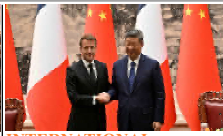




BALUCHISTAN
Quetta Seminar Highlights
Digital Media's Role...
Page No 5



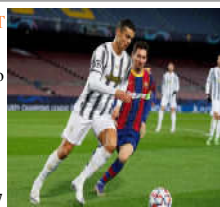
NATIONAL
Horticulture exporters unveil plan to
raise exports from \$700m to \$2bn
Page No 6



INTERNATIONAL
Macron urges Xi to step up
efforts on Ukraine...
Page No 8

SPORT

Messi,
Ronaldo
take
rivalry
to sixth
World
Cup



Page No 7

First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE

Rs. 10.00 Vol. VII: No: 75

Email address: quettavoice@gmail.com
Website: www.quettavoice.com

Friday 05, December, 2025



President appoints Field Marshal Munir as country's first chief of defence forces

NEWS DESK:

President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday signed off on the summary to appoint Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir as the country's first chief of defence forces (CDF).

A press release from the presidency said he also signed off on the two-year extension in the tenure of Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu and extended his best wishes to the two for their successful tenures.

The CDF position, created under the 27th Constitutional Amendment, will replace the now-abolished office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) chairman, which formally ended on November 27. It would be a dual-hatted position combined with the office of the army chief. Earlier in the evening, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sent a summary to President Asif Ali Zardari recommending the appointment of COAS Field Marshal Asim Munir as CDF.

The prime minister today approved the summary for the ap-

pointment of Field Marshal Munir as the chief of army staff and the chief of defence forces, and then referred it to the President House, said a press release by the PM Office (PMO).

Field Marshal Munir's appointment for both roles is for a period of five years, the statement said. PM Shehbaz also approved a two-year extension in the tenure of Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu, which will take effect upon the completion of his current five-year tenure in March 2026, the PMO added.

ACM Sidhu was appointed as the chief of the air staff in March 2021 and had been granted a one-year extension in 2024.

Officials and observers had expected the new notification to coincide with JCSC post's abolition on November 27.

On Sunday, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the notification for the CDF appointment would be issued "in due course of time" and urged people to refrain from speculation over it.

The next day, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said the government would issue the noti-

fication in the coming days, but that he was already "holding the office in all respects".

Tarar had linked the delay to PM Shehbaz not being in the country, explained that notifying the new CDF is the defence ministry's job, and they have to coordinate with the PMO.

The government rapidly pushed the 27th Amendment through parliament last month, but the notification setback complicated the transition to the restructured higher-defence framework, which military planners had hoped would be seamless.

In meeting with UK high commissioner, Naqvi hands over extradition papers for Shahzad Akbar and Adil Raja

NEWS DESK:

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met United Kingdom (UK) High Commissioner Jane Marriott on Thursday, where he handed over the extradition papers for former special assistant to the prime minister Shahzad Akbar and YouTuber Adil Raja.

The development comes three days after Naqvi announced a crackdown on those involved in fake news, declaring that the government would repatriate from the UK YouTubers involved in this activity or the targeting of state institutions.

According to a statement released by the interior ministry, Naqvi held an "important" meeting with Marriott in Islamabad, where the two discussed Pak-UK relations, security cooperation and issues of mutual interest.

Federal Secretary for Interior Muhammad Khuram Agha and other relevant officers were also present, it said. They also discussed the return of Pakistanis illegally residing in the UK, it added.

"The extradition papers for Akbar and Raja from the government of Pakistan were handed over [to Marriott]," the statement said.

"Both individuals are wanted in Pakistan. They should be handed over to Pakistan immediately," Naqvi was quoted as saying.

He also provided evidence against Pakistani citizens who were spreading propaganda, the statement said.

"I fully believe in freedom of expression, but fake news is a problem for every country," he said, as per the statement.

"No country can allow slander and defamation against state institutions from those sitting abroad," the minister said. Naqvi also said that Pakistan would welcome British cooperation for the return of those who "spread anti-Pakistan propaganda".

The statement further said that the interior ministry had initiated the extradition process through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Reacting to the news, Akhtar took to social media platform X, "It has become increasingly clear that my publications, broadcasts, and political commentary on human rights abuses in Pakistan, the rise of authoritarianism.

Third Afghan national arrested in US, accused of providing 'material support to ISIS-K'

NEWS DESK:

A third Afghan national has been arrested in the US, days after another Afghan national, Rahmullah Lakanwal, shot two National Guards, for providing "material support to ISIS-K", according to a statement issued by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on Wednesday. Jaan Shah Shafi, who entered the US in 2021 under former president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome, "provided support to the ISIS-K". He also provided weapons to his father, who is a commander of a militia group in Afghanistan," the press release stated. It further stated that Shafi applied for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), but his application was terminated once DHS Secretary Kristi Noem ended TPS for Afghans. He was arrested in Waynesboro, Virginia.

The Trump administration halted the Afghan refugee resettlement program on January 20 and suspended the entry of Afghan nationals, for "protection and safety of Americans".

Karachi-Quetta-Chaman Highway N-25 Construction Begins, Major Progress on Pakistan Expressway

News Desk:

Construction work has officially begun on the Karachi-Quetta-Chaman N-25 Highway, marking a significant step toward improving Balochistan's road connectivity. The development was confirmed during a high-level meeting of the National Highway Authority (NHA), chaired by Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan.

Officials briefed the meeting that construction on the 800-kilometer Pakistan Expressway in Balochistan is already underway. The federal minister noted that the Prime Minister had announced this major road initiative earlier this year, calling it a crucial project for Balochistan's long-term development.

Abdul Aleem Khan added that work on the N-25 from Khuzdar to Mastung is progressing steadily, and the completion of the Pakistan Expressway will be a major breakthrough for the province's infrastructure and economic connectivity. The meeting also reviewed projects related to Gwadar, Khaplu, the Coastal



Highway, and other key routes. The federal minister instructed authorities to expedite the

completion of all ongoing road projects in Balochistan. Discussions also focused on security

arrangements and other logistical requirements for road construction. The NHA chairman and

senior officials briefed the minister on the status of development projects across the province.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

How Long Will Quetta Pay the Price for SSGC and Federal Negligence? Editorial:



Quetta is once again at the mercy of a winter crisis that has become all too familiar: low gas pressure, unannounced load shedding, and complete administrative silence. Every year, citizens are told to "bear with the situation" as temperatures fall and heaters, stoves, and geysers turn useless. Yet the authorities responsible—Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and the federal energy managers—continue to operate without accountability.

A City Freezing While Authorities Look Away The people of Balochistan are right to ask: Why must Quetta suffer the same crisis every winter while no structural reforms are introduced? Why are consumers forced to pay heavy bills for a service that barely exists? And why do officials in Karachi and Islamabad continue to treat Balochistan's gas issues as a seasonal inconvenience rather than a governance failure?

Desperate Balochistan, being an energy-producing region, its residents struggle every winter for the very resource extracted from their own soil. This contradiction reflects a deep-rooted policy imbalance in the federation, where

Balochistan remains last on the priority list—not because of a shortage of resources, but because of a shortage of political will.

SSGC's Repeated Excuses and Decades of Mismanagement

The SSGC's performance adds another layer of frustration. Each year, the company offers the same explanations—"excessive demand," "pipeline pressure issues," "technical challenges." Yet no one explains why these problems remain unresolved despite decades of complaints. Why have there been no significant infrastructure upgrades? Why has the company failed to introduce a clear winter management plan for Quetta? Why is communication with consumers absent?

The unannounced nature of the load shedding exposes a complete disregard for public convenience. When outages are not scheduled or announced, families cannot plan meals, heating, or even basic daily routines. Hospitals and clinics struggle to maintain warm environments for patients. Small businesses suffer. And in a city where temperatures can drop below freezing, such negligence is not just inconvenient—it is dangerous.

Federal Government's Weak Oversight and Balochistan's Low Priority

The federal government cannot escape responsibility either. Energy management is a national issue, and the pattern of winter mismanagement in Balochistan reflects weak oversight, poor planning, and an unfair allocation of resources. The silence of policymakers during these crises sends a clear message: Quetta's suffering is not a priority.

What Quetta needs is not another round of hollow statements. It needs a transparent winter gas plan, proper infrastructure investment, honest communication with the public, and real accountability for SSGC.

Most importantly, it needs the federal government to finally treat Balochistan as an equal stakeholder in national resource management. The people of Quetta have endured enough. Their patience should not be mistaken for acceptance. Without decisive action, this recurring winter crisis will continue to expose not only the inefficiencies of SSGC but also the federal government's unwillingness to address longstanding injustices.

Quetta: Contaminated water posing a serious threat to human health

Abdul Razzaq Khilji: Fresh and clean water is an essential part of human life. It stands second to the air for the existence of all human beings and it is now a commonly known fact that groundwater quality is as important as its quantity. Balochistan is becoming the fast water-scarce province of the country particularly in urban areas including the Quetta sub-basin where 90% of the drinking water is utilized from groundwater. Groundwater quality has a direct impact on the health and welfare of the inhabitants therefore fresh and clean water supply need to be prioritized.

Drinking water must be free from pathogenic organisms

Water from any source must suit the purpose for which it is intended whereas, drinking water must be free from pathogenic organisms and its chemical and physical qualities must also be suitable for human consumption. Accordingly, groundwater contamination is approximately constantly the consequence of human activities.

Accordingly, the (Coliforms and E. Coli) are those bacteria that originate from wastes and intestines of animals and signal contamination in drinking water during testing. A recent report of the Irrigation Department indicates that the high rate of Coliform and E. Coli bacteria was found in the water of Quetta which signals contaminations in the drinking water that may affect human health and cause severe illness, as such



gastrointestinal, vomiting, cramps, diarrhea, muscle aches, and headache. However, anyone can get sick from drinking contaminated water but children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems are at a higher risk of the harmful effects.

Contaminated water in Quetta affecting human health

On the basis of analyzed water quality data the areas of Mariabab, Shaldara Kasi Road, Pashoonabad, Gowalmandi, Sirki Road satellite town, Takhtani Bypass, airport road, Western bypass, Barwary road, Mosa Colony, Spinai road, Joint Road, Raisani Road, Sariab road DG WAPDA office, Gahi Khan Chowk, Sariab Railway Station where the water Quality is declared unsafe due to

high concentration of Coliform and E. coli as such the analyzed values are high than the permissible limits of the WHO.

The drinking water in these areas is found objectionable and unsafe for drinking purposes on the basis of bacteriological contamination.

Accordingly, the current analysis of water quality discloses that water in most of the areas of the Quetta is exclusively micro-biologically contaminated.

Whereas, other contaminations include, Turbidity, Arsenic, hardness, TDS, and other ions have been analyzed wherein, the Nitrate concentrations have been found higher than the prescribed WHO standards.

Water quality contamination is an extensive phenomenon

Moreover, the change in water quality pattern in Quetta follows largely the pattern of microbiological contaminations.

The analysis indicates that water quality contamination is an extensive phenomenon in the drinking water supply system. It is of great concern that the average concentrations of contaminations have been observed mostly in the thickly populated areas of the Quetta.

The situation follows the growing rate of contaminations over the Quetta, whereas the extension in the water supply system has increased in

the last two decades and the density of population is also increasing with time.

The report points out that due to lack of proper water supply pipeline designing the cross-contamination is not in control and the

flow of pollutants into the main supply line is a major cause of contaminations.

The study further reports that the old age leaking pipes in the main

water supply system are also the main cause of bacterial contamination in the main supply lines.

The inhabitants of Quetta may be at risk of drinking contaminated water and may suffer from various water-borne diseases.

The report also specifies the high rate of Nitrate concentrations in water in some areas which may cause Blue Baby Syndrome diseases in Children.

Non-availability of regular water quality monitoring

Of the critical areas and issues cannot be identified.

The author is serving as an officer in the Balochistan Irrigation Department

Energy shortage in Balochistan

Ajmal Khan: Poverty is not a static or fixed phenomenon. It is a multi-dimensional idea that encompasses quality in almost every sphere of life, ranging from calorie intake, life expectancy, living standards, literacy and access to modern energy services.

This type of poverty is always expressed from an income perspective. Sticking with the non-income dimensions of poverty, such as health, education and living standards, are as important as employment.

The two energy indicators of non-income dimensions, including electricity (no access to electricity) and cooking fuels (wood, dung and charcoal), constitute poverty.

Goal no. 7 of SDGs contains universal access to modern energy services to increase energy supply, energy efficiency, and increasing renewable energy share.

As we know, energy plays a vital role in the development process of a country, but in case of Pakistan, energy poverty is the largest single drain on Pakistan's economy.

When we talk about Balochistan, it is the direct and major victim of energy crisis, and has slowed down the growth of the province. Balochistan is

the largest province of Pakistan, having an area of 347,190 km square and a population of 12,344,408 people. The major portion of the population live in rural areas, constituting 72.45%. Only 36 Percent of Balochistan has access to energy.

Balochistan is facing an acute energy shortage that has stopped the development not only in the economic and agricultural sector, but also in every walk of life. According to a document submitted to the National Assembly of Pakistan, only 36% of Balochistan is electrified, while the remaining 64% of Balochistan still doesn't have access to energy. Due to the scattered population living in rural areas, it is impossible to electrify them. In 2018, the total demand of Balochistan was 1650 MW, but supply was limited to 600 MW, and in 2019 the demand has been raised to 2500 MW.

Energy Projects in CPEC

Energy is the prominent component of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Almost 70% of the CPEC projects were related to the energy sector, which comprises thermal, hydal, coal and wind.

Unfortunately, Balochistan is being



left out of these projects. Out of 13 mega projects related to energy, six projects are being located in Punjab, six in Sindh and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Once again, the energy-starved and downtrodden province has been ignored and not given its due share to fulfill its energy demands. The energy generated by these projects will not give any relief to the province living in Balochistan.

The already installed transmission lines are inadequate, and the province does not have the capability and capacity to absorb

energy beyond 500 MW. The two transmission lines worth \$4 billion will run from Matari to Faisalabad and Lahore, respectively. These transmission lines are providing 4000 MW to Punjab. Looking at this picture, the overall situation in rural Balochistan is worse, where 85% of the population lives and some areas in Balochistan are not even linked with the national grid systems. This is an alarming situation where a major portion of the population still doesn't have access to electricity, and it will further deteriorate the growth of

the province.

Energy Production in Balochistan: Balochistan is producing about 2422 MW of electricity using gas-based thermal. Almost all the electricity generated in the province is being transmitted to other provinces. Electricity has been purchased by QESCO from two autonomous power producers include the Uch power plant and Habibullah Coastal Power plant. The province also receives electricity from Iran and provides it to the areas along the border.

The federal government initiative to reduce load-shedding will not positively impact the province because the existing transmission lines are not that much capable of supplying any load beyond 600 MW. There is not a single 500 kV grid station in the province. No doubt, it is impossible to provide and extend transmission lines to the far-flung areas because it will cost too much. The electricity demand in rural areas of Balochistan is very low and the houses in rural areas need only lighting for roomed huts built of mud. Furthermore, investors feel hesitant to invest in the

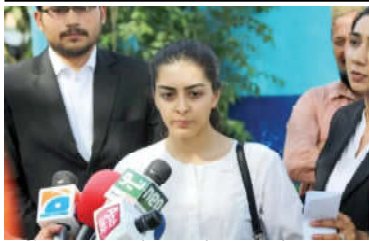
province due to lack of infrastructure, revenue generation and security.

Considering all these factors, solar energy remains the best source because Balochistan receives the largest solar radiance in its area. According to a World Bank assessment, Balochistan receives the highest average sunlight in the world, which makes it rich in solar energy. Keeping in view these factors and in spite of extending the transmission lines to the far-flung and remote areas, the government should provide a solar panel to each house that is more economical and cost efficient. It will empower the socio-economic conditions of the population living in rural areas.

The Wind Corridor of Balochistan and Government's efforts:

Besides solar energy, the wind energy is another essential source and Balochistan has been blessed with a high rate of wind speeds. The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), in their shared data, suggested that the wind speed in the coastal area of the province is enough to generate electricity. In this line, Pakistan Council of Renewable Energy Technologies (PCRET) has electrified 1600 villages along the coastal side

of Sindh and Balochistan. A study suggested that the coastal belt of Pakistan can produce 50,000 MW through wind resources. To minimize the cost of these projects, the government should encourage local manufacturers of wind turbines. In this regard, to overcome the energy poverty in Balochistan, the federal government can play a vital role in alleviating energy poverty by using renewable energy resources in electrifying the rural areas of Balochistan, keeping in view the solar radiance and wind speed, there is a huge potential for renewable energy in the province. They should not electrify the far-flung areas with conventional grid-based methods because it will maximize their cost as the traditional modes of energy are expensive, and in the long run, it cannot meet the energy demand for sustainable development. The government should provide the due share in CPEC related energy projects to the province. Suppose the issues related to energy poverty are not taken into account, the dream of achieving SDGs will never be achieved, and the already poverty-stricken province will observe more difficulties in the coming days.



Controversial social media posts case: Islamabad court rejects Imaan Mazari's acquittal plea

NEWS DESK: An Islamabad district and sessions court rejected on Thursday an application submitted by lawyer and rights activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir, seeking her acquittal in a controversial social media posts case. Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka, who was presiding over the proceedings, also rejected an application moved by Mazari and her husband, co-accused Hadi Ali Chhattha, challenging the appointment of a counsel by the state to represent them in the case registered with the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency (NCCIA). Both of them have been accused of attempting to incite divisions on linguistic grounds through social media posts and of creating the impression that the armed forces were engaged in terrorism within the country. At the hearing today, Mazari and Chhattha, along with lawyer Sher Afzal Marwat, Islamabad Bar Association (IBA) President Naeem Ali Gujjar, Islamabad Bar Council member Raja Aleem Abbasi and other legal representatives, appeared before the court. The court's previous orders were read out to Marwat, who presented arguments challenging the appointment of a counsel by the state to represent Mazari and Chhattha. He contended that under relevant rules, a lawyer should have at least five years of practice in criminal cases for such an appointment. He further argued that the accused, too, must have confidence in the coun-

sel appointed for them. Marwat cited several Supreme Court judgments in support of his arguments. Abbasi endorsed the arguments presented by Marwat, pointing out that the accused had "explicitly expressed a lack of confidence" in the state-appointed counsel. Mazari and Chhattha have been objecting to the appointment of a counsel by the state to represent them in the case, with Mazari even alleging at one instance that the court had "forcibly appointed [a] state defence counsel". During a previous hearing on November 29, she had a heated exchange with the state-appointed counsel and accused him of being a "tour". The examination of the prosecution's witnesses was also completed during that hearing. Abbasi, however, urged the court today to recall the prosecution's witnesses, saying that the defence should be allowed to conduct a "surgery" through proper cross-examination. For his part, Gujjar complained about "heavy police presence and the treatment of lawyers" at previous hearings. He requested the court to treat the case against Mazari and Chhattha "as a routine case" and summon the witnesses again to "ensure fairness". Then, Marwat sought more time from the court, saying that "things might improve if proceedings are reset". After the completion of arguments on the application challenging the appointment of a counsel by the

state for Mazari and Chhattha, the court reserved its decision on the matter and later dismissed it. Subsequently, it also dismissed an application submitted by Mazari at the hearing on November 29 for her acquittal. The court has already rejected Chhattha's acquittal application. Separately, IBA President Gujjar submitted a power of attorney to the court to represent Mazari and Chhattha. At that instance, Judge Majoka also enquired about the recording of statements by the accused under Section 342 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). Before concluding the November 29 hearing, Judge Majoka had directed the prosecution to prepare and submit the questionnaire under Section 342 of the CrPC to the accused by December 4 (today) and instructed Mazari and Chhattha to submit their replies. Upon his enquiry today, Chhattha told him that they had not received a copy of the questionnaire yet. At that, the judge assured that a typed copy would be provided to the accused by 10am. The next hearing of the case will be held tomorrow. Mazari urges SC to urgently take up plea against denial of interim relief. Separately, Mazari today rushed an application before the SC, urging it to take up, preferably by tomorrow, her and Chhattha's joint appeal against the Islamabad High Court's (IHC) denial of interim relief to them in the social media post case.

Four killed, two injured in Lachi Bazaar shooting

NEWS DESK: Four people have died in a shooting incident on Thursday in Lachi Bazaar, Tehsil Lachi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the initial report, the incident occurred between two groups as a result of a personal dispute. Upon receiving the alert, the Rescue 1122 medical team responded promptly, reached the scene, provided first aid to all the injured, and shifted them to Lachi Hospital.

Hospital sources confirmed that four people had died, while two critically injured individuals were referred to Kohat's KDA Hospital due to their serious condition. Hassan, son of

Jahangir, Zahir Zaman, son of Ashoor Zaman, and Mamoor, son of Najeeb Gul, have passed away. Ijaz, son of Mamoor Khan, and Hamid, son of Ajmeer, are severely injured.

Kohat District Police Officer (DPO) Shahbaz Ilaqi visited the scene of a brutal quadruple murder in Lachi, accompanied by Superintendent of Police (SP), Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), and other senior investigative officers.

At the site, the DPO examined the crime scene and reviewed forensic evidence critical to the investigation. He instructed that all evidence be secured according to modern

standards and that the inquiry be conducted thoroughly from all angles.

Addressing the investigative team, DPO Shahbaz Ilaqi ordered the swift arrest of all suspects and emphasised that no negligence or oversight would be tolerated.

He stressed that public safety remains the police's top priority and vowed strict legal action against those responsible, assuring justice for the affected families.

Multiple teams have been deployed to carry out raids for suspect apprehension, with investigators leveraging modern technology and intelligence resources to advance the inquiry.



Balochistan Government Launches Major Crackdown on Banned Groups, Targets Over 300 Militants

Staff Reporter:

Quetta — In a high-level security meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, the Balochistan government approved an extensive and "exceptionally tough" crackdown on the leadership and operatives of several banned militant organisations operating from abroad.

According to officials, the move aims to tighten the net around ring leaders, commanders, and more than 300 militants linked to proscribed groups including the BIA, BLF, UBA, BRG, and Lashkar-e-Balochistan. Authorities have been instructed to fast-track prosecution in all pending cases and accelerate international legal steps through Interpol with assistance from the federal interior and foreign ministries.

Coordinated Action From Local Facilitators to Foreign Commanders

Briefing the meeting, security officials presented evidence of communication links, call recordings, and logistical support networks between overseas militant heads and their local facilitators. Based on these findings, the government approved

immediate, full-scale action against all individuals involved both within Pakistan and abroad. CM Bugti said that operations will be carried out strictly under the Provincial Action Plan's guidelines, ensuring that every facilitator—"from the smallest link to the top commander"—is brought within the legal net.

'No One Who Sheds Blood in Balochistan Will Be Allowed to Hide'

The Chief Minister reaffirmed a zero-tolerance stance, declaring that those responsible

for violence in the province "will not be allowed refuge in any corner of the world." He emphasised that militant leaders disguising themselves as political activists will also be exposed at international forums. "We owe it to the people of Balochistan to reveal the true face of those who promote terror under political covers," Bugti said, directing law enforcement agencies to accelerate actions under new anti-terrorism laws.

Comprehensive Documentation and International Legal Action Restoring Stability

The Home Department has been instructed to reactivate and strengthen the dedicated action cell established under the Provincial Action Plan. Officials will compile a complete list of all militant commanders and their local collaborators, adding available evidence to official records. The Chief Minister added that the compiled dossiers would be taken to global platforms with federal support to initiate strong international proceedings against foreign-based militant leaders.

