospitality has always extended beyond welcoming guests. It is also about bringing people together, creating connections and providing space for conversations that can contribute to a better and more inclusive society. It is with this spirit that Raabta was introduced under Serena Hotels' Public Diplomacy initiative.

Meaning "connection" or "people's bridge," Raabta is a non-partisan forum promoting informed and inclusive dialogue on issues shaping Pakistan's future. Its discussions span culture, economy and future, covering topics from heritage and social development to leadership, wellbeing and economic progress.

Sessions are curated and moderated by renowned journalist Sidra Iqbal, bringing together voices from academia, development, business, civil society and media to foster diverse and relevant conversations. Over the years, Raabta has continued

to evolve in response to issues that are increasingly important to society. Its most recent conversation, "Leading Beyond Performance: Wellbeing as the New Leadership Imperative," explored how the idea of leadership is changing and why wellbeing, empathy, resilience and healthier workplace cultures are becoming essential to sustainable organisational success.

Such conversations reflect the wider purpose of Raabta: creating a space where people listen, exchange perspectives, challenge conventional thinking and find common ground. Through its Public Diplomacy initiatives, Serena Hotels has long connected people through culture, heritage, arts, sports and intellectual exchange. Raabta builds on this legacy by fostering dialogue, understanding and stronger relationships towards a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable future.

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the Summer 2026 edition of the AKDN Pakistan Newsletter.

For more than a century, the Aga Khan Development Network through its programmes has remained committed to improving the quality of life of communities and creating opportunities for individuals to realise their full potential. Across Pakistan, this commitment continues to take shape through new ideas, innovative partnerships and programmes that respond to the evolving needs and aspirations of communities. At the heart of AKDN's work are the communities themselves. Our greatest partners in development are the people with whom we work—individuals and communities who have consistently demonstrated remarkable resilience, leadership and determination in shaping their own futures. This strong sense of community ownership and participation has been fundamental to ensuring that development initiatives are meaningful, sustainable and enduring. As we look towards the future, AKDN continues to embrace innovation while building on the lessons and achievements of the past. We are deeply grateful to our partners, supporters and institutions whose collaboration and commitment have made this journey possible. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of Pakistan for its continued support and partnership, which has enabled AKDN agencies to contribute to the country's development across a wide range of sectors and regions.

Highlights in this edition include His Highness the Aga Khan's official visit to Pakistan; the installation of Princess Zahra Aga Khan as Pro-Chancellor of Aga Khan University; the conservation of the Lahore Fort's iconic Picture Wall; HBL's appointment to chair the SCO Interbank Consortium; a school transformed—creating a safer and more sustainable learning environment in Gilgit; light after dark—how a solar micro-grid is transforming lives in coastal Sindh; the Chipurson earthquake response—restoring hope when calamity strikes; how sustainability is transforming maternal and newborn care in Hunza; the Sindh Education Dialogue; and Raabta—connecting people through meaningful dialogue.

If you have any questions or would like further information about the articles featured in this edition, please feel free to contact the Editor, Laila Naz Taj, Director AKDN Pakistan Communications, at; laila.taj@akdn.org.

We want to extend our gratitude to Fayyaz Nurmohamed, Director of Communications, AKDN Global; Shahed Karim, Senior Manager Communications, AKDN Global; Karim Sayani; Carol Oyola; Mustafa Husain (AKU); Abbas Hussain (AKCS-P); Irshad Khan Abbasi, Rehanna Khan, Hairs Ahmed, Qudsia Mahtab (AKF, P); Janelle Dias (AKU-IED); Shanoz Aqnazabekova (AKU-EB); Imran Hassan and Amina Jaffri (Serena Hotels Pakistan); Maya Ismail and Anum Zehra Ali (HBL-MfB); Zulfiqar Alikhan (AKRSP); Tahir Zamanali (AKAH, P); Alizay Jaffer and Rafiq Bharwani (AKES, P); Humera Iqbal (AKHS, P); Seema Samad and Mehar Aftab (Focus Humanitarian Assistance Pakistan) Afzal Shahabuddin; the Department of Communications, The Ismaili Council for Pakistan; Géraldine Ausino, Graphic Designer (AKDN), for their valuable contributions. Finally, we thank you, our readers, for your continued interest and encouragement. Your engagement with the stories, people and communities featured in these pages inspires us to continue sharing the remarkable journeys of hope, progress and transformation taking place across Pakistan. We hope you enjoy this edition and find inspiration in the stories of the people and partnerships that continue to shape a brighter and more resilient future.

Cover photo credit; Salina Kassam.

The Picture Wall resembles a vast canvas embellished with a plethora of vivid imagery drawn from court life, mythology, folklore and nature, reflecting Indo-Persian artistic traditions.



AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK