PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SINDH



Comprehensive Report of the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference / 2nd Joint CPA Asia & South-East Asia Regional Conference, 2026 KARACHI – PAKISTAN

DAY I
4th February, 2026
"Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace"

Venue: Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Karachi, Pakistan
Time 11:00 to 1:00

Introduction and Background

The 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference was held from 3rd to 7th February 2026 at the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Karachi. The conference brought together Parliamentarians, Speakers, Deputy Speakers, and delegates from Asia and South-East Asia to deliberate on the evolving role of parliaments in strengthening democratic governance.

The event was organized under the overarching theme "Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace," reflecting contemporary challenges and opportunities facing democratic institutions globally. It marked a historic occasion as it was the first time that an international parliamentary conference was held inside the Sindh Assembly Hall.

Inaugural Ceremony

Cultural Opening and Procession of Delegates

The inaugural ceremony commenced with a traditional cultural procession accompanied by the folk rhythm of *Hujamalo*, symbolizing the rich cultural heritage and historical legacy of Sindh. Heads of delegations from various legislatures across Asia and South-East Asia participated in the procession, demonstrating regional diversity and parliamentary solidarity.

Distinguished participants included speakers and representatives from Malaysia, Pakistan's federal and provincial legislatures, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Zambia, and other regional assemblies, highlighting the international significance of the conference.

Recitation of the Holy Quran and National Anthem

The ceremony formally began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the national anthem of Pakistan, setting a solemn and dignified tone for the proceedings.

Welcome Remarks: Hon. Syed Awais Qadir Shah
Speaker, Provincial Assembly of Sindh & President, CPA Asia Conference,

The Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Hon. Syed Awais Qadir Shah, in his address, highlighted the historical significance of hosting the CPA regional conference, noting that it was the second time the Provincial Assembly of Sindh had the honour of hosting such an important parliamentary gathering, with the previous conference held in Karachi in 2012. He emphasized that the 2026 conference was particularly historic as it marked the first occasion on which a national or international conference was convened within the Sindh Assembly hall themselves, underscoring the symbolic and institutional importance of the venue.

He reflected on Sindh's rich civilizational heritage, describing it as a land that has historically welcomed travelers, traders, and tourists with openness and hospitality. The Speaker underscored the role of the Indus River in shaping the region's prosperity and connectivity, and referred to the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro and other archaeological sites as enduring testimony to Sindh's ancient civilization characterized by cultural richness, commercial vitality, and peaceful coexistence. He further portrayed Sindh as a land of Sufis, saints, mystics, and intellectuals, and paid tribute to its prominent national leaders, including Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the world's youngest and the Muslim world's first woman Prime Minister. He extended a warm welcome to the delegates and expressed his best wishes for their stay and safe return with lasting memories.

The Speaker then turned to the contemporary global context, observing that the world was passing through a period of profound turbulence marked by conflict, socio-economic exploitation, cultural challenges, hunger, disease, and climate crises such as rising temperatures, floods, and droughts. He also highlighted the complex challenges posed by rapid technological change, particularly artificial intelligence and the pervasive influence of social media, which have introduced new dimensions to human security and democratic governance.

Referring to developments since the previous conference in Lahore in February 2025, he noted that Pakistan and its surrounding region had witnessed serious security and geopolitical challenges. He mentioned that Pakistan had faced aggression in May of the previous year, which was met with unity and resilience by the nation and a measured response by its armed forces. He further referred to persistent instability in Afghanistan, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, tensions in the Middle East, and conflicts in Ukraine, Venezuela, and Africa, emphasizing that these developments posed significant threats to global peace and sustainable development, with direct implications for the region. He expressed concern over the rise of populism and unilateralism, the shrinking space for multilateral cooperation, and the erosion of democratic values such as pragmatism, tolerance, and reason, warning against a world dominated by the interests of a privileged few at the expense of vulnerable populations.

Quoting Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the Speaker reiterated that political solutions should be pursued at the earliest opportunity and that democracies should unite to confront shared challenges rather than resort to conflict. Highlighting the region's demographic and socio-economic realities, he noted that South Asia was home to a significant proportion of the world's population, poverty, and illiteracy, stressing the collective responsibility of elected representatives to respond to the suffering of their people with empathy, restraint, and a commitment to peace. The Speaker emphasized that dialogue, perseverance, and consensus-building must remain the defining attributes of democratic institutions. He argued that parliaments could remain relevant to future generations only if democracy was redefined through trust, inclusion, innovation, and peace, and called for deeper understanding and the sharing of best practices among legislatures.

He highlighted the pivotal role of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in bringing together parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth to sustain dialogue for peace and development, particularly noting the importance of the CPA Asia region as a unique platform for regional parliamentary cooperation. Expressing satisfaction over the renewed momentum in organizing annual CPA Asia conferences and the inclusion of Southeast Asian legislatures, he underscored the value of joint regional engagement in strengthening understanding and collaboration, and expressed optimism about broader representation in future conferences.

Looking ahead, the Speaker outlined the key issues to be discussed during the conference, including strengthening parliaments, enhancing executive accountability, addressing environmental and climate challenges, managing the impact of artificial intelligence and misinformation, promoting democratic values through parliamentary education, and ensuring a safer digital environment for women. He emphasized that these issues were central to the stability of democratic institutions and social cohesion, and called upon delegates to learn from one another in order to develop consensus-based solutions.

In concluding his address, the Speaker invoked the words of philosopher Dante to stress the moral responsibility of parliamentarians to speak and act decisively in times of crisis, and called for collective action grounded in confidence and mutual trust. He also quoted the poetry of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif, reflecting Sindh's spiritual and cultural ethos, and concluded by expressing gratitude to the participants and reaffirming his commitment to democratic ideals, ending his speech with a message of national pride and unity.

Screening of Documentary (History of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh)

The documentary traced Sindh's historical, political, and constitutional journey, from its ancient civilization and cultural identity to its struggle for autonomy under British rule. It highlighted Sindh's annexation by the British, its long campaign for provincial status, and the role of key leaders in securing its separation from the Bombay Presidency in 1936. It also reflected the establishment of the Sindh Legislative Assembly in 1937 and its significance as a foundational institution of governance, culminating in Sindh's historic role in the creation of Pakistan and the transfer of power on 14 August 1947.

Opening Remarks: Hon. Dr. Christopher Kalila
Chairperson, CPA Executive Committee

Hon. Dr. Christopher Kalila, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Executive Committee, delivered a forward-looking address at the opening ceremony of the 2nd CPA Joint Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference. At the outset, he acknowledged the presence of the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Syed Awais Qadir Shah, cabinet ministers, and distinguished parliamentarians from Asia and South-East Asia. He commended the organizers for fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment, expressing appreciation for the warm hospitality extended by the Government and people of Sindh.

Dr. Kalila highlighted the significance of the conference, describing it as the first major international parliamentary event hosted by the Sindh Assembly since 2012. He noted that the conference brought together more than 150 delegates from 17 legislatures across the region, highlighting its importance as a platform for regional parliamentary dialogue. He further emphasized the relevance of the conference theme, 'Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace,' and acknowledged the critical role of the CPA Chairperson and host institutions in steering meaningful discussions on the future of democratic governance.

Reflecting on his previous participation in the first Joint Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference held in Lahore, Dr. Kalila expressed personal satisfaction at returning to Pakistan and witnessing the continuity and growth of regional parliamentary cooperation. He observed that the conference was taking place at a time of profound social, technological, and political transformation across Asia and South-East Asia, marked by evolving expectations of citizens, particularly younger generations. In this context, he described the conference theme as timely and urgent, aligning with contemporary democratic challenges.

In his address, Dr. Kalila added trust as the cornerstone of democratic systems, emphasizing the need to rebuild public confidence in democratic institutions through transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership. He stressed that parliaments must go beyond their legislative functions to actively listen to citizens and serve as responsive institutions where public interest remains paramount. He reiterated that restoring trust is central to strengthening democratic governance and is a core objective of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

He further highlighted inclusion as a fundamental democratic imperative, noting that future parliaments must reflect the diversity of society, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. He emphasized that inclusive representation is not merely symbolic but essential for democratic legitimacy. In this regard, he acknowledged the CPA's efforts in promoting inclusive parliamentary networks, such as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities, as mechanisms to advance equitable representation in democratic processes.

Addressing the theme of innovation, Dr. Kalila emphasized the transformative impact of technology on governance and citizen engagement. He stated that parliaments must adapt to digital transformation while mitigating associated risks. He highlighted the potential of digital tools to enhance transparency, efficiency, and public participation in legislative processes. Beyond technological advancement, he stressed the importance of innovation in institutional mindset, including evidence-based policymaking and adaptive parliamentary practices that respond to contemporary realities while preserving democratic values.

Dr. Kalila also emphasized the central role of peace in sustaining democratic societies. He described parliaments as arenas for dialogue, compromise, and peaceful conflict resolution, particularly in an era marked by polarization, misinformation, and global instability. He asserted that through respectful debate and inclusive governance, parliaments can promote social cohesion, prevent conflict, and nurture a culture of peace within and across the Commonwealth.

Concluding his address, Dr. Kalila highlighted the conference as a valuable forum for sharing experiences, exchanging best practices, and collectively reimagining the future of democratic institutions. He encouraged participants to engage actively in discussions and leverage the collective wisdom of the gathering to strengthen parliamentary democracy for future generations. He expressed gratitude to the hosts for their hospitality and wished the conference success, concluding with prayers for Pakistan, the region, and the Commonwealth.

Remarks by Hon. Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon
Senior Minister, Government of Sindh

Hon. Sharjeel Inam Memon, Senior Minister of the Government of Sindh, in his address at the conference, highlighted the evolving challenges and responsibilities of parliamentary democracy in a rapidly changing global environment. At the outset, he extended a warm welcome to the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Syed Awais Qadir Shah, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and distinguished parliamentarians from across

Asia and South-East Asia. He expressed appreciation to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Provincial Assembly of Sindh for convening the conference and acknowledged the leadership of the Speaker of the Sindh Assembly in strengthening parliamentary practices and fostering regional and international engagement.

In his address, the Minister highlighted that parliamentary democracy today is confronted with multifaceted challenges, including declining public trust, political polarization, digital disruption, and climate change. He described the conference theme, "Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace," as timely and strategically relevant to contemporary democratic discourse. Emphasizing **trust** as the cornerstone of democratic governance, he highlighted the importance of transparency, accountability, and sustained citizen engagement in rebuilding confidence in democratic institutions. He also referred to institutional reforms undertaken in Sindh, including strengthening legislative oversight, improving committee systems, and enhancing openness in parliamentary processes, as concrete measures to reinforce democratic governance.

The Minister further emphasized **inclusion** as a fundamental democratic principle, noting that democracy loses legitimacy when segments of society are excluded from decision-making. He highlighted initiatives of the Sindh Assembly aimed at promoting women's participation and leadership, as well as addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence, workplace safety, and the protection of women in public life. He described inclusion not merely as a policy choice but as an essential democratic obligation. Addressing climate change, he identified it as one of the defining challenges of the modern era and drew attention to Sindh's vulnerability to floods, droughts, and environmental degradation, particularly affecting marginalized communities. He stressed that legislative responses to climate change must be framed within the broader context of justice and human rights.

Highlighting **innovation** as a driving force of future democracies, the Minister discussed the transformative potential of digital technologies in parliamentary systems. He noted that the digital modernization of parliamentary processes offers significant opportunities to enhance transparency, efficiency, and citizen participation. He also referred to Sindh's efforts to modernize parliamentary procedures and to address the governance implications of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, within the framework of democratic values and institutional integrity.

In concluding his address, the Minister emphasized that peace constitutes the unifying thread linking trust, inclusion, and innovation. He reiterated that parliaments must function as platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and consensus-building, and that parliamentary diplomacy and regional collaboration through forums such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are essential for promoting sustainable peace. He described the conference as a collective commitment to democratic renewal and expressed hope that the Karachi Charter, to be adopted at the conclusion of the conference, would translate deliberations into actionable reforms. He concluded by thanking the organizers and participants and by expressing his best wishes for the success of the conference and the strengthening of parliamentary democracy

Presidential Address by the Chief Guest: Hon. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq
Speaker, National Assembly of Pakistan

The Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Hon. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, delivered an address at the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference, highlighting the significance of the event and the collective responsibility of parliaments in strengthening democratic governance. He extended greetings to the distinguished parliamentary leaders, international delegates, and representatives from various legislatures, and expressed appreciation to the Provincial Assembly of Sindh for hosting the conference in its historic building, symbolizing Sindh's enduring democratic legacy.

In his remarks, the Speaker emphasized enhanced cooperation among Pakistan's federal and provincial legislatures, noting recent efforts to strengthen inter-parliamentary coordination and harmonize parliamentary rules across assemblies. He described these initiatives as important steps toward reinforcing democratic unity, institutional coherence, and the rule of law. He also underscored Sindh's historical contribution to democratic development, recalling its pioneering role in promoting women's political representation and leadership.

Reflecting on the conference theme, "Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace," the Speaker identified trust, inclusion, innovation, and peace as fundamental pillars of resilient and future-ready democracies. He stressed that sustainable democratic progress depends on representative institutions, public confidence, technological adaptation, and social stability. The Speaker further highlighted the urgent need for inclusive representation, particularly of youth, women, minorities, and marginalized communities, describing their participation as a democratic imperative rather than a privilege. He also emphasized the transformative role of technology and digital governance in enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement within parliamentary systems.

Addressing broader governance and geopolitical issues, the Speaker underscored the importance of federalism, power-sharing, and inter-parliamentary cooperation in promoting national harmony and equitable development. He reiterated the role of parliaments in advancing peace, protecting human rights, and advocating peaceful conflict resolution at regional and global levels.

In conclusion, the Speaker called for ethical leadership, institutional modernization, and active citizen engagement to strengthen democratic legitimacy. He reaffirmed that public trust remains the most valuable asset of democratic institutions and formally declared the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference open, expressing his best wishes for its success and the advancement of parliamentary democracy.

_____ LUNCH BREAK_____

POST LUNCH
2:30 PM

The plenary session was moderated by Hon. Muhammad Qasim Soomro. Plenary Session-I of the conference focused on the role of parliaments in promoting peace, strengthening democratic trust, and fostering reconciliation in diverse societies. The session highlighted the interconnected relationship between peace and democratic legitimacy, emphasizing that strong, inclusive, and accountable parliamentary institutions are essential for sustainable stability and social cohesion across Asia and South-East Asia.

1. **Hon. Mr. Ahmed Nazim**
   Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives (2:35 pm- 2:44 pm)

Hon. Mr. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis, Maldives, expressed appreciation to the host parliament and the CPA Asia Secretariat for their warm hospitality and excellent organization of the conference, highlighting the spirit of cooperation that characterizes the Commonwealth parliamentary community. He emphasized that such forums provide valuable opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collective reflection on shared democratic challenges.

He underscored that peace is inseparable from democratic trust, noting that genuine peace exists when citizens have confidence in democratic institutions and resolve differences through dialogue and the rule of law. Parliaments, he stated, play a central role as engines of reconciliation by providing platforms for debate, consensus-building, and inclusive governance.

Drawing on the experience of the Maldives, he highlighted the country's peaceful transition to a multi-party democracy, constitutional reforms, and legislative initiatives that strengthened rights, inclusion, oversight, and public trust in democratic institutions.

Mr. Nazim concluded by stressing that inclusive representation, effective oversight, and responsive legislation are essential to sustaining peace and democratic stability. He warned that political polarization and declining trust can undermine social cohesion, while proactive parliamentary action can foster stability and reconciliation. Reaffirming that peace is built through democratic processes and earned trust, he emphasized that strong, inclusive, and accountable parliaments remain fundamental to peaceful and resilient societies.

2. ***Hon. Dr. Rizvie Salih,***
Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Sri Lanka (2:45 pm- 2:58)

Hon. Dr. Rizvie Salih, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Sri Lanka shared a personal journey from a medical career to public service, emphasizing that his transition into politics was driven by the realization that sustainable social progress requires systemic change beyond individual professional efforts. He expressed deep gratitude to Pakistan for the scholarship that shaped his education and conveyed appreciation for the warm hospitality extended by the CPA Pakistan and the people of Karachi. He contextualized his remarks within the conference theme, underscoring that in a rapidly evolving world marked by economic and technological challenges, parliaments must serve as engines of reconciliation and platforms for inclusive dialogue.

Drawing on Sri Lanka's recent democratic and socio-economic crisis, Mr. Salih highlighted the importance of addressing public grievances within parliamentary institutions rather than allowing frustration to erupt into unrest. He outlined key institutional reforms introduced in Sri Lanka, including the Office of National Unity, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and strengthened parliamentary oversight committees, which have transformed legislative processes into more consultative and inclusive mechanisms. He stressed that trust is the cornerstone of democracy and acknowledged that declining transparency and accountability have weakened democratic confidence across the region. To restore trust, Sri Lanka has prioritized transparency in governance, youth engagement through student and youth parliaments, and inclusive participation of civil society and minority groups in policymaking.

In concluding remarks, Mr. Salih emphasized that peace cannot be sustained by the absence of conflict alone but must be rooted in trusted democratic institutions, particularly parliament. He highlighted Sri Lanka's post-conflict experience as evidence that reconciliation requires continuous effort through inclusive law-making, pluralistic representation, and effective oversight of executive power. Reaffirming that democratic trust must be constantly earned through accountability, inclusion, and performance, he concluded that parliaments play a unique and enduring role in transforming disagreement into constructive dialogue, thereby ensuring durable peace and democratic stability.

3. ***The Right Honourable Paul Yaw Boateng (3:00 pm- 3:25)***

The distinguished delegate, Hon. Paul Yaw Boateng, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address the Commonwealth parliamentary gathering and conveyed appreciation for the hospitality of Pakistan and the leadership of the Speaker. Drawing on his personal background as a British politician with formative roots in Ghana, he reflected on the purpose of parliamentary engagement and emphasized that the fundamental question guiding public service is the reason for participation in democratic institutions. He highlighted the historical and people-to-people connections between Pakistan and the United Kingdom, underscoring the shared values and responsibilities of Commonwealth nations.

The speaker stressed the central role of parliaments as pillars of democracy, accountability, and development. He noted that contemporary global challenges, including climate change, geopolitical tensions, economic pressures, declining development assistance, and widespread mistrust in institutions, have intensified the need for effective parliamentary leadership. Using African wisdom to illustrate the vulnerability of smaller nations amid global power struggles, he emphasized resilience as a critical attribute of democratic institutions and described the Commonwealth as a platform for cooperation, mutual learning, and shared best practices.

Referring to the conference theme, Paul Yaw Boateng argued that parliaments must move beyond rhetoric and become institutions of tangible delivery and democratic legitimacy. He highlighted the urgent need to prioritize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), noting that their achievement by 2030 remains uncertain without renewed commitment. He called on parliaments to legislate, advocate, and oversee policies that promote sustainable development, emphasizing that meaningful progress must be reflected in improved conditions at the local constituency level. Particular attention was drawn to key SDGs related to health, education, water and sanitation, inequality, sustainable communities, climate action, and environmental protection.

The speaker further underscored the importance of strong parliamentary committees and oversight mechanisms in ensuring effective governance and public spending. He highlighted the potential of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain to enhance transparency, combat corruption, and strengthen public trust in financial management and procurement processes. He also emphasized the role of youth in technological innovation and encouraged parliaments to engage young people in democratic processes and digital transformation.

In concluding remarks, Paul Yaw Boateng emphasized that politics is ultimately a people-centered endeavor and that parliamentary legitimacy depends on responsiveness to citizens' real needs. He illustrated how practical policy interventions, particularly in areas such as sanitation and gender equality, can transform lives and strengthen democratic credibility. Reaffirming the responsibility of parliaments to sustain inclusive and effective democracies, he expressed his best wishes for the conference and encouraged participants to translate shared commitments into concrete action for the benefit of their societies.

4. ***Hon. Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan,***
Speaker, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab (3:24- 3:34)

The speaker of Provincial Assembly of Punjab, Hon. Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, expressed appreciation to the organizers and participants for convening an important dialogue on the theme of trust in parliaments. He emphasized that public trust in democracy depends not only on how representatives enter parliament but also on the quality of parliamentary conduct, procedures, and outcomes. He warned that disorderly debates, lack of constructive dialogue, and failure to address citizens' basic needs, such as education, water, and security, undermine democratic credibility. Reflecting on regional and global trends, he observed the growing dominance of strong executives and populist leadership, questioning whether these developments are weakening democratic institutions and parliamentary authority.

Highlighting the role of parliaments as potential platforms for reconciliation, oversight, and inclusivity, the speaker stressed the need to translate democratic ideals into tangible benefits for citizens at the grassroots level. He raised critical questions about whether existing parliamentary models are sufficient or whether new approaches are required to strengthen accountability and public participation. He also acknowledged the value of international parliamentary forums and conferences in fostering shared learning and addressing common challenges across Commonwealth countries.

Mr. Ahmad Khan, further addressed emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, describing it as both an opportunity and a challenge for lawmakers. He questioned whether parliaments are adequately prepared to legislate and regulate rapidly evolving technologies and cautioned against leaving such powerful tools solely in private hands. Concluding his remarks, he underscored the importance of meaningful legislation, effective oversight, and best practices, citing progressive laws on women's protection as examples of impactful parliamentary action, and reaffirmed the need for parliaments to reclaim their central role in democratic governance and public trust.

5. Hon. Mr. Babar Saleem Swati
Speaker, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3:35-3:41)

The speaker, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Hon. Mr. Babar Saleem Swati, began by expressing sincere appreciation to the Honourable Speaker of the Sindh Assembly, Mr. Awais Qadir Shah, and the Sindh Assembly Secretariat for their hospitality and for successfully organizing the conference. The address emphasized the central theme of peace, democratic trust, and the role of parliaments as vital instruments of reconciliation. The speaker stressed that public trust in democratic institutions is the foundation of a functional democracy and warned that this trust erodes when citizens face poverty, disease, illiteracy, and the denial of fundamental rights. It was underscored that democratic institutions must be fully empowered, legislators must act for the public good, and assemblies must be strong enough to hold the executive accountable. Policies of the state, the speaker asserted, should be debated within elected chambers and aligned with the will of the people rather than imposed upon them, cautioning that parliaments must not be reduced to rubber-stamp bodies. True democratic power, the speaker argued, must rest solely with elected representatives.

Further elaborating on democratic challenges, Mr. Swati endorsed the Host Speaker's observations regarding the growing trend of unilateralism globally and within societies. Democracy was described as inherently pluralistic, with its strength lying in collective decision-making through debate, dialogue, and consensus. He highlighted that when public voices are ignored or disrespected, democracy loses its essence, leading to public frustration, alienation, and the replacement of dialogue with violence. The address concluded with a strong tribute to Pakistan's democratic pioneers, including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, Fatima Jinnah, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, acknowledging their sacrifices for the rule of law. The speaker also referred to the imprisonment of Imran Khan since August 2023, presenting it as part of a broader struggle for democracy in Pakistan, noting that while his party views the detention as suppression of dissent, the government attributes it to legal violations. This case was cited as emblematic of concerns over shrinking democratic space and increasing military influence, reinforcing the need to safeguard democratic principles and parliamentary supremacy.

DAY-II: Thursday, 5
PARALLEL BREAKOUT SESSIONS
Session A
"Parliamentary Education —Inculcating Democratic Principles in Everyday Living"
Theme Pillar: ● Inclusion
Venue: Conference Hall, PC Hotel, Karachi
9:45-11:30

Introduction and Strategic Context

The revitalization of parliamentary education is a critical driver for national development and a resilient democracy. This session explores the transition from traditional top-down information sharing to a "lived civic culture" where democratic values are actively practiced by both legislators and the public. The strategic framework rests on four pillars: experiential learning via youth parliaments, reimagining institutional resources as public spaces, digital integration, and comprehensive curriculum reform. These initiatives aim to dismantle barriers to engagement, ensuring parliament remains a transparent and evolving entity reflective of a modern, inclusive society.

Role	Name	Designation
Moderator	Hon. Mr. Taha Ahmed Khan	Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh
Panelist	Hon. Dr. Rizvie Salih	Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Sri Lanka
Panelist	Hon. Ms. Mahtab Akbar Rashdi	Member, National Assembly of Pakistan
Panelist	Hon. Mr. Khawaja Izhar ul Hassan	Member, National Assembly of Pakistan
Panelist	Hon. Mr. Sajjadullah	Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Panelist	Hon. Zulfikar Ali Shah	Member, Provincial Assembly of Punjab
Expert/Specialist	Hon. Syed Shamoon Hashmi	Secretary, National Assembly of Pakistan (Expert in Parliamentary Education)

Opening Remarks by the Moderator

Hon. Mr. Taha Ahmed Khan established the premise that democracy must function as a lived civic culture rather than a distant institutional exercise. He emphasized that the health of a nation's democracy is measured by everyday civic behavior—how citizens resolve conflict and engage with institutions—rather than being limited to election cycles. This set a collaborative tone for the session, focusing on the need to shape democratic behavior in daily life.

Panelist Intervention: Inculcating Democratic Principles (Sri Lanka)

Hon. Dr. Mohammad Rizvie Salih addressed the "delivery deficit" that alienates youth from democratic processes. He proposed a "cradle-to-legislature" pipeline, integrating civic education into school curricula (Grades 6–10) to balance individual rights with moral foundations. The Sri Lankan model utilizes practical simulations, including 200 School Parliaments and a National Youth Parliament, to demystify governance and provide a formal channel for grievances. This decentralized outreach aims to transform the legislature into a reachable entity that fosters trust through structured dialogue.

Panelist Intervention: Transparency and Institutional Relevance (Punjab)

Hon. Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah highlighted the global "crisis of perception" regarding political actors and the subsequent retreat in voter confidence. To reclaim trust, the Provincial Assembly of Punjab has adopted a model of radical transparency, including live broadcasting and "educational tourism" for students. A primary focus is re-characterizing Standing Committees as the collaborative heart of democracy. By showcasing the consensus-driven work of these committees and implementing public petition systems, the legislature demonstrates genuine deliberation over mere executive endorsement.

Expert Commentary: Addressing the Pedagogical Disconnect

Mr. Syed Shamoon Hashmi and Hon. Mahtab Akbar Rashdi discussed the "pedagogical disconnect" in national curricula that historically favored autocracy. In response, the Parliamentary Education Project (PEP) was launched, establishing a charter with 25 universities and creating Bachelor's programs in Parliamentary Studies. This initiative transitions democracy from a theoretical product to an active process. The session emphasized "forward-looking" education and regulated exposure to technology, arguing that parliamentary education must foster critical thinking to equip youth for a pluralistic, tech-driven future.

Panelist Intervention: Socio-Economic Delivery and the Opposition

Hon. Khawaja Izhar-ul-Hassan reframed democracy as a measure of national health, tied directly to the delivery of healthcare, infrastructure, and equality. He emphasized the essential role of the Opposition in maintaining oversight and institutional checks and balances. His vision for the future includes educating "digital citizens" through a new Digital Social Contract, ensuring accountability from the top-down and the bottom-up. This approach posits that the survival of the democratic spirit depends on reciprocity between the treasury and the opposition.

Panelist Intervention: The Domestic-Civic Nexus and Digital Ethics

Hon. Ms. Mehtab Akbar Rashdi explored the domestic roots of democratic education, identifying the home as the primary site for learning gender equality and inclusivity. This perspective grounds democratic sustainability in the common walks of life. Regarding the digital age, she advocated for "disciplined guidance" over prohibition, asserting that banning information reflects institutional incapacity. Instead, education should focus on independent, culturally contextualized navigation of technology to empower the next generation as architects of their own future.

Panelist Intervention: Local Governance and Inclusive Representation

Hon. Mr. Sajjadullah focused on the necessity of local government systems to make democracy tangible for citizens in remote provinces. He urged parliamentarians to serve as "living curricula" by demonstrating dignified debate and empathy. Emphasizing technology as an equalizer between urban and rural sectors, he concluded that true democratic inclusion requires non-negotiable access to education for girls and the active participation of persons with special abilities within the legislative framework.

Moderator's Synthesis: Dimensions of Parliamentary Education

Hon. Mr. Taha Ahmed Khan established a final directive framing parliamentary education as a behavioral ecosystem operating across four critical dimensions. These include the House, where leadership must model democratic excellence; the Classroom, where the Constitution serves as the foundational text; the Media, focused on ethical information management; and the Community, where trust is cultivated through transparency and data-driven engagement.

The Digital Dilemma: Regulation versus Moral Grooming

The panel, led by Hon. Dr. Mohammad Rizvie Salih, rejected prohibitive legislative models like the "Australian Model" for social media restrictions. The consensus maintained that in developing democracies, digital platforms are essential infrastructure for news and transparency. Rather than total bans, the session advocated for a shift from technical instruction (*Taleem*) to moral grooming (*Tarbiyat*). This emphasizes "Digital Ethics" to equip citizens with the ability to navigate the addiction economy and AI-generated content without compromising the social fabric.

Redefining Accessibility and Parliamentary Tools

Addressing perceived institutional rigidity, Mr. Syed Shamoon Hashmi clarified that inaccessibility often stems from educational gaps rather than institutional closure. While public attention often focuses on the "Question Hour," the session highlighted "hidden" engines of democracy—such as Standing Committees, Calling Attention Notices (CANs), and the Public Petition System—as more effective avenues for influence. The strategic goal is to utilize digital portals to open the legislature while simultaneously teaching citizens "how to knock" through procedural literacy.

Addressing the Trust Deficit in Gen Z

Mr. Syed Shamoon Hashmi and Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq analyzed the "disillusionment matrix" affecting Gen Z, noting that youth hold less than 3% of legislative seats despite being the demographic majority. To transition youth from spectators to stakeholders, the panel advocated for the restoration of student unions and the establishment of Youth Advisory Councils. The objective is to demonstrate that constitutional frameworks are active tools for empowerment, thereby earning trust through transparency and inclusion.

Technical Expertise and Legislative Drafting

The session identified a critical void in legal education regarding the technical skills required for effective law-making. Experts argued that "Procedural Mastery" and "Policy Research" are essential for translating the will of the people into enforceable law. By fostering partnerships between law schools and institutions like the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), the next generation of "effective citizens" can move beyond surface awareness to gain the technical proficiency required for legislative drafting.

The Balochistan Disconnect: From Security to Development

Hon. Khawaja Izhar-ul-Hassan and Hon. Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah addressed the deep-seated mistrust among youth in Balochistan, arguing for a transition from a "Security Lens" to a "Development Lens." The panel proposed neutralizing "Insecurity Managers" in favor of professional "Managers of Change" to ensure development packages reach the grassroots. This approach seeks to prove the Parliament is a partner in provincial progress by prioritizing infrastructure and local ownership of resources over abstract political rhetoric.

Modeling the Grammar of Disagreement

The panel, including Hon. Mr. Sajjadullah, posited that the House must serve as a social pressure valve by modeling non-violent conflict resolution. By institutionalizing "respectful disagreement," the Parliament teaches that consensus-building and compromise are civic virtues. Through public galleries and open data, the legislature encourages a habit of public scrutiny, demonstrating that the rule of law applies to all and providing a formal channel for grievances to reduce civic apathy.

Strategic Framework for Democratic Sustainability

In his concluding synthesis, Hon. Mr. Taha Ahmed Khan distilled the deliberations into a framework where democracy is a continuous practice fueled by education and accountability. He advocated for a radical shift toward experiential learning—such as mock parliaments—to replace rote instruction. Khan emphasized that a resilient democracy must be inclusive by design, integrating women and marginalized groups into the core of civic instruction. Ultimately, digital literacy was reaffirmed as a non-negotiable pillar to ensure technology empowers rather than polarizes the modern citizen.

Concluding Synthesis and Strategic Framework

Hon. Mr. Taha Ahmed Khan distilled the session's deliberations into a strategic framework, defining democracy as a continuous, lived practice fueled by education, participation, and accountability. He positioned parliamentary education as the vital connective tissue between the state and its people, asserting that understanding the mechanics of legislation is the primary prerequisite for restoring institutional trust.

Youth Engagement and Pedagogical Reform

The moderator identified youth engagement as the ultimate guarantor of democratic sustainability. To prevent systemic stagnation, he advocated for a radical shift in pedagogy, prioritizing experiential learning—such as mock parliaments and simulations—over passive, rote instruction. This "learn by doing" approach is designed to create a clear pathway for future leadership development within the democratic fold.

Inclusivity by Design

A core tenet of the proposed framework is that resilience depends on deliberate inclusivity. The representation of women, youth, and marginalized groups must be treated as a central pillar of civic instruction rather than an ancillary concern. The moral health of a nation's democracy is reflected in its ability to integrate these diverse voices directly into the halls of power.

Digital Literacy as an Actionable Pillar

Acknowledging the complexities of the modern information era, digital and media literacy were established as non-negotiable requirements for responsible citizenship. In an age of rapid-fire information, the ability to critically analyze digital content is essential to ensure technology functions as a tool for democratic empowerment rather than a source of polarization or misinformation.

Formal Closing and Commemoration

The session concluded with a formal recognition of the contributors' insights. Dr. Christopher Kalila, Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, was invited by the moderator to present honorary shields to the panelists, marking the official close of the proceedings.

DAY-II
Thursday, 5 th February 2026
PARALLEL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Session B
"Parliaments as Vanguards of Peaceful and Harmonious Societies — Rise of Fake News; AI and Misinformation"
Theme Pillar: ◎ Innovation
Venue: Grand Ballroom, PC Hotel, Karachi

0930-1115 hrs

This session examined the growing impact of digital misinformation, AI-generated content, and deep fakes on social cohesion, democratic stability, and public trust. It focused on how parliaments can lead innovative responses by shaping modern legal and policy frameworks that promote content verification, transparency, and accountability while safeguarding freedom of expression. The discussion also highlighted the importance of media literacy, Open Parliament initiatives, and cross-sector collaboration with technology platforms, regulators, and fact-checking bodies. Special attention was given to countering hate speech, reducing political polarization, and empowering youth as informed, responsible digital citizens who actively strengthen democratic resilience.

Moderator:
- Hon. Dr. Sharmila Sahiba Faruqui Hashaam, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Panelists:
- Hon. Mr. Ahmad Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives
- Hon. Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon, Senior Minister, Government of Sindh
- Hon. Ms. Farah Azeem Shah, Member, Provincial Assembly of Balochistan
- Hon. Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab
- Hon. Barrister Danyal Chaudhry, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan
- Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Opening Remarks
Moderator, Hon. Dr. Sharmila Sahiba Faruqui

The session opened with a welcome to foreign delegates, distinguished guests, students, and media, focusing on the theme "Parliaments as vanguards of peaceful and harmonious societies and the rise of fake news, AI, and misinformation."

The moderator introduced a panel of notable parliamentarians: Honorable Ahmad Nazim, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis in Maldives; Honorable Sharjeel Inam Memon, Senior Minister and Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Government of Sindh; Ms. Sara Ahmed, MPA from Punjab Assembly and head of the Child Rights Bureau in Punjab; Ms. Farah Azeem, a legislator from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former spokesperson for the government of Balochistan; and Mr. Asif Khan, convener of SUGs in the KPK Assembly from South Waziristan.

Hon. Dr. Sharmila introduced the theme of the session, highlighting the global challenge posed by artificial intelligence, fake news, deepfakes, misinformation, and disinformation. She emphasized that technology itself is not a threat but a tool, and that the misuse of technology must be addressed through collective parliamentary action. The Moderator underscored the importance of solution-based dialogue and cross-parliamentary learning to strengthen democracy rather than undermine it.

Starting with Hon. Mr. Ahmad Nazim Sahib, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis in Maldives the moderator asked, in the wake of deep fakes and fabricated videos, even manipulated voices which sometimes are used to undermine democracy, how does he see his responsibility to ensure that the right information is disseminated to the people?

1. *Ahmad Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives*

Hon. Ahmad Nazim responded that in every constitution, the role of freedom of expression, the protection of individual rights are enshrined but the parliament is empowered to make laws that uphold democracy. They have come across this problem because technology is changing the game. AI and synthetic media create hyper-realistic deep fakes, audio, video and images that are almost impossible to distinguish from reality.

He added that social media spreads the news very fast, the clock is ticking for parliaments everywhere. So Maldives has already acted on this last year. The online safety acts and amendments to the criminal code have been amended to include and criminalise non-consensual AI-generated content. They strengthen cyber security, they protect citizens, especially women from digital exploitation and harassment. And in the case of Maldives, they have found out that the women are not willing to enter into the political arena, mainly because of the social media harassment and the things that come with public life. So this has been going on for some time.

He elaborated that for the last three parliaments, the number of women in the parliament has been decreasing. So therefore, they thought they needed legislation to bring criminalised, unauthorised edited videos and these things. These threats are real and varied. Deep fakes erode trust and manipulate public opinion. They create the liaise dividend, where real evidence can be dismissed as fake. AI enables hyper-detected messaging, echo chambers and amplifications of biases.

So last year, they brought into existence a new law to govern the media. So therefore, they have two, three umbrella organisations, the Media Council and the Broadcasting Commission. So they have combined the two and then have made it to cover all platforms, TV and also the print media.

MODERATOR, Sharmila Faruqi

With this question, the moderator moved on to Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon, an information minister and as a spokesperson of the government. She asked that in an age where information travels faster than how institutions can respond and in an age of deep fakes, misinformation, how does he as information minister manage to not only project the official narrative of the government but also keep that balance between media freedom and also not sliding into censorship because that is one complaint that always comes across for governments once they try to manage information is that the freedom of speech is being impaired.

2. **Hon. Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon**

Hon. Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon opened by acknowledging the significance of the question, noting that deepfake and AI-generated content pose a widespread challenge not only for governments but for society at large, including political parties. As a government representative from the information department, the speaker emphasized the need for constant vigilance and around-the-clock monitoring of content entering the public sphere. The panelist highlighted the importance of deploying effective AI detection tools to identify whether incoming content is real or fake, underscoring the critical role of such technology in combating the harmful impact of synthetic media on society.

Mr. Memon highlighted that AI tools have enabled the creation of false and fake news, often mimicking TV channels and replicating voices to spread content that is not real. This misinformation is circulating widely in the market. In response, the speaker emphasized that the government must actively monitor social media platforms around the clock, including Facebook, Twitter, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram, to track and address such deceptive content. This ongoing monitoring is seen as essential to counter the spread of AI-generated false information.

Hon. Mr. Memon further explained that the government is actively monitoring AI-driven tools and social media platforms continuously to detect fake news as it emerges. He emphasized the need for rapid response to such content, assessing whether it is real or false, and stressed the importance of public awareness so citizens understand the consequences of spreading misinformation. He clarified that the intent is not to threaten but to highlight the potential harm fake content can cause, including risks to lives.

The panelist identified this as a societal challenge requiring strong legislation. He referenced the PECA Act but suggested the need for broader legal frameworks. He also highlighted the importance of training journalists to ensure they publish only authentic news, noting that publishing unverified information can damage reputations and public image. The speaker concluded that legislation should apply not only to journalists but to all citizens to effectively address the spread of false information.

Mr. Sharjeel Memon emphasized that any citizen, not just public office holders or journalists, who spread fake news should avoid doing so, as they could face penalties. In Pakistan, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is the primary federal body that handles complaints about fake content on social media, including cases where individuals report accounts spreading false information about them or their families. The speaker stressed the need for strong checks and balances, highlighting that the government, particularly information departments, has a primary responsibility to remain vigilant around the clock. Prompt government response to identify and label fake news is essential to prevent the public from easily trusting false information.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Mr. Memon for his insights and referenced the PECA Act. The moderator posed a question to Mr. Danyal Chaudhary, Member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting, and spokesperson to the Prime Minister, noting his role at the intersection of public communication and media regulation. Citing concerns from the media fraternity about the PECA Act, the moderator asked how Mr. Chaudhary ensures that official government narratives do not overshadow independent journalism. The question also addressed how to balance this in an era of widespread deepfakes, voice manipulation, and doctored images, which can escalate tensions, distort public cohesion, and interfere with the government's intended communication to the public.

3. Danyal Chaudhry, Member National Assembly of Pakistan

Mr. Danyal Chaudhary, Member of the National Assembly of Pakistan and Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting, opened by thanking the Sindh government for hosting the event and praised the province's culture and collaborative spirit among its ministers and MPs. Addressing the question posed by Madam Sharmila, he acknowledged AI as a widely discussed global topic, noting that while it presents significant opportunities, it also poses threats, particularly in the form of deepfakes and misinformation. He highlighted that legislation typically lags behind technological advances, citing the European Union's recent AI Act as an example.

Mr. Chaudhary explained that Pakistan, as a developing economy, faces similar challenges, with many relevant laws still unaddressed. He noted that his government has been working on frameworks, including the PECA Act, which he helped draft, but admitted that it covers only a small portion of AI-related issues. He reported a 900% increase in AI-generated videos in the past year, including both entirely new content and cleverly edited existing material that changes context and meaning.

He described the PECA Electronic Act 2016 as focusing on defamatory content and deepfakes, and mentioned that the government has reached out to platforms like Meta to require labeling of AI-generated videos. The government is also developing software to automatically detect AI-generated content and alert users. The Ministry of IT is working with an international agency on the National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025, which aims to create a broad framework for monitoring and managing AI content.

Hon. Mr. Danyal acknowledged that legal challenges remain, as many cases are dismissed in court due to gaps in legislation and implementation. He emphasized ongoing collaboration with stakeholders and highlighted the importance of this forum, which brings together global speakers and politicians facing similar issues. He expressed hope that the outcomes of this event will help shape future policies and position Pakistan as a leader in addressing AI and deepfake challenges.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Mr. Danyal Chaudhary for his insightful remarks about the government's work on a National Artificial Intelligence Policy and the Pakistan Software Electronic Act. The moderator then introduced the next speaker, Sarah Ahmed, noting that children and young people are the most connected to digital spaces and, consequently, the most exposed to risks such as misinformation and deepfakes. As Chairperson of the Punjab Child Rights Authority, Sara Ahmed was asked to identify the key gap in protecting children online and to suggest one action parliaments could take today to safeguard the most vulnerable members of society. The question emphasized the urgent need for legislative and policy measures to protect children in the digital age.

4. **Hon. Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab**

Hon. Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Chairperson of the Punjab Child Protection and Welfare Bureau, began by congratulating the Sindh government for hosting a successful CPA conference in Karachi. Drawing on her experience, she identified a critical gap in how parliaments protect children from AI-driven digital harm: current laws are reactive, addressing abuse after it occurs, rather than preventive, and they do not place clear obligations on digital platforms and AI systems to safeguard children.

She shared that in Punjab, her bureau rescues over 10,000 destitute, neglected, and abused children annually from streets, factories, and trafficking situations. In recent years, she has observed a shift from physical spaces to online digital environments, where children, including those from middle-class families with internet access, are increasingly vulnerable to abuse via misinformation, manipulation, AI, and online sexual exploitation.

Ms. Sarah cited a 2025 case in Muzaffargarh district, Punjab, where a gang exploited six children aged six to ten years for online child pornography and role-playing, with a German individual heading the operation. The videos were distributed on the dark web. The National Cyber Crime Investigation (NCCI), FIA, Punjab Police, and her bureau collaborated to rescue the children, who were being paid minimal amounts (500 rupees per hour) by their own parents or handlers. She stressed that online sexual abuse is an organized, technology-driven crime that crosses borders and requires urgent attention from parliamentarians.

She also highlighted the growing concern of online grooming through games like PUBG and Roblox, where strangers build relationships with children, often exploiting them through blackmail. She noted that the volume of dark web content is overwhelming for agencies like NCCI. Ahmed advocated for provincial jurisdiction over such cases and is working to include these provisions in Punjab's PDNC Act, enabling provincial intervention in child sexual abuse cases.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Sarah Ahmed for her insights and key takeaway that child protection measures should be implemented at the provincial level, emphasizing the need for cohesion and collaboration. The moderator then introduced the next speaker, Mr. Asif Khan, a member of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from South Waziristan Upper, a region undergoing institutional integration and evolving public access to information and trust.

The moderator posed a question to Mr. Asif Khan, highlighting the challenges of rumors, misinformation, and lack of public trust in the region. The question focused on how, as convener of the SDGs in the KPK Assembly, he leverages AI to disseminate accurate information, build public trust, and bridge the gap between political representation and public institutions. The inquiry sought to understand how AI can be used as a tool to improve communication and governance in areas facing significant challenges in public perception and information flow.

5. ***Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa***

Mr. Asif Khan, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from South Waziristan Upper, began by thanking the Sindh government for its hospitality. He highlighted the severe lack of basic communication infrastructure in his region, noting that even telephone landlines and cellular services (3G/4G) are unavailable, let alone AI technologies. He explained that South Waziristan has been in a state of conflict for 22 years, lacking basic necessities and facing ongoing challenges.

Despite these limitations, Mr. Khan emphasized the need for parliamentarians from such areas to focus on what can be done. He shared that the provincial assembly is prioritizing capacity building by training Members of Provincial Assembly (MPAs) and staff, developing the IT department, and working on legislation to create programs that include AI, addressing both its benefits and risks.

He stressed that the government must strengthen digital governance and regulation, enhance national digital literacy, invest in AI fact-checking tools, and develop an ethical AI framework. Noting that fake news is often generated by machines and algorithms, he underscored the importance of implementing existing policies to combat AI misuse effectively.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Mr. Asif Khan for his remarks, acknowledging the unfortunate lack of telephone lines and internet access in his merged area of South Waziristan, highlighting the challenges in building public trust between politicians and institutions in the absence of basic necessities. The moderator then introduced Farah Azim, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, noting the province's frequent exposure to rumors, false news, and misinformation, especially during sensitive situations that can escalate tensions on the streets.

The moderator posed a question to Farah Azim, asking how, as a provincial legislator, she views the use of AI tools to build public trust, prevent the spread of false news, and bridge the gap between public representatives and local communities. The question also addressed the challenges posed by fake news, deepfakes, manipulated videos, and altered voices of politicians, which can spread harmful narratives and heighten tensions in Balochistan. The moderator asked how Farah Azim addresses those challenges and what steps the provincial assembly can take to counter these effects.

6. ***Hon. Ms. Farah Azeem Shah, Member, Provincial Assembly of Balochistan***

Farah Azim, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, opened by welcoming all delegates and highlighting Pakistan as a land of hospitality and solidarity, noting the 5th February Kashmir Solidarity Day. She emphasized that harmful actions in the world persist not due to bad people but due to the silence of good people, which she believes is now changing. She praised the Sindh Assembly Speaker and his team for their preparation and welcome.

Addressing the question, she explained that misinformation in Balochistan is not accidental but often a deliberate tool of conflict. Terrorist groups and hostile elements use fake news, doctored videos, and false narratives to undermine security forces, instill fear among civilians, and erode trust between the state and its people. Pakistan's response, she stressed, is not panic or censorship but calm, lawful, and transparent engagement.

She outlined a multi-pronged approach: first, providing timely, verified, and consistent information to prevent rumors; second, engaging communities directly through local leaders, civil society, youth, and women using local languages and culturally sensitive messaging to build trust. Third, political leaders must act responsibly online, avoiding amplification of unverified claims and correcting misinformation openly. Fourth, institutional coordination is essential to present a unified front against hostile narratives. Finally, addressing root causes such as development, inclusion, justice, and dialogue reduces the space for misinformation to thrive.

In summary, Ms. Farah stated that Pakistan counters terrorist-driven misinformation through transparency, unity, resilience, and trust-building with its citizens.

MODERATOR:
The moderator thanked Farah Azim, emphasizing her closing words of transparency, unity, and leadership. She announced the conclusion of the first round of the panel and introduced a final, cutting-edge question for all panelists. The moderator highlighted a key takeaway from the discussions: there is no fear of technology itself, but its misuse poses a significant challenge. Parliaments are not powerless and have a responsibility to ensure accurate information reaches the public.

ROUND 2

The question posed to the panelists was: If parliaments could do one thing to curb misinformation and disinformation, what would it be? Options suggested included legislating, setting clear standards for public representatives, or ensuring public digital literacy. The moderator invited the panelists to share their views on the most effective single action parliaments could take to address the growing problem of misinformation.

1. ***Hon. Mr. Ahmad Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives***

The speaker thanked the moderator and emphasized the importance of the question. They asserted that parliamentarians must act as vanguards of truth, stability, and peace, noting that while the digital age has democratized information, it has also democratized deception. Rumors, fabricated videos, and manipulated narratives can quickly cause unrest and fracture communities. The role of parliamentarians, therefore, extends beyond lawmaking to being guardians of public trust, architects of ethical innovation, and defenders of peaceful societies. They must ensure technology strengthens democracy rather than distorts it.

The speaker acknowledged that misinformation can be weaponized, silence truth, and erode public trust, but also highlighted that reform, innovation, and parliamentary resolve can reverse these trends. They stressed that misinformation transcends borders, so national legislation alone is insufficient; a cross-border response is necessary. The conference serves as a testament to shared commitment, offering an opportunity to learn from each other's national experiences.

Highlighting South Asia's diverse but vulnerable democracies, the speaker agreed with colleagues that misinformation is often deliberate. They proposed that through the Commonwealth, countries can collaborate between legislatures to develop cooperative solutions to this global challenge.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Hon. Ahmad Nazim, and reiterated that, despite differing regional realities, there is a shared commitment among parliaments to address a common challenge: misinformation and disinformation. The moderator posed a follow-up question, asking what the first response to these issues should be in the future. The options presented were legislating new laws, setting clear standards for public representatives, or ensuring public digital literacy. The question sought the panelists' views on the most effective initial step parliaments should take to counter misinformation and disinformation moving forward.

2. ***Hon. Mr. Sharjeel Inam Memon, Senior Minister, Government of Sindh***

The speaker emphasized that the primary responsibility of parliament should be to enact strong legislation, with government tasked with effective implementation. They observed that across the world, fake or negative content about public figures spreads faster than positive news, reflecting a societal tendency to focus on downfall rather than achievements. To address this, the speaker argued that parliament must create stringent laws, and governments must enforce them so that individuals think twice before sharing false or fabricated videos, knowing they could face punishment.

The speaker also noted that misinformation is not new; even before AI, media houses spread fake news, and those responsible should be held accountable. Journalists have a duty to report accurately, and fabricated news that harms lives must be addressed seriously. Citizens need to be responsible, and both parliament and government must play active roles in curbing misinformation.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Mr. Memon sahib, summarizing his key points as strong legislation, followed by robust implementation and responsible journalism. The moderator then turned to Hon. Danyal Chaudhary, noting that previous speakers emphasized the responsibility of parliaments to legislate. The moderator posed a question to Chaudhary, asking what he considers to be the single most effective tool for parliaments to counter misinformation and disinformation. The question invited Chaudhary to share his perspective on the most impactful approach lawmakers can take in addressing the spread of false information.

Hon. Barrister Danyal Chaudhry, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Hon. Mr. Danyal Chaudhary began by referencing a common saying that a lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth puts on its shoes, noting that AI has amplified this reality. He highlighted that many people in Pakistan, especially Gen Z, are not yet fully equipped to understand AI, and that legislatures are lagging behind in this area. He stressed that public understanding of AI is crucial, as it is a powerful technology capable of creating highly convincing fake content in minutes, citing examples of fabricated videos he has seen in Pakistan.

Chaudhary proposed two key strategies for parliamentarians to address misinformation. First, supply-side measures: implementing mandatory regulations such as strict labeling requirements for deep fakes, using digital watermarks on social media content, and improving detection technologies for AI-generated media. He shared personal experiences of misinformation affecting official communications, illustrating how widespread and damaging the problem is.

Second, demand-side measures: strengthening media literacy among the public, investing in fact-checking initiatives, and rebuilding trust in mainstream local media to make citizens less vulnerable to manipulation. He emphasized that both strategies must be pursued simultaneously, as the challenges posed by AI will continue to grow and could impact governments significantly. He suggested that the insights from this panel should serve as a roadmap for future action against AI-driven misinformation.

MODERATOR:

The moderator turned to Ms. Sarah and asked her opinion on the single most effective tool to counter misinformation. The question invited her to identify the one key approach she believes would have the greatest impact in addressing the spread of false information, whether through legislation, technology, public education, or another method.

4. -***Hon. Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab***

Hon. Ms. Sarah responded that if parliamentarians could do one thing to counter misinformation and the misuse of artificial intelligence, it should be regulating digital platforms, particularly to protect children, as they are the most vulnerable segment of society. She acknowledged that digital literacy and clear ethical rules for elected representatives are also important, but emphasized that neither of these alone can protect a child from grooming, manipulation, or exploitation by AI-powered systems. She stressed the critical need for targeted regulation to safeguard children in the digital age.

MODERATOR:

The moderator turned to Hon. Asif Khan Sahib and asked for his opinion on the single most effective tool to counter disinformation. The question invited him to identify one key approach he believes would have the greatest impact in addressing the spread of false information, whether through legislation, technology, public education, or another method.

5. - ***Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa***

Mr. Asif Khan Sahib emphasized the need for extensive education on misinformation and its rapid spread. Referencing Mr. Danyal's comments, he highlighted how difficult it is to comprehend the scale of deepfakes and false information. He shared that he has been a victim of misinformation and is currently pursuing a case under the PECA Act with the FIA. He stressed that education and a proactive response are essential to control the situation, warning that failure to address misinformation and disinformation in a timely manner could lead to significant problems and potentially get out of control.

MODERATOR:

The moderator asked Farah to provide, in just a few words, the single most effective tool to counter misinformation. The question called for a concise response highlighting the key approach she believes would have the greatest impact.

6. **- Hon. Ms. Farah Azeem Shah, Member, Provincial Assembly of Balochistan**

Hon. Ms. Farah emphasized that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam, which, according to the Quran, prohibits circulating information without verification. She noted that false narratives and AI-generated videos disproportionately affect Pakistani women, whose dignity and modesty are highly valued. In Balochistan, separatist groups such as BLA, BLF, and Baloch Yajati Committee use AI-generated content to target youth, especially girls, recruiting them as suicide bombers.

Ms. Farah further stated that digital literacy is the key tool. It equips people to identify fake news and manipulated content, question emotionally charged narratives, verify sources before sharing, and resist propaganda designed to spread fear and division. She concluded that Pakistan's approach is balanced, but increasing digital literacy and public awareness is essential to counter misinformation.

MODERATOR:

The moderator thanked Ms. Farah and the other speakers for a solution-oriented discussion, highlighting key takeaways: legislation, oversight, ethical standards, and public digital literacy are essential for parliamentarians worldwide to counter disinformation and misinformation and uphold democratic values. The floor was opened for audience questions.

First Audience Question:
Hon. Dato' Sri Haji Mohd Sharkar Bin Haji Shamsudin,
Speaker, Pahang State Legislative Assembly

He referenced the movie *Dhurandhar* and asked whether it should be categorized as fake news, misinformation, disinformation, or a real story, seeking comments from the panelists.

Mr. Sharjeel Memon's Response:

Mr. Memon explained that *Dhurandhar* is a fictional film with some real historical characters, but largely a narrative created for storytelling. He noted India's frequent use of fake propaganda, citing recent wars and evidence that India is producing movies showing false victories. He emphasized that such propaganda, often based on fiction, can cause unrest, citing examples of fake videos sparking riots in France (2023), UK (2024), and India (2025). He urged politicians and citizens to raise awareness about the dangers of fake content and act responsibly to prevent harm.

Second Audience Question:
Hon. Dr. Haji Mohammad Puad bin Zarkashi,
Speaker, Johor State Legislative Assembly

He asked the Deputy Speaker of Maldives whether it is realistic for parliament to establish a code of conduct for MPs to prevent misinformation and hate speech, and if such a code would infringe on freedom of speech. He also asked Sharjeel Inam if a single source of truth channel would be effective against fake news.

Maldives Deputy Speaker's Response:

He shared Maldives' mixed experience with media freedom, noting that media often claims self-regulation but fails to do so. In 2025, Maldives enacted the Media and Broadcast Regulation Act, creating a unified commission to oversee media, address AI-generated disinformation, protect journalists, and enforce transparent mechanisms. He stressed the importance of regulating media to prevent harmful dissemination, citing an example from Johor where a social media game led to violence.

Mr. Sharjeel Memon's Response:

He stated that Pakistan already has laws on fake news, including defamation laws, the PECA Act, and cybercrime laws enforced by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Victims of false social media content can file complaints with FIA, and defamation cases can be pursued in court.

Third Audience Question:

Imtiaz Jamal Mughal, Chief Editor of Global Peace International Magazine, asked how lawmakers can ensure AI-generated regulations are not used to avoid accountability but instead strengthen transparency and trust, noting that genuine government failures are sometimes dismissed as AI-generated fake news.

Sharjeel Memon's Response:

He acknowledged the validity of the question, emphasizing that laws apply to both AI-generated and non-AI-generated content. If news is based on reality, it cannot be challenged, but fake news can be subject to legal action. He recognized concerns about potential misuse of laws to suppress journalism but stressed that accountability is essential. Journalism independence must be respected, but false or fabricated scandals must be addressed by law.

Conclusion

The session closed with a focus on the need for responsible legislation, enforcement, and public awareness to combat misinformation while protecting journalistic freedom.

The Moderator concluded that parliaments are not powerless in the digital age. Through legislation, ethical standards, oversight, and public digital literacy, democratic institutions can counter misinformation and ensure that technology strengthens, rather than undermines, democratic trust.

DAY-II
Thursday, 5 th February 2026
PARALLEL BREAKOUT SESSIONS
SESSION-C
Legislating for Survival: Climate Resilience and Vulnerable Voices

Starts at 12:00 PM
Theme Pillar: Peace & Resilience
Venue: Conference Hall, PC Hotel, Karachi
Hon. Mr. Muhammad Qasim Soomro, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh invited all the guest for this theme. The distinguish parliamentarians are:

Moderator/Chair:
Hon. Senator Sherry Rehman, Chairperson Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Senate of Pakistan

Panelists:
- Hon. Mr. Muhammad Qasim Soomro, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh
- Hon. Mr. Muhammad Ahmad Khan Leghari, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab
- Hon. Mr. Tamkeen Akhtar Niazi, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan
- Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Chair's Opening Remarks
The post-tea break session was formally reconvened by Hon. Senator Sherry Rehman, Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Senate of Pakistan. In her opening remarks, the Chair framed climate change not as a distant environmental concern but as an immediate governance and survival challenge directly impacting water security, public health, food systems, and social stability.

She emphasized that climate change must be understood through the lens of human security, particularly for women, children, rural communities, and other marginalized populations who bear the disproportionate burden of climate disasters. Highlighting Pakistan's increasing exposure to floods, droughts, heatwaves, and water stress, she underscored the responsibility of legislatures at both federal and provincial levels to move beyond rhetoric toward rights-based, inclusive, and implementable climate legislation.

The Chair noted that while awareness has increased, the real challenge lies in translating policy commitments into locally grounded action, supported by legislation, institutional coordination, and public accountability.

Panelist Intervention: Hon. Muhammad Ahmad Khan Leghari
Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Hon. Muhammad Ahmad Khan Leghari focused his intervention on the deepening water crisis and its implications for Pakistan's sustainability and governance. He cautioned against overreliance on technologically attractive but fiscally unrealistic solutions such as large-scale desalination, noting that while countries like Saudi Arabia and Singapore have implemented desalination successfully, such models are capital-intensive and unsuitable for countries facing severe fiscal constraints.

He highlighted that Pakistan's public debt stands at an unsustainable level, making high-cost infrastructure solutions impractical. He stressed that even Punjab, often considered resource-rich, is rapidly exhausting its groundwater reserves, with many regions already classified as water-scarce.

Hon. Leghari argued that behavioral change must be at the center of water sustainability efforts. He noted that Pakistan is among the world's highest per-capita users of water, largely due to the perception that water is an infinite resource. Simple consumption practices such as excessive domestic use and unchecked agricultural extraction are accelerating depletion.

He warned that the solarization of tube wells, while helpful in addressing energy costs, risks further depleting groundwater if not regulated. Drawing comparisons with Tehran, Cape Town, and Australia, he emphasized that water rationing and crisis scenarios are no longer hypothetical but imminent.

He concluded by stressing that legislation must promote conservation, regulation, and public awareness, recognizing water as a finite and precious national asset.

Panelist Intervention: Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah
Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah addressed climate change through the lens of unpredictability and intensification of natural systems. He explained that global warming does not simply alter seasons but disrupts established climatic patterns, leading to erratic floods, heatwaves, droughts, and glacial melt.

He emphasized the importance of documenting loss and damage, particularly in flood-affected and climate-vulnerable regions, to ensure accountability and informed policy responses. He proposed the creation of a dedicated catastrophe fund, suggesting that existing legislative expenditures could be rationalized to finance climate resilience initiatives.

Hon. Shah highlighted the need for political courage, stating that climate change is already "in our face" and requires legislatures to reallocate priorities and resources. He argued that provinces must be willing to redirect funds toward preparedness, mitigation, and support for affected communities rather than maintaining inefficient expenditure patterns.

He also stressed that climate resilience must be treated as a shared national responsibility, requiring coordination between federal and provincial governments.

Panelist Intervention: Hon. Qasim Soomro
Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh

Hon. Qasim Soomro focused on Sindh's unique vulnerability, particularly regarding water scarcity, drought-prone districts, and irrigation system disruptions. He highlighted how climate variability has severely affected agricultural livelihoods and rural economies, especially in arid and semi-arid regions.

He emphasized the importance of district-level vulnerability mapping, improved water governance, and the deployment of technology-based solutions such as water sensors and early warning systems. These tools, he argued, are essential for monitoring water availability, predicting shortages, and responding proactively to climate risks.

Hon. Soomro underscored that legislation must be locally driven, considering regional realities rather than adopting one-size-fits-all national solutions. He called for stronger coordination between provincial departments, local governments, and communities to ensure effective implementation.

He concluded by stressing that resilience-building requires sustained investment in institutional capacity, not just emergency response mechanisms.

Panelist Intervention: Hon. Tamkeen Akhtar Niazi
Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Hon. Tamkeen Akhtar Niazi centered her intervention on vulnerable communities, particularly women engaged in informal agricultural labor who are disproportionately affected by climate shocks yet remain largely invisible in compensation and relief frameworks.

She highlighted how cloudbursts, floods, and heatwaves in regions such as South Punjab have devastated livelihoods, while existing disaster response mechanisms often fail to recognize women as independent economic actors. As a result, women agricultural workers frequently receive little or no compensation despite bearing the brunt of climate impacts.

Hon. Niazi emphasized the need for gender-responsive climate legislation, ensuring that relief, insurance, and adaptation policies explicitly account for women's roles and vulnerabilities. She also pointed to contradictions between policy formulation and execution, calling for stronger oversight to ensure that climate initiatives reach those most in need.

She concluded by urging legislators to prioritize inclusive representation in climate decision-making processes, noting that resilience cannot be achieved while large segments of society remain excluded.

Chair's Interventions and Reflections

Throughout the panel discussion, Hon. Senator Sherry Rehman provided contextual reflections, linking individual interventions to broader national and global challenges. She highlighted the limitations of global climate finance mechanisms, noting that countries most responsible for emissions receive most of the green financing, while vulnerable nations like Pakistan are left behind.

She emphasized that while international frameworks such as the SDGs provide important targets, implementation gaps particularly regarding women's protection and inclusion remain severe. Drawing on policy examples, she highlighted the importance of social protection programs, land rights for women, and direct cash transfers as practical mechanisms for resilience-building.

The Chair stressed that climate action is not solely an environmental issue but a moral, political, and governance imperative, requiring sustained commitment beyond conferences and declarations.

Audience Interaction

During the Q&A session, participants, particularly youth and young professionals raised questions regarding AI justice, SDGs, urban vulnerability, women's safety, and the role of international institutions such as the UNDP. Audience members emphasized the need for meaningful youth engagement and questioned how marginalized voices can be better integrated into climate policymaking.
Panelists and the Chair responded by reiterating that while global advocacy is important, domestic political will, legislative reform, and budgetary prioritization remain critical. The discussion highlighted the gap between global narratives and local realities, reinforcing the need for grounded, context-specific solutions.

Concluding Observations

In her closing remarks, the Chair reaffirmed that legislating for climate resilience is inseparable from peace, equity, and social justice. She emphasized that climate change is already reshaping Pakistan's social and economic landscape and that legislatures must act decisively to protect vulnerable populations. The session concluded with a shared recognition that while challenges are immense, inclusive, rights-based, and locally driven legislative action offers a viable pathway toward resilience, stability, and sustainable development.

DAY-II THURSDAY, 5 TH FEBRUARY 2026
PARALLEL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Session D

"Making Parliaments Powerful --- Ensuring Responsible Executive through Vigilant Parliamentary Accountability"

Theme Pillar: ● Trust

Venue: Grand Ballroom, PC Hotel, Karachi

11:45 HRS-1:15

This session examined how parliaments can reinforce their constitutional role as guardians of transparency and accountability in governance. It focused on strengthening oversight mechanisms such as Public Accounts Committees, revitalizing Question Hour, and safeguarding Members' right to hold the Executive to account. The discussion also explored ways to enhance the quality of parliamentary debate through non-partisan research support, data-driven analysis, and institutionalized public hearings that bring citizens and experts into legislative processes. Emphasis was placed on ensuring timely consideration and follow-up of committee reports, and on exploring carefully defined powers that enable committees to effectively scrutinize public expenditure and financial irregularities.

Chair:
Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar, Chairman, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Moderator:
Hon. Ms. Sadia Javed, Member Provincial Assembly of Sindh

Panelists:

- Hon. Senator Syed Masroor Ahsan, Senate of Pakistan
- Hon. Mr. Muhammad Mobeen Arif, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan
- Hon. Syed Ali Haider Gilani, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab
- Hon. Mr. Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab
- Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Opening Remarks
Moderator, Hon. Ms. Sadia Javed, Member Provincial Assembly of Sindh

The session opened with a welcome to foreign delegates, distinguished guests, students, and media, focusing on the theme "Making Parliaments Powerful --- Ensuring Responsible Executive through Vigilant Parliamentary Accountability".

The moderator, Ms. Sadia Javed, introduced the Chair, Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar, Chairman, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan, and panel of notable parliamentarians: Hon. Senator Syed Masroor Ahsan, Senate of Pakistan; Hon. Mr. Muhammad Mobeen Arif, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan; Hon. Syed Ali Haider Gilani, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab; Hon. Mr. Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, and Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Chair: Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar, Chairman, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar opened the session on the empowerment of Parliament and accountability, noting that empowering Parliament has been a continuous struggle due to ongoing conflicts with other state institutions. He emphasized that parliamentary sovereignty is a legitimate right enshrined in each country's constitution. As Commonwealth nations, most follow a federal parliamentary system, sharing similar issues, backgrounds, and evolutions, though some have experienced smoother progress than others. He highlighted that frequent interventions and disruptions of democracy have weakened these institutions.

He framed the discussion as a "clawback" of rights not only for parliamentarians but also for their constituents, emphasizing that a member of an assembly seeking empowerment is advocating for the empowerment of their people. He stressed that the most powerful tool for parliamentary empowerment is financial control, as controlling the purse strings of government is the most effective means of accountability and influencing policy direction. This financial authority, he suggested, is central to strengthening parliamentary oversight and ensuring that the executive remains answerable to the people's representatives.

Naveed Qamar Sahib continued the discussion, highlighting that budget-making is the second most important task for a parliamentary system, after electing the leader of the house. He described the budget process as the most powerful tool for parliamentary empowerment, but stressed that it must be used appropriately. He noted that governments often prefer to present a budget as a fait accompli, expecting assemblies to rubber-stamp it, despite the formalities of debates, demands for grants, cut motions, and the finance bill. He emphasized that if legislators do not scrutinize the budget, they risk becoming puppets of the executive. He argued that reclaiming this power is essential to ensure that the will of the people is reflected in government policy.

He shared that he and Mr. Mubeen are members of the Finance Committee of the National Assembly, and noted a historic first: last year, for the first time in 75 years of Pakistan's parliamentary history (excluding periods of military rule), the Finance Committee reviewed and passed the budget before it was presented to the full assembly. The Ministry of Finance and the Federal Board of Revenue were held accountable for every line item in the Finance Bill. He described this as a significant step forward in parliamentary empowerment, though he acknowledged that much more remains to be done to reverse historical trends. This development, he suggested, is a major move in the right direction for strengthening parliamentary oversight of the executive.

Naveed Qamar Sahib continued, addressing colleagues from various assemblies present in the room. He emphasized that it is time to replicate the recent progress made in Pakistan across the region, noting that the plenary is not the appropriate forum for detailed budget scrutiny. Plenary sessions offer general political positions, not the technical examination that budget-making requires. He called on members from government benches, who constitute most of those present, to take the initiative, as opposition members lack the capacity to enforce greater government accountability. He urged parliamentarians to transcend party lines to transform budget and policy-making, acknowledging that this may require a struggle. He underscored that the spirit of any constitution, written or unwritten, is that parliament passes the budget as the representative of the people, embodying the will of the people. Bureaucracies, whether acting independently or under agreements with donor agencies, must be accountable to parliament and its committees. He also highlighted the importance of the Auditor General's report, which reviews government expenditure after the budget is passed, ensuring that funds are spent appropriately and that any misuse is penalized. He stressed that this post-budget oversight is as critical as the budget-making process itself.

Naveed Qamar Sahib noted that, in Pakistan and similar countries, a lack of continuity in parliamentary oversight has meant that government expenditure continues, but scrutiny often lags, resulting in significant backlogs. He explained that this often means attempting to audit spending from decades past, when those responsible may no longer be available, making accountability difficult. He argued that instead of focusing on clearing old backlogs, the Public Accounts Committee should prioritize current government spending and work backwards. This approach ensures that the present government feels accountable, rather than focusing on governments from 20, 15, or even five years ago. He emphasized that real-time oversight is essential for meaningful parliamentary accountability.

Naveed Qamar Sahib emphasized that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) would be more effective if it focused on current decision-makers, requiring those who made the decisions to answer for their actions, rather than allowing them to deflect responsibility by claiming they were not in office at the time. He stressed that the power to improve parliamentary oversight lies in the hands of legislators. The tools for accountability are available, and if they are not, parliamentarians have the authority to create them, without being beholden to external forces. He urged members to follow established patterns and ensure that assembly members and their constituents are fully engaged in policy-making, financial oversight, and holding the government accountable.

Concluding his remarks, Naveed Qamar Sahib thanked the participants and announced that he would now invite members to speak.

Naveed Qamar Sahib introduced Hon. Mr. Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. He highlighted that when discussing the empowerment of the legislature relative to the executive, they are often seeking to reclaim power from individuals close to them, but emphasized that this effort is worthwhile.

Hon. Mr. Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Mr. Ahmad thanked the chair for the introduction and addressed the audience of parliamentarians and delegates from CPA Asia and Southeast Asia regions. He described the discussion as timely, noting that democracy worldwide is under stress, and highlighted the need to balance executive power with the will of the people, as set out by Sayed Naveed Qamar. Ahmed, a first-term parliamentarian in his second year in office, shared his background, noting that he began his political career in local government and served as chairman of a district council before being elected to the Provincial Assembly. He observed that, as a young legislator, much of the work in parliaments and assemblies appears to be largely procedural.

Mr. Ahmad observed that much of parliamentary work is currently conducted as a procedural exercise, simply to comply with the rules and procedures set out in official books. He suggested that if democracy is becoming overly procedural, it is time to rethink these procedures, making them more ambitious and demanding. He argued for stricter requirements for assemblies to legislate and for committees to follow specific protocols, preventing situations where a bill is introduced in the house, reviewed by a standing committee the next morning, and passed in the afternoon without meaningful scrutiny. Ahmed called for more robust procedures to compel greater democratic engagement. He indicated he would address several additional themes in his remarks.

Ahmad noted that, as Syed Naveed Qamar Sahib mentioned, Commonwealth countries share a common history and legacy, including a significant challenge in Pakistan: administrative asymmetry inherited from the colonial era. He explained that the subcontinent was once governed by a small number of officials, and after Pakistan's independence and the adoption of its constitution, there was insufficient debate on the country's administrative structure. As a result, a powerful bureaucracy remains, making it difficult even for the executive to control government operations.

Speaking as chairman of a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in Punjab. Ahmad explained that Punjab has three PACs. Two are standard PACs that split their workload across alternate years. However, following devolution reforms 20 years ago, the audit for the third year was intended to be referred to PACs at the provincial level. He highlighted this as a structural issue impacting parliamentary oversight.

Ahmad explained that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) III, which he chairs, handles audits at the district and local levels, including basic health units, rural health centers, and high schools. In 2024, the provincial assembly took up local government audits for the first time, confronting a 20-year backlog. Over a year and a half, PAC III disposed of 21 audit reports, clearing the last five years of backlog. He noted that looking beyond five years is no longer productive.

He described a new approach: rather than reviewing audit reports paragraph by paragraph, which is repetitive and time-consuming, the committee now groups similar audit paras together, allowing them to resolve hundreds of issues in a single meeting. Ahmad emphasized that the real work of PACs is not to focus on minor clerical errors or allowances, but to assess government performance audits. He called for a shift away from monolithic roles, especially for treasury bench members, and urged political parties to play a larger role in this transformation. He stressed that PACs should focus on evaluating the performance of government, not just routine accounting issues.

Mr. Ahmad raised a series of questions about the outsourcing of a private hospital: Why was it outsourced? Did it produce sufficient results? How much did the government spend on it? Was there an increase in the number of beneficiaries? He emphasized that these are the kinds of questions that all assemblies should be addressing, marking the next stage of accountability for parliamentarians and their institutions.

Ahmad emphasized that a primary responsibility of provincial legislatures is to ensure devolution to the grassroots, as mandated by the constitution, which grants provincial assemblies the power to devolve political, administrative, and financial authority to elected local representatives. He noted that this has not been implemented in the past 20 years, despite the clarity of the constitution.

To address this, a group of about 106 members of the Punjab Assembly, including Syed Ali Haider Gilani (parliamentary leader of the People's Party), members of PMLN, PTI, and PMLQ, formed a local government caucus-the largest parliamentary caucus in Pakistan. Ahmed represents the government, and Haider is a coalition partner. The group passed a resolution in the Punjab Assembly urging the National Assembly and Senate to amend the constitution, as provincial governments have not complied with devolution provisions.

Mr. Ahmad called for greater activism within parties and assemblies, stressing that political parties must provide members like Mubeen and Haider with the necessary tools to advance devolution. He concluded his remarks with a thank you.

Hon. Senator, Syed Masroor Ahsan, Senate of Pakistan

Hon. Senator, Syed Masroor Ahsan, emphasized that the ongoing political tug-of-war does not cause disappointment. Democracy, by its nature, involves efforts to deliver benefits to the people, and dialogue continues even in these challenging circumstances. The speaker noted that dialogue has historically brought people together, even in times of war, and that issues have been resolved through negotiation. In Pakistan, political parties and parliamentarians have matured, maintaining their commitment to the democratic process in all situations, including

difficult ones. The speaker cited the persistence of parliamentary democratic struggle, despite setbacks, and highlighted the sacrifices made by party leadership. They stressed that Pakistan's survival depends on democracy, which is the path to empowerment for its people. The speaker also referenced Pakistan's constitutional history, noting that a constitution was created during Ayub Khan's era (1954-1956), but the people ultimately prevailed, and in 1973, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto gave Pakistan a unified constitution.

Mr. Masroor highlighted the significance of the Republic of Pakistan's formation, noting that all political parties, even those in opposition, supported the 1973 Constitution. This constitution enshrined fundamental rights, including those for the people and parliamentarians, and detailed these rights extensively. The speaker acknowledged that a period followed in which Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was removed from power, but emphasized that this did not cause them to lose hope. Their commitment to working for the people of Pakistan and securing their rights persisted. The struggle continued, and eventually, their party returned to power and worked to empower the people. The speaker concluded by noting that this process of striving for democratic rights and empowerment has continued uninterrupted.

Mr. Masroor reflected on a period when democracy in Pakistan was derailed, but emphasized that through dialogue and parliamentary processes, it is possible to deliver to the people consistently. The speaker noted that their leader, Benazir Bhutto, was martyred, yet they remained undeterred and continued to focus on strengthening parliament and delivering to the people. They highlighted the restoration of the 1973 Constitution and its rights, and the passage of the 18th Amendment under Pakistan's President, which devolved powers to the people. The speaker referenced a committee formed in the Senate, chaired by a previous speaker that contributed to this process.

He acknowledged that in Pakistan, the parliament is still learning and evolving, as Mr. Ahmed noted, and is not in a rush. They highlighted Sindh as a model, noting that power has been devolved to local levels in the province, with administration organized by town. Local bodies in Sindh have been elected and have been granted powers, whether good or bad, and this is part of the democratic process where the people judge the outcomes. The Sindh Assembly has played an important role in legislation and empowering the people.

Mr. Masroor highlighted a significant development: citizens now have the right to submit petitions to the Senate, which are referred to Standing Committees. These committees conduct personal hearings, listen to the petitioners, and provide recommendations. The speaker noted that the Senate's role is primarily advisory, as executive powers lie elsewhere, but it can offer constructive suggestions to bring important issues to the forefront. The speaker also mentioned that matters of public importance are addressed through call-attention notices, resolutions, and motions, which are used to raise and discuss key issues in the Senate. As commented: 'We talk about it. We move resolutions. We move motions'.

Hon. Mr. Muhammad Mobeen Arif, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Hon. Mr. Muhammad Mobeen Arif opened with greetings and expressed gratitude to Naveed Qamar Sahib and foreign dignitaries, acknowledging the presence of members from the Sindh, Punjab, KP Assemblies, and Senate. The session's topic was empowering parliament, which the speaker intended to focus on. Emphasizing parliament's role as a representative body for the people of Pakistan, the speaker highlighted its oversight function, particularly through committees, referencing Naveed Qamar's explanation of the Public Accounts Committee. The speaker, a member of the Finance Committee, credited Naveed Qamar for the first time in Pakistan's history that the Finance Bill was brought to this committee for clause-by-clause discussion. The speaker contrasted this with previous budget sessions in the National Assembly, where Finance Bills were presented in June, followed by speeches and passed by majority vote. This time, the Finance Bill was thoroughly examined, including the Income Tax Ordinance, Sales Tax Act, Customs Act, Federal Excise Duty Amendments, and several other bills.

Mr. Mobeen noted that certain items should not have been included in the Finance Bill, but the government insisted they be included, assuring that it would not happen next time. The Finance Committee discussed everything thoroughly, making more than 35 amendments, a first in Pakistan's history, which were adopted before the Finance Act was passed. The speaker emphasized the role and duties of parliamentarians, highlighting Question Hour as an integral part of sessions, where members should raise questions and supplementary questions, as is done in Pakistan. He expressed uncertainty about whether countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives have similar Question Hour practices. The Finance Committee is also working on establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office, which is expected to be set up soon. The speaker noted that budgeting is a year-long process, unlike in many countries where it spans 3-6 months with daily discussions. The speaker expressed hope that Pakistan will adopt this approach, with Naveed Qamar's support.

He expressed deep respect for a senior colleague, describing him as a teacher for many young parliamentarians. In committee meetings, he gives ample time to speak, creating an atmosphere similar to a drawing room where thorough discussions can take place. The speaker emphasized that the role of parliamentarians is not limited to legislation; post-legislative scrutiny is also essential. After an Act is passed, it is important to check whether the rules made under it are in accordance with the Act.

Mr. Mobeen recommended that the first rules following an Act should be made by parliament, and routine scrutiny should be conducted to ensure consistency with the Act. He noted Pakistan has four provincial assemblies and two regional assemblies, and the National Assembly serves as a constituent assembly. He emphasized that as members of the National Assembly, a constitutional assembly, it is their duty to oversee whether provincial assemblies are legislating in accordance with the relevant Acts. This scrutiny is also their responsibility.

Hon. Syed Ali Haider Gilani, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Hon. Mr. Ali Haider Gilani thanked and congratulated the Speaker of the Sindh Assembly, Syed Awais Qadir Shah, for hosting the second joint CPA conference in Karachi, and welcomed delegates from Pakistan and abroad. He highlighted the importance of the session's theme, "accountability and trust," quoting the Deputy Speaker of Sri Lanka's Parliament, who stated that "trust is the currency of democracy" and that this currency has devalued in recent years-a sentiment the speaker agreed with.

Mr. Gilani noted that parliament has an inherent accountability mechanism, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), as mentioned by Ahmed Iqbal. The speaker believes that if the PAC is functioning effectively, no additional accountability agencies such as anti-corruption bodies or NAB are necessary. The PAC is a constitutional requirement and a safeguard established by the framers of the constitution. He acknowledged that in recent years, the executive branch has accumulated significant power. As Chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the speaker admitted to shortcomings, including poor quality of audit paras, limited capacity of the audit department, and the failure of over 40 Punjab departments to provide appropriation accounts-a constitutional requirement. The speaker also noted a lack of interest among many members in conducting thorough scrutiny of the government, possibly finding accounting matters uninteresting, despite it being a crucial parliamentary tool.

Mr. Gilani highlighted that Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmed Khan has amended the Rules of Procedure, granting the committee powers equivalent to those of the National Assembly's committee. The Senate has started accepting public petitions, and the Punjab Assembly has also revised its rules to allow this. The speaker's PAC II committee has handled petitions, including one referred by a senator. He expressed optimism that with a supportive speaker and engaged members, the committee's work will improve. He emphasized the need to convince the executive that parliamentary scrutiny enhances government capacity and public trust, leading to good governance and increased citizen confidence.

Hon. Mr. Asif Khan, Member, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The speaker thanked the organizers and highlighted the challenges faced by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), including the 2018 merger and unfulfilled promises to the province. The speaker, a first-time parliamentarian from South Waziristan, noted the impact of military operations in the region for over 22 years and the gap between parliamentary forums and local constituencies.

The speaker outlined the progress made by the KP Provincial Assembly in parliamentary oversight, including the establishment of a comprehensive committee system, an active Public Accounts Committee, and the adoption of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business 2025, which have strengthened institutional frameworks. The speaker emphasized the need for continuous strengthening through implementation, capacity building, and modernization.

The speaker also stressed the importance of improving the quality of scrutiny, noting that committees often rely heavily on departmental explanations. Parliamentary oversight should not depend solely on the executive narrative; members need access to independent financial, legal, and policy analysis to make informed and precise inquiries focused on outcomes. Strengthening research and analytical support for committees is essential, not a luxury.

Questions from the Audience

The session opened the floor for questions, asking participants to introduce themselves and direct their queries to specific speakers.

Hon. Dr. Haji Mohammad Puad bin Zarkashi,
Speaker, Johor State Legislative Assembly

He addressed Honourable Mr. Muhammad Mobeen Arif, asking about strategies to empower the opposition in parliament, noting that structural reforms, financial autonomy, and select committees are essential for a transparent and responsive institution. The speaker, a member of the opposition, responded that committee work is bipartisan, allowing open discussion and decision-making focused on the benefit of Pakistan's people. The speaker highlighted the importance of committee work in the legislative process and expressed uncertainty about the structure of Johor's assembly.

Qazi Asif directed a question to a PTI National Assembly member regarding legislative scrutiny. The speaker emphasized that after legislation is passed, executive-made rules must be scrutinized by parliament and provincial assemblies to ensure alignment with the original Act and the constitution. The speaker noted that the primary duty of standing committee members is to ensure draft bills are consistent with the constitution, and this should be judged in committee, not in courts. The speaker also discussed local government, stating that the 18th amendment aimed to devolve power to grassroots levels, but provinces have encroached on local government functions, contrary to democratic spirit. The speaker referenced India's 1991 constitutional amendments and suggested Pakistan's political parties should collaborate on the 18th amendment and provincial autonomy.

Farah Azim Shah, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan and CPA Executive Committee member, asked Mr. Gilani what concrete steps can empower citizens and improve governance, noting that a strong parliament is essential for democracy but ineffective without strong people and governance. The speaker clarified a previous resolution in the Punjab Assembly, involving multiple parties, was a request to the federal government to ensure local government systems in provinces have permanent amendments for tenure and elections, not a rollback of the 18th amendment or a transfer of provincial authority to the federal government.

Hon. Mr. Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary, Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, discussed the Local Government Act 2025, which terminated the third tier head in Karachi, aiming to address strong executive power and ensure a constitutional tenure security system. The speaker highlighted that Punjab's strong executive has sent messages to other provinces, but this does not mean governance is compromised or dictatorial. The speaker noted that the last two budgets were non-inclusive, with South Punjab receiving less funding in health, education, and ADP compared to other regions. The speaker emphasized the role of parliamentarians in questioning the strongest actors and standing up in parliament. The speaker suggested that the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Finance could visit provincial assemblies to share expertise, noting that changes to rules of procedure can be radical and impactful.

Tahir Shah Kakar, Secretary of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, asked two questions: first, regarding Public Accounts Committee (PAC) functionality and how to handle five-year-old reports, and second, about the role of parliament in scrutinizing rules made by the government. The speaker responded that the aim is not to shift responsibility away from the government but to ensure parliamentary scrutiny of rules to match the spirit of the law. The speaker also discussed the importance of consolidating audit reports and covering recent years first.

Hon. Ms. Kalsoom Niaz, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan (National Party), asked how parliamentary committees can be strengthened to monitor the executive, especially in provincial assemblies. The speaker responded that significant amendments have been made in the National Assembly of Punjab, giving committee powers equivalent to Senate and National Assembly committees. The speaker highlighted the importance of follow-up meetings in PAC 2 and cautioned against the term "as prescribed" in draft bills, as it can hinder implementation.

Syeda Marvi Rashdi, Member of Provincial Assembly Sindh (Pakistan People's Party), praised the panelists and the discussion on making parliament powerful. The speaker commented on the statements made by Honourable Gilani, noting that a powerful PAC reduces the need for agencies like NAB. The speaker appreciated the creation of multiple PACs (1, 2) and the increased powers given to committees in the Punjab Assembly, expressing a desire to see similar empowerment in the Sindh Assembly.

Mr. Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Chairman of PAC in Sindh Assembly, raised questions about the practice of clubbing 400 paras together and the effectiveness of audit work, as well as PAC's follow-up on directives to the chief secretary. The speaker responded that clubbing paras is done when they are similar in nature, such as accounts receivable, and directions are given on systemic issues rather than specific amounts. The speaker also criticized the quality of audit observations and suggested reforms in the audit process, including improving the expertise of audit officers. The speaker referenced the Westminster model, where the National Audit Office is merged with Parliament, and suggested similar reforms in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The session concluded that a strong, empowered Parliament is essential for democratic governance. Strengthening parliamentary committees, especially PACs, enhancing research and analytical capabilities, and ensuring effective follow-up on audit and committee reports are critical to improving accountability and transparency. The 18th Amendment's goals of devolution to local governments remain incomplete and require political consensus and constitutional safeguards. The discussion underscored the need for continuous institutional reforms, capacity building, and cross-assembly collaboration to make Parliament more effective, inclusive, and responsive to citizens' needs. The session ended with a call for ongoing cooperation among provincial and national assemblies to share best practices and strengthen democratic institutions in Pakistan.

LUNCH BREAK

POST LUNCH @ 2:30 PM

DAY 2

PLENARY SESSION – II

"Gender, Tech and Trust: Protecting Women Leaders from Online Violence and Digital Manipulation"

Themes: ◯ **Innovation** • ◯ **Inclusion** • ◯ **Trust**

Venue: Grand Ballroom, PC Hotel, Karachi

1430-1600 hrs.

This session focused on protecting women leaders from gender-based violence including online harassment, deepfakes, and digital violence, strengthening legal frameworks, parliamentary protocols, and cross-party solidarity mechanisms.

Moderators:

Hon. Ms. Sumeta Afzal Syed, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh
& Hon. Ms. Nida Khuhro, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh

Opening of the Session

The session was opened by Hon. Ms. Sumeta Afzal Syes, Member of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and CPA Asia. She welcomed distinguished guests to the plenary on gender, tech, and trust, organized in partnership with UN Women. She introduced herself as a legislator with a keen interest in women's political participation, governance, and the responsible use of technology in public life. Co-hosting the session was Ms. Nida Khuhro, Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Population, who brought valuable experience in gender, media, and public discourse.

The moderator invited the first speaker of the plenary session, Hon. Ms. Professor Jane Roscoe, board member of the British Council Global and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Creative Arts in the UK, was invited to share her insights on the topic. The session sought to foster a meaningful, solution-oriented dialogue on protecting women leaders from online violence and digital manipulation, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement to address this pressing issue.

Hon. Ms. Professor Jane Roscoe,
Board member of the British Council Global and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Creative Arts in the UK

The speaker expressed pleasure and admiration at seeing many women in the room, congratulating female members of parliament for their important work and role modeling in government and society. She emphasized the importance of women's representation in government but highlighted a critical challenge: the prevalence of various forms of violence against female politicians, including verbal abuse, online trolling, stalking, and other harassment. These threats make political careers less attractive and hinder efforts to encourage more women to engage in civic and governmental roles.

The speaker highlighted a key challenge: violence and abuse faced by female politicians, including verbal abuse, online trolling, and stalking, which creates an emotional burden and makes the job less attractive for women considering public service. The speaker referenced Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, who spoke about the toll of everyday sexism on her leadership. The speaker noted that while many new female leaders aim to be open and accessible, this can make them vulnerable to abuse. The speaker noted the emotional toll this abuse takes on women leaders, referencing former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's public comments on the impact of everyday sexism on her leadership. She acknowledged that many new female leaders are adopting more open and accessible approaches to governance, which is a positive development but also increases their vulnerability to abuse.

The speaker referenced a major study conducted in Wales, which surveyed female local politicians and national executive members about their experiences in politics. The women reported being told that abuse is a "cost" of political life — a price they must pay and that they should "grow a thick skin" and accept harassment as part of the job. She also cited research from the UK, conducted with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and CPA, found that 60% of women in parliamentary roles have experienced hate speech, disinformation, disclosure of personal information, and psychological discomfort. Technology has made it easier to target female politicians, although male politicians also face abuse, women are more likely to encounter it. A study in Wales found that female politicians at local and national levels reported being told that abuse is a cost of politics and were advised to "grow a thick skin," a normalization that the speaker said must stop. The speaker emphasized that this normalization of abuse must end. To move forward, it is essential to first understand the nature and specific experiences of this abuse so that targeted solutions can be developed. Additionally, the speaker stressed the need for broader cultural change to create a safer, more supportive environment for women in political leadership.

The address underscores the need to tackle these challenges head-on to create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics, ensuring that their participation is not deterred by violence or harassment. This is essential to maintaining diverse representation and strengthening democratic institutions.

Hon. Ms. Asma Ehtisham-ul-Haq,
Member, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Hon. Ms. Asma Ehtisham-ul-Haq, a Member of Punjab Assembly since 2024, Chairperson of the Women Development Committee, and active member of the Women Parliamentary Caucus Punjab, addressed a forum on democracy, technology, and trust. She highlighted the issue of gender-based violence against women in politics, including online harassment, deepfakes, and digital abuse, emphasizing that such attacks aim to silence women and are a democratic issue, not just a women's issue. She referenced historical women leaders like Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto, who sacrificed for democracy.

She shared that in Punjab, significant progress has been made under strong leadership to improve the safety of women. Initiatives include the establishment of women's police stations to report harassment and digital crimes, as well as the use of emergency hotlines and mobile apps to make reporting more accessible. She noted that a harassment bill has been submitted in the Punjab Assembly, thanks to the Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan. Under the leadership of Punjab's woman Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the province has taken steps to ensure women's safety, including a zero-tolerance policy on violence against women Key initiatives include Women Police Stations, digital reporting via live chat, video call, emergency helpline, and mobile apps, as well as virtual women police stations, protection centers, and legal reforms. She called for stronger legal frameworks, justice system responsiveness, and internal political party protocols to address these challenges. She stressed that empowering women in the digital sphere is essential for trust, democracy, and a stronger society. She reflected that Women in India are also benefitting from organized methods for safe services, including protection services and medical support.

The speaker emphasized the need to strengthen justice systems and ensure timely protection for victims of online violence. She also called for critical studies and programs to address these challenges, highlighting that sustained efforts are necessary to combat the increasing threats faced by women in public life. The speaker concluded by reiterating that online violence against women leaders is a red line for democratic societies, and policies must prioritize their safety. She called for continued innovation, cross-regional cooperation, and the extension of support systems to ensure justice and protection for women in leadership roles. The address highlighted Punjab's proactive approach as a model for other regions, emphasizing that safeguarding women's participation in politics is essential to preserving democracy.

Mr. Jamshed M. Kazi
Country Representative, UN Women

The speaker expressed deep gratitude for being part of a unique session featuring women speakers, emphasizing that any discussion lacking women's voices is incomplete and results in suboptimal policy outcomes. He added that democratic institutions are being tested not only by traditional challenges but also by rapid technological forces, including algorithms and anonymous online platforms. The speaker commended the organizers for addressing a theme that is no longer emerging but is urgent and essential: the intersection of gender, technology, and trust. These three areas are interconnected and form the foundation on which 21st-century democracy will either thrive or fail.

The speech highlighted a stark reality: digital violence against women leaders is not a side effect of technology but a deliberate weapon of exclusion. It is systemic, scalable, and designed to succeed where legal protections are lacking. Evidence presented included that 70% of women human rights defenders, journalists, and activists experience online harassment and abuse regularly, not as isolated incidents. Among women journalists, 42% reported that online abuse escalated into offline harm, including stalking and physical threats, a figure that has more than doubled since 2020. Globally, 1.8 billion women and girls, 44% of the world's female population, lack legal protection against cyber harassment and cyberstalking. This is not a series of isolated events but a widespread infrastructure of intimidation.

The speaker challenged the notion that technology is neutral, calling it a dangerous myth. Technology amplifies existing power imbalances, and when gender inequality is present, technology becomes a multiplier of that inequality. For women in politics, activism, and journalism, digital spaces have shifted from platforms of political participation to arenas of humiliation, coordinated disinformation, gender surveillance, and threats to safety. The rise of generative AI has introduced new forms of abuse, including deep fake pornography, voice cloning, and AI-generated disinformation campaigns that can be deployed cheaply and at scale. Notably, 95% of online deep fakes are non-consensual pornographic images, 99% targeting women. The "mesosphere," an ecosystem of extreme misogyny, is increasingly promoted by algorithms and is influencing millions of young people, especially men and boys, across the world.

The speaker added regional data and provided regional context, citing a 2025 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) covering 33 Asia-Pacific countries. It found that 60% of women parliamentarians have been targeted by hate speech, disinformation, image abuse, or doxing online. In parliamentary settings, 85% of online attacks against women come from the public, with 59% of threats and 45% of psychological harassment originating from public sources. In Pakistan, a December 2025 investigative report by Fight for All Pakistan documented 171 cases of digital violence against women, including journalists, activists, and religious and ethnic minorities, within three months. These campaigns reached over 106 million users. The report emphasized that digital violence in Pakistan is structural, often linked to misogyny, sectarianism, and political motives, and combined with extremist narratives and blasphemy accusations, it fuels real-world violence and pushes women out of civic life. Key barriers to women's political participation in Pakistan and Indonesia include violence in public and private spaces, lack of party support, limited mobility, and disproportionate family responsibilities.

The speaker underscored that trust is the currency of democracy. Without it, institutions falter, citizens disengage, and governance becomes ineffective. When women leaders face relentless online harassment, public trust in democratic institutions erodes, as half the population sees a system that fails to protect its representatives. This leads to reduced political participation, self-censorship by women journalists, and discourages young women from pursuing leadership roles. The cumulative effect is not only fewer women in politics but poorer governance outcomes for society as a whole, as democracy cannot claim legitimacy when half the population is intimidated into silence.

The speech concluded by framing digital violence against women as a democratic emergenc not just a women's issue. It called for urgent action through legal reforms that criminalize digital abuse, platform accountability with transparency and rapid response mechanisms, investment in specialized cybercrime units, and parliamentary codes of conduct to enforce zero tolerance for sexist and abusive content. Additionally, it emphasized the need to amplify women's voices and leadership, not just their safety concerns, and to foster cultural change by engaging male allies. The speaker stressed that the choices made now in legislation, technology design, and institutional accountability will determine whether digital spaces become tools of liberation or oppression for women in public life.

Hon. Dr. Fouzia Hameed
Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh

The speaker, Hon. Dr. Fouzia Hameed, delivered a powerful address emphasizing the growing threat of digital violence against women in political leadership across Asia and the Pacific. She noted that while technology has provided new avenues for communication, mobilization, and political engagement, it has also become a weapon used to silence women in politics, posing a serious threat to democratic institutions. The speech highlighted that online harassment, threats, and character assassination are increasingly prevalent, often occurring in private spaces and spreading rapidly through social media platforms. These attacks are frequently gender-based, targeting women not for their policies but for their identity, questioning their competence and morality, and dragging their families into false narratives. Tools such as deep fakes, fake images, and coordinated trolling are used to intimidate, exhaust, and ultimately push women out of public life, with the goal of silencing them. This silencing reduces public debate, weakens institutions, and erodes trust in democracy.

The speaker further highlighted the gendered nature of cyber harassment in South Asia, including Pakistan, noting that data shows women are the majority of cyber harassment victims, and a significant portion of politically targeted online abuse is directed at women. Existing laws are often gender-neutral in language but fail to address the specific challenges women face in digital spaces. Although cybercrime is criminalized, political digital violence against women is not adequately recognized or addressed in legal frameworks. Additionally, women are frequently excluded from digital innovation and governance, and online spaces remain largely unregulated, allowing abuse to proliferate.

To address these challenges, the speaker proposed several actions. First, disinformation, online threats, and AI-enabled abuse against women leaders should be legally recognized as attacks on democracy. Second, parliamentarians must update laws to keep pace with rapidly evolving technology, including artificial intelligence and automated harassment, as outdated laws and weak enforcement are insufficient. Third, social media and digital platforms must be held accountable, prioritizing user safety over profit. Fourth, women must be included in AI development, policy-making, and digital governance to prevent bias and ensure inclusive digital futures. Fifth, since digital violence crosses borders, a coordinated regional response is essential. Finally, parliamentarians should choose courage over comfort, protection over silence, and trust over fear, ensuring women can lead safely and strengthening democracy.

In conclusion, the speaker stressed that protecting women's digital spaces is essential to safeguarding the future of democratic leadership. Ensuring that women can participate in politics without fear is critical to the health and strength of democracy in the region and beyond. The speech calls for urgent legal reforms, greater accountability of digital platforms, inclusion of women in technology sectors, and regional collaboration to address this pressing issue, underscoring that when women lead without fear, democracy leads with strength.

Conclusion

The session highlighted that digital platforms increasingly shape political participation and public discourse, but women leaders face disproportionate levels of online gender-based violence, including harassment, misinformation, and digital intimidation. These challenges threaten individual safety, undermine democratic trust, and hinder inclusive governance. The discussion aimed to bring together lawmakers, media leaders, and development partners to explore how legislation, technology governance, media responsibility, and institutional collaboration can create safer digital spaces for women in public life.

The session concluded that protecting women's digital spaces is essential to safeguarding the future of democratic leadership. The speakers emphasized that digital violence is a democratic emergency, not just a women's issue, and that urgent action is needed through legal reforms, platform accountability, and cultural change. The initiatives in Punjab were highlighted as a model for other regions. The session called for collective action from parliaments, governments, civil society, media, and the private sector to ensure that technology strengthens democracy rather than undermines it. The message was clear: when women lead without fear, democracy is stronger for everyone.

Session Proceedings

The plenary session commenced with Hon. Ms. Sumeta Afzal Syed, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh, formally handing over the moderation to Hon. Ms. Nida Khuhro, Member, Provincial Assembly of Sindh, who guided the proceedings for this segment of the session.

Moderator's Opening and Introduction

Hon. Ms. Nida Khuhro opened the discussion by situating the session within the broader challenges facing women leaders in digital spaces. She emphasized that online harassment, disinformation, deepfakes, and coordinated digital abuse are no longer peripheral concerns but central threats to democratic participation, trust, and inclusion. She underscored the responsibility of parliament to respond through legislation, oversight, and cross-party solidarity.

The moderator then invited Hon. Ms. Shazia Marri, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan, to deliver her remarks, noting her extensive legislative experience and long-standing advocacy for social justice and gender equality.

Panelist Intervention

Hon. Ms. Shazia Marri, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan

Hon. Ms. Shazia Marri began by highlighting that discussions on gender, technology, and trust must be grounded in lived realities rather than abstractions. She stated that digital violence has tangible, deeply personal, and politically damaging consequences, particularly for women who choose to enter public life.

She observed that while digital platforms were initially celebrated as tools for empowerment and participation, they have increasingly become spaces of intimidation, distortion, and organized abuse against women leaders. Drawing on empirical evidence from Pakistan's 2024 general elections, she cited documented cases of gendered disinformation, noting that a significant majority of such attacks specifically targeted women politicians through false allegations, manipulated images, and AI-altered content.

Hon. Marri emphasized that these attacks were neither isolated nor spontaneous, but coordinated efforts aimed at delegitimizing women's presence in politics and discouraging their participation. She shared her personal experience of being targeted by fabricated allegations circulated online, which falsely claimed the recovery of large sums of money from her residence. Despite successfully challenging these claims through legal channels, she noted that the primary perpetrators evaded accountability due to anonymity and weak platform responsiveness.

She further highlighted systemic challenges faced by women victims of digital abuse, including slow complaint mechanisms, opaque platform processes, and the disproportionate burden placed on victims to document harm while abuse continues in real time. She stressed that online violence is not merely a gender issue but a democratic one, as it undermines trust in institutions and silences over half of the population.

In concluding her remarks, Hon. Marri called for:

- Recognition of online violence as a serious political and legal harm
- Stronger implementation of mechanisms beyond existing laws
- Cross-party solidarity among women legislators
- Greater accountability of technology platforms
- A collective refusal to normalize silence in the face of digital abuse

She reaffirmed that women belong in leadership and public life, and that technology must serve democracy rather than distort it.

Panelist Intervention

Hon. Senator Farooq H. Naek, Senate of Pakistan

Following the moderator's transition, Hon. Senator Farooq H. Naek delivered his intervention, framing digital trust as the currency of democracy and inclusion as its foundation. He noted that while technology has the potential to strengthen transparency, participation, and access to information, it can also be weaponized to manipulate narratives and damage reputations.

Drawing on his legal and constitutional expertise, Senator Naek referenced Articles 9, 14, and 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan, emphasizing that online harassment and reputational harm constitute violations of fundamental rights, including the right to life, dignity, and equality before the law. He stressed that women leaders are disproportionately targeted by digital abuse, which is often gendered and character-focused in nature.

He outlined a comprehensive set of practical measures to address digital violence, including:

- Rapid response and digital safety support systems for women leaders
- Strengthening legal and procedural tools to address impersonation, harassment, and coordinated abuse
- Cross-border cooperation with platforms, regulators, and civil society
- Mandatory identification of AI-generated and manipulated content
- Political party codes of conduct and institutional focal points
- Integration of digital citizenship and media literacy into education systems

Senator Naek concluded by stressing that building parliaments of the future requires protecting trust in the digital public sphere and defending inclusion where it is most threatened—namely, the lived experiences of women in leadership.

Audience Interaction and Q&A

The session then transitioned into an interactive Question and Answer segment, facilitated by the moderator.

- Mr. Jamshed M. Kazi, Country Representative, UN Women, responded to an audience question by emphasizing the importance of prevention alongside legal remedies. He highlighted the need for institutional training, clarity around consent and power dynamics, and cultural change to prevent harassment before it occurs.
- Hon. Ms. Shazia Marri supplemented this response by underscoring that national legislation alone is insufficient to address digital abuse, as perpetrators often operate across borders using anonymous profiles. She emphasized the need for international cooperation and global accountability mechanisms.

A subsequent question from the audience focused on the rapid evolution of AI technologies and the capacity of policy frameworks to keep pace. Hon. Senator Farooq H. Naek responded by reiterating that while laws cannot eliminate crime entirely, they serve as critical deterrents. He referenced past legislative successes, including workplace harassment laws, and advocated for specialized legal mechanisms to address digital and AI-enabled abuse.

A final question from a student representative highlighted the exclusion of younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Alpha, from policy formulation despite their digital fluency. Hon. Ms. Shazia Marri acknowledged this gap and emphasized the importance of including younger generations in policymaking processes related to digital governance and online safety.

Moderator's Conclusion

In her concluding remarks, Hon. Ms. Nida Khuhro summarized the key takeaways of the session:

Online violence against women leaders is a democratic challenge requiring institutional responses

- Trust in digital spaces depends on robust legal frameworks, accountable platforms, and ethical political conduct
- Federal and provincial parliaments must work collaboratively to close legal gaps and strengthen enforcement
- Partnerships with UN Women, media, and civil society are essential to building inclusive digital ecosystems

She emphasized that digital spaces must not become tools of democratic exclusion and reaffirmed the collective commitment to protecting women leaders in online environments.

Closing and Shield Distribution

Following the conclusion of the session, Hon. Syed Awais Qadir Shah, Speaker, Provincial Assembly of Sindh, invited Hon. Mr. Zia ul Hassan Lanjar, Minister for Home, Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Sindh, to the stage. The session concluded with a formal shield distribution ceremony, conducted under the moderation of Hon. Ms. Nida Khuhro, recognizing the contributions of speakers and partners.

Session Adjourned at 04:30 PM.

DAY-III

Friday, 6th February 2026

CLOSING CEREMONY

Topic: "Way Forward: Strengthening Democratic Trust through Regional Parliamentary Cooperation"

Theme: Trust

Venue: New Assembly Hall, Provincial Assembly of Sindh

Time: 1000-1200 hrs.

OPENING OF THE CLOSING CEREMONY

The Closing Ceremony of the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference formally commenced with a warm welcome to all distinguished delegates and participants representing CPA Asia, CPA South-East Asia, and other Commonwealth jurisdictions, including Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and beyond.

The proceedings began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the national anthem, setting a solemn and dignified tone for the final session of the conference.

Hon. Syed Awais Qadir Shah, Speaker, Provincial Assembly of Sindh & President, CPA Asia Conference, extended heartfelt appreciation for the presence and active participation of all the Honorable Speakers, Deputy Speakers, distinguished delegates, parliamentarians, and parliamentary officials, throughout the conference. He acknowledged the extensive efforts and dedication involved in organizing an international parliamentary event of such magnitude, reflecting on the tireless preparations and commitment that contributed to its success.

He emphasized that the true purpose of the conference lay in fostering dialogue, strengthening parliamentary cooperation, and advancing democratic values across the Commonwealth. He noted that the meaningful contributions and insightful deliberations of the participants had significantly enriched the proceedings and reinforced the relevance of the conference outcomes.

Linking his remarks to the overarching theme of *Trust*, he highlighted the evolving role of parliaments in redefining trust through inclusivity, innovation, and responsiveness. He underscored the importance of embracing technological advancement, promoting youth engagement, and strengthening the role of parliaments as pillars of democratic governance. He further stressed that modern parliaments must remain adaptive and people-centered to sustain public confidence and democratic legitimacy.

Proceeding with the closing ceremony, he invited Mr. Stephen Twigg, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, to deliver his remarks.

Address by Mr. Stephen Twigg
Secretary-General, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Mr. Stephen Twigg expressed his profound appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference, describing it as a privilege to engage with parliamentary leaders and delegates from across the Commonwealth. He extended sincere gratitude to the Hon. Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and his team for their exceptional leadership and dedication in organizing the conference, acknowledging the collective appreciation of all participants for the successful delivery of the event.

Reflecting on the continuity and growth of the CPA Asia Regional Conference, Mr. Twigg highlighted the significance of holding the conference on an annual basis and expressed confidence that the tradition would continue with the upcoming 8th CPA Asia Regional Conference in Sri Lanka. He noted that the themes discussed during the conference trust,

inclusion, innovation, peace, and the future of parliaments—were highly relevant not only to the parliaments of Asia and South-East Asia but also to the broader Commonwealth.

He further informed the participants about the forthcoming launch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Strategic Plan in London, which will guide the CPA's work until 2030. He emphasized that the plan reaffirms the Association's core mission and strategic objectives while setting ambitious goals for the future. Quoting the key strategic objectives of the CPA, as:

- Strengthening parliamentary institutions.
- Supporting the professional development of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.
- Promoting Commonwealth values

He reflected the priority themes guiding CPA's Work:

- Gender equality.
- Disability inclusion.
- Small jurisdictions.
- Technology and digital transformation.
- Sustainable development and climate change
- Youth engagement

Mr. Twigg observed that these objectives and themes had been comprehensively addressed throughout the conference deliberations. He also drew attention to the challenging global context in which parliaments operate, marked by declining trust in political institutions, democratic backsliding, climate change, stalled progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, and rising conflicts and insecurity.

He underscored the importance of the **Karachi Declaration**, noting that it builds upon the Lahore Declaration adopted during the previous CPA Asia Regional Conference. He described the joint collaboration between the CPA Asia and South-East Asia regions as an innovative and powerful model of regional cooperation, emphasizing that CPA regions represent the "beating heart" of the organization.

To illustrate the impact of regional cooperation, Mr. Twigg cited three notable examples:

- The Kuala Lumpur Conference on Artificial Intelligence, jointly organized with the Parliament of Malaysia, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the United Nations Development Programme, resulted in the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration with thirteen key recommendations on the governance and safety of emerging technologies.
- The role of small parliamentary branches, including small island developing states, in contributing to the CPA's work, with special reference to the Maldives' hosting of the Small Branches Workshop.
- The proposal emerged from the conference to establish a Peace and Human Rights Committee, highlighting the evolving role of parliaments in peacebuilding and human rights protection.

Mr. Twigg also highlighted a major institutional milestone for the CPA—the acquisition of international legal status following the passage of enabling legislation by the UK Parliament. He explained that this development would strengthen the voice and influence of parliaments within and beyond the Commonwealth, including at international forums such as the United Nations.

In concluding his address, Mr. Twigg highlighted key initiatives and programmes of the CPA aimed at strengthening parliamentary capacity and inclusivity. He referred to the CPA Parliamentary Academy, democratic benchmarks for legislatures, initiatives on gender equality, youth participation, and disability inclusion, emphasizing their relevance to modern parliamentary practice.

***Key Areas of CPA Engagement Highlighted*:**

- Capacity-building through the CPA Parliamentary Academy and residential training programmes.
- Democratic benchmarks to enhance parliamentary effectiveness and representativeness.
- Promotion of gender-sensitive parliaments and protection of women parliamentarians from online harassment.
- Youth engagement through the Commonwealth Youth Parliament.
- Inclusion of persons with disabilities through dedicated networks, forums, and legislative frameworks.

Vote of Thanks
Hon. Dr. Rizvie Salih, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Sri Lanka

Hon. Dr. Rizvie Salih, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Sri Lanka, expressed his deep honor and privilege in delivering the Vote of Thanks at the conclusion of the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia and South-East Asia Regional Conference. He described the conference as meaningful, productive, and memorable, reflecting the collective commitment of Commonwealth parliaments to democratic values and regional cooperation. On behalf of the Sri Lankan parliamentary delegation and all participating dignitaries, he conveyed heartfelt appreciation to the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and the CPA Sindh Branch for hosting the conference with exceptional excellence, warmth, and foresight under the outstanding leadership of the Hon. Speaker of the Sindh Assembly.

He commended the Hon. Speaker's dynamic and hands-on leadership, noting that his personal involvement from strategic planning to meticulous attention to detail and delegate welfare set a high benchmark for parliamentary hosting. He further acknowledged the tireless efforts of the organizing team, whose dedication and professionalism reflected the Speaker's leadership and ensured the seamless conduct of the conference. He extended special gratitude to the Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, the Chief Guest at the inaugural session, whose presence and address elevated the proceedings and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to parliamentary democracy and regional collaboration. He also expressed appreciation to the Hon. Chief Minister of Sindh for hosting a gracious dinner in honor of the delegates, highlighting the warmth, cultural richness, and legendary hospitality of Sindh and Pakistan.

He acknowledged the contributions of distinguished delegations from Malaysia and other regional assemblies, the leadership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and Mr. Stephen Twigg, Secretary-General of the CPA. He noted that their perspectives and shared experiences enriched the deliberations and strengthened the spirit of the Commonwealth parliamentary family. He also commended the panelists and moderators for guiding insightful, candid, and constructive discussions, emphasizing that dialogue, mutual respect, and shared learning are the foundations of strong democratic institutions.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the conference, he highlighted the importance of the Karachi Declaration as a key takeaway for participating parliaments, underscoring its relevance in advancing democratic cooperation and trust across the region. He concluded by emphasizing that beyond institutional frameworks and procedures, it is human connection, shared values, and mutual respect that bind nations together. He urged delegates to carry forward not only the

resolutions and insights gained from the conference but also the friendships and goodwill strengthened in Karachi.

Key Points Highlighted:

- Appreciation for the exemplary leadership and hospitality of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh.
- Recognition of the contributions of delegates, CPA leadership, panelists, and moderators.
- Acknowledgment of the organizing committee, secretariat, interns, and support staff.
- Emphasis on the significance of the Karachi Declaration as a lasting outcome of the conference.

Vote of Thanks
Hon. Mr. Ahmed Nazim Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives

Hon. Mr. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis Maldives, expressed sincere gratitude at the conclusion of the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference, acknowledging the collective efforts that contributed to the success of the event. He highlighted the historic parliamentary ties between Pakistan and the Maldives, recalling that the Maldives Parliament building was gifted by the people of Pakistan, symbolizing enduring friendship and Pakistan's commitment to strengthening democratic institutions across the Commonwealth.

He conveyed deep appreciation to the Government of Pakistan, the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, and the organizing committee for their exceptional hospitality and efficient arrangements, which made the conference both productive and memorable. He also commended the speakers, panelists, moderators, and delegates for their valuable contributions and active participation, noting that their engagement reflected the strength and unity of the CPA Asia community.

He referred to the Maldives' upcoming role as host of the Small Branches Conference, expressing confidence that the standards set in Karachi would serve as a guiding example. He concluded by acknowledging the dedicated efforts of the secretariat, volunteers, and partners who worked behind the scenes and extended his best wishes to all delegates for a safe journey home.

Key Points Highlighted:

- Recognition of Pakistan-Maldives parliamentary ties and democratic cooperation.
- Appreciation for the hospitality and organizational excellence of the hosts.
- Acknowledgment of the contributions of delegates, speakers, and organizers.

Vote of Thanks
Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, Provincial Assembly of Punjab,
ON BEHALF OF
Hon. Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan Speaker, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab

Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, speaking on behalf of the Hon. Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, conveyed sincere appreciation to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for its valuable contribution and continued support in strengthening parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth.

He expressed regret over the absence of Hon. Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan due to unavoidable personal reasons, while emphasizing that his unwavering commitment to parliamentary values, transparency, and institutional strengthening remained deeply

acknowledged and respected. He highlighted the Speaker's guidance and vision in promot good governance and democratic practices, noting that although physically absent, h influence and leadership were reflected in the spirit and purpose of the conference.

Hon. Zulfiqar Ali Shah further extended gratitude to the organizers, speakers, and participants for their collective efforts in making the conference meaningful and successful. He concluded by thanking all stakeholders for their time, cooperation, and contributions to the success of the event.

Key Points Highlighted:

- Appreciation for the CPA's role in promoting parliamentary democracy.
- Recognition of the leadership and vision of Hon. Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan.
- Gratitude to organizers, speakers, and participants for the success of the conference.

Vote of Thanks
Representative Speaker, State Legislative Assembly Malaysia
Hon. Dato' Seri Mohammad Zahir Bin Abdul Khalid
Speaker, Perak State Legislative Assembly

Hon. Dato' Seri Mohammad Zahir Bin Abdul Khalid, Speaker of the Perak State Legislative Assembly, extended thanks to all delegates and invited fellow Malaysian delegates to rise in appreciation of the host, the Provincial Assembly of Sindh. He expressed deep gratitude to the CPA Asia Region for convening the conference, the Government of Pakistan and the Government of Sindh for their warm hospitality in Karachi, and especially to the Speaker, Sindh Assembly for his gracious leadership and tireless efforts in hosting the event. He also thanked the Honourable Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, for his support of regional parliamentary cooperation, and Honourable Dr. Christopher Khalila, Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, for his guidance, highlighting the Commonwealth as a community of shared democratic values, mutual respect, and trust.

Reflecting on the conference theme, **"Parliaments of the Future – Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation and Peace,"** the speaker emphasized the importance of trust in an era of declining public confidence, the necessity of inclusion for women, youth, and vulnerable communities, and the role of innovation in addressing digital technology, artificial intelligence, and misinformation risks. He reaffirmed parliaments as guardians of peace and reconciliation, praised the quality of plenary and breakout sessions, and thanked all speakers, ministers, parliamentarians, moderators, and panellists for their contributions on parliamentary education, accountability, climate resilience, digital governance, and democratic space protection. He closed by stressing that democracy, peace, and trust require strong institutions, responsible leadership, and ongoing dialogue, urging participants to carry the spirit of Karachi back to their home countries.

Vote of Thanks
Hon. Mr. Ali Khurshidi Leader of The Opposition, Provincial Assembly of Sindh

Hon. Mr. Ali Khurshidi, Leader of the Opposition, Provincial Assembly of Sindh, on behalf of the opposition benches of the Sindh Assembly and his party, MQM-P, he congratulated the Speaker of the Sindh Assembly and the organizing team for successfully hosting delegates from more than 17 parliaments. He highlighted the significant effort involved in planning, the hard work of the team, and the excellent arrangements, smooth management, and heartfelt hospitality extended to all participants.

He emphasized the meaningful discussions held over the past few days, focusing on trust, inclusion, innovation, accountability, the future of democratic institutions, parliamentary

education, and climate change, underscoring the shared mission of all participants to serve their people and strengthen democracy. He further stressed the importance of collaboration between government and opposition, noting that democracy grows stronger through mutual respect, constructive criticism, and cooperation, and that this conference demonstrated the value of dialogue and partnership over division.

The speaker extended sincere thanks to all delegates for traveling long distances to attend, expressing hope that they found Sindh organized, warm, and welcoming. He also expressed deep appreciation for the officers, staff, volunteers, security team, and young interns who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, noting that the success of the conference was due not only to the speakers on stage but also to the silent dedication of those working off-stage, whose efforts deserve heartfelt applause. He called on all attendees to leave the conference with renewed energy and fresh ideas, carrying forward the spirit of cooperation to ensure that parliament remains transparent, accountable, and close to the people it represents.

Hon. Ms. Farah Azeem Shah,
Member of Balochistan Provincial Assembly

Hon. Ms. Farah Azeem Shah welcomed all delegates representing their countries, and extended sincere thanks to the General Secretary of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Honorable Stephen Twigg, describing him as a good friend and a down-to-earth individual committed to humanity. She emphasized the sense of a Commonwealth family united by shared values of humanity and mutual respect and expressed gratitude for the acceptance of her peace proposal at the previous CPA conference in Barbados, which was welcomed by all regions, highlighting the global family spirit and the interconnectedness of all human beings. She also noted the sacrifices made by Balochistan, including its forces and the Pakistan Army, reaffirming their ongoing commitment to peace.

Adoption of the Karachi Declaration

Preamble

We, the Speakers, Presiding Officers, and Delegates of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) branches of Asia and South-East Asia, convened in Karachi from 3 to 7 February 2026 for the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia & South- East Asia Regional Conference, reaffirm our shared commitment to democratic governance, constitutionalism, parliamentary accountability, inclusivity, responsible innovation, and sustainable peace, in accordance with our respective national constitutional frameworks, CPA principles, and the Charter of the United Nations.

We recognise the indispensable role of parliaments in upholding democratic trust, ensuring executive accountability, protecting fundamental rights, and responding to the evolving aspirations of citizens. We take cognizance of the complex challenges confronting democratic institutions, including declining public confidence, political polarisation, misinformation, climate vulnerability, social exclusion, and the rapid pace of technological change. We affirm that the future of democracy depends on parliaments that are inclusive, participatory, transparent, and forward-looking, capable of strengthening social cohesion, embracing responsible innovation, and promoting peace and resilience within and across societies.

We recognise multilateralism and parliamentary diplomacy as foundational pillars for building trust, advancing peace, and reinforcing democratic resilience in an increasingly interconnected world, grounded in sustained dialogue, mutual respect, shared democratic values, and adherence to international norms and collective responsibility.

Declarations

1. Democratic Trust and Parliamentary Oversight

Affirm our commitment to democratic norms, constitutional principles, and parliamentary supremacy as the foundation of legitimate and effective governance.

Underscore the critical role of parliamentary oversight in ensuring executive accountability, ethical governance, and public trust.

Support the strengthening of committee systems, including Public Accounts Committees, to promote fiscal discipline, transparency, and responsible management of public resources.

Endorse evidence-based debate, constructive political dialogue, and cross-party cooperation as mechanisms to rebuild democratic credibility.

Promote initiatives that enhance citizen engagement with parliamentary institutions.

2. Inclusive and Participatory Parliaments

Commit to promoting equitable representation and meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, religious minorities and marginalised communities in parliamentary processes.

Resolve to review and reform parliamentary rules, procedures, and institutional practices to eliminate systemic barriers to inclusion.

Support parliamentary education, civic literacy, and public outreach initiatives to instill democratic values and principles in the hearts and minds of our future generations.

Endorse mentorship, capacity-building, and leadership programs that empower underrepresented groups within parliamentary institutions.

Contribute to national and regional efforts aimed at fostering inclusive governance,social cohesion, and participatory democracy.

3. Innovation and Responsible Use of Technology

Recognise the growing influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on governance and parliamentary processes, and underscore the importance of ethical, transparent, and human-centered frameworks.

Affirm the need to counter misinformation, hate speech, deep fakes, and digital manipulation while safeguarding freedom of expression and democratic discourse.

Support the development of Open Parliament initiatives and digital governance tools to enhance digital access to information, transparency and accountability.

Promote capacity-building programmes for parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and citizens to enable informed and responsible digital participation.

Encourage measures to ensure safe and equitable digital engagement, including protection against online harassment.

4. Peace, Climate Resilience, and Social Cohesion

Affirm that peace, justice, and inclusive development are mutually reinforcing and essential for sustainable democratic progress.

Recall that right to self-determination, as recognised under international law, remains essential to democratic legitimacy, peaceful coexistence, and durable political solutions.

Note with concern the evolving challenges to the international order, marked by growing unilateralism and the gradual narrowing of space for mutual respect, sovereign equality, and adherence to international norms.

Recognise the role of parliaments as platforms for dialogue, reconciliation, and peaceful conflict resolution within and across communities.

Support legislative initiatives to strengthen climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and protection of climate-vulnerable regions.

Endorse community empowerment, local governance engagement, and participatory policy-making to enhance social cohesion.

Contribute to regional and national efforts that advance justice, equity, and sustainable development as cornerstones of democratic stability.

5. ***Regional Parliamentary Cooperation***

Affirm the importance of parliamentary diplomacy and collaboration among CPA member parliaments as instruments for trust-building and regional stability.
Support structured capacity-building programs, knowledge-sharing platforms, and bestpractice exchanges among regional parliaments.
Endorse partnerships with civil society, academia, and private sectors to advance inclusive, innovative, and sustainable parliamentary development.
Encourage regional initiatives that address shared democratic, social, economic, and environmental challenges.
Recognise that timely CPA regional conferences are central to sustaining parliamentary partnerships, and commend the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Pakistan, for hosting the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference within one year of the previous conference.

Conclusion
As we conclude our deliberations in Karachi and adopt this Declaration on February 6, 2026, we reaffirm our shared resolve to strengthen parliaments as trusted, inclusive, innovative, and peace-building institutions. Guided by democratic values, CPA principles, and international commitments, we commit to translating the spirit and intent
of this Declaration into concrete legislative and institutional action within our respective jurisdictions, in pursuit of democratic resilience, collective well-being, and a peaceful future for our peoples.

Address by the Chief Guest
Hon. Syed Murad Ali Shah Chief Minister, Government of Sindh

Hon. Syed Murad Ali Shah, Chief Minister of Sindh, addressed the Closing Ceremony of the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia & South-East Asia Regional Conference, expressing his appreciation to the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for successfully convening a meaningful dialogue on the future of democracy and regional parliamentary cooperation.

He welcomed the distinguished delegates to Karachi and Sindh, describing the province as a symbol of resilience, democratic struggle, and institutional continuity. He commended the Hon. Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and his team for hosting the Conference with professionalism, political maturity, and institutional strength, noting that bringing together diverse political voices to deliberate on democratic challenges reflects the true spirit of parliamentary democracy.

The Chief Minister emphasized that democracy across the region is facing growing pressures not because citizens reject democracy, but because they demand better governance, fairness, and institutional performance. Referring to the Conference theme of **Trust, Inclusion, Innovation, and Peace**, he highlighted that rebuilding democratic trust requires transparency, accountability, and effective delivery of public services. He stressed that citizens no longer place confidence in rhetoric alone but in systems that demonstrate responsibility and measurable outcomes.

He further underscored that inclusion is an essential pillar of democratic stability, not a symbolic gesture, and reaffirmed the Government of Sindh's commitment to expanding opportunities for women, youth, minorities, and vulnerable communities. He also highlighted the importance of innovation in governance, noting that technology and institutional reforms must serve citizens by improving decision-making, service delivery, and accessibility.

The Chief Minister drew attention to the interconnected challenges of peace, social justice, and climate resilience, emphasizing that Sindh remains at the frontline of climate change impacts. He called upon parliaments to legislate for resilience, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development, stressing that lasting peace is inseparable from climate justice and political will. He also highlighted the significance of regional parliamentary cooperation, describing it as a practical mechanism for sharing legislative best practices, strengthening oversight, and accelerating democratic progress across the region.

Referring to the adoption of the Karachi Declaration, he urged delegates to translate its principles into concrete legislative and institutional reforms rather than treating it as a symbolic document. He concluded by expressing gratitude to the CPA leadership, international delegations, organizers, parliamentary staff, and volunteers, and expressed hope that participants would return to their countries with renewed commitment to strengthening transparency, inclusivity, innovation, and public trust in their respective parliaments.

Key Points Highlighted in the Address

- Democracy is challenged not by rejection, but by citizens' demand for better governance and accountability.
- Trust in institutions must be rebuilt through transparent systems and effective service delivery.
- Inclusion of women, youth, minorities, and marginalized groups is essential for democratic stability.
- Innovation in governance should focus on institutional reform and citizen-centric service delivery.
- Climate resilience and social justice are fundamental to sustainable peace and democratic progress.
- Regional parliamentary cooperation strengthens democratic institutions and shared learning.
- The Karachi Declaration must be implemented through practical legislative and institutional action.

With these closing remarks, the conference was declared closed.