A Decisive Stage in Restoring Stability

Bugti stated that Balochistan has entered a "decisive phase" in dismantling militant networks backed by foreign agendas. He reaffirmed that the province will no longer allow external forces to destabilize the region.

"The state's authority will be upheld at all costs. We will pursue every remaining facilitator until the last link of this terrorist chain is broken," he said.

The meeting concluded with a unified commitment: no compromise on public safety, peace, and the dignity of the state.

KPC CM Sohail Afridi denied access for '9th' time to meet Imran Khan at Adiala jail

NEWS DESK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi was prevented for the ninth time by prison authorities from meeting PTI founder Imran Khan at Adiala Jail on Thursday.

Imran's sister Uzma Khan met the party founder in prison on Tuesday after weeks of effort, with CM Afridi and other party leaders scheduled to meet him today. The meeting took place as rumours regarding Imran's health began circulating in local and foreign media, despite claims by the government and PTI leaders that the former prime minister was in good health.

These speculations, however, gained traction due to the government's reluctance to let visitors, including his family members and legal team, meet Imran over the past few weeks.

According to a post on X by the PTI, CM Afridi addressed the media outside the prison after the continued lack of access. He said he would update the media on the immediate course of action—whether he would stage a sit-in or not.

In a talk with the media after exiting the room, CM Afridi said: "I think the meeting is not being allowed. Today is the ninth time I have come, a chief minister of a province is repeatedly coming, but even a five-minute meeting is not being allowed. The whole world is witnessing this discriminatory treatment, and their actions are being noted and will be remembered."

"This government won't remain forever and then no one will get a chance to complain," When asked if he planned to spend any other night outside the prison in protest, he said that Imran's good physical health had been confirmed in the meeting with Uzma.

He added that the party would now devise its next course of action after the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP. Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

On a question about the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP, Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.



The PTI also shared a video of the KPC CM and his delegation in a waiting room, saying that today was the ninth instance of Afridi not being allowed to meet Imran.

In a talk with the media after exiting the room, CM Afridi said: "I think the meeting is not being allowed. Today is the ninth time I have come, a chief minister of a province is repeatedly coming, but even a five-minute meeting is not being allowed. The whole world is witnessing this discriminatory treatment, and their actions are being noted and will be remembered."

"This government won't remain forever and then no one will get a chance to complain," When asked if he planned to spend any other night outside the prison in protest, he said that Imran's good physical health had been confirmed in the meeting with Uzma.

He added that the party would now devise its next course of action after the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP. Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

On a question about the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP, Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

On a question about the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP, Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

Punjab replaces traditional brooms with EVs, mechanical sweepers

NEWS DESK: Punjab is undergoing a major revolution in urban and rural sanitation, as Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif unveils a comprehensive plan to modernise cleanliness across the province. For the first time, traditional brooms are being replaced by eco-friendly electric vehicles and mechanical sweepers under the Clean Punjab initiative.

Energy will now also be generated from waste through the "Waste-to-Value" project, for which the chief minister has requested a comprehensive plan by mid-January. Cleaning services will now be provided in every street and alley, including Sundays, marking an unprecedented effort to maintain hygiene across cities and villages.

Under the new system, anyone littering or on roads will face legal action, with violators being brought under the law within 15 days. The number of sanitation workers in every union council will be increased, and proposals are being reviewed to provide one tractor for every two union councils. Proper waste enclo-



tures will also be constructed for garbage bins and containers, establishing new standards for organisation and cleanliness.

CM Maryam emphasised the scale and impact of the project, calling it "nothing less than a miracle" and noting that a comprehensive cleaning system should have been established years ago. She added that the project started from zero and is improving over time, receiving positive feedback from citizens across the province.

For greater transparency, salaries and payments have been digitalised, while a Vehicle Tracking Management System and live container monitoring are being used to oversee sanitation vehicles. Waste management companies are being assessed based on KPIs, with performance determined through marks, ensuring no compromise on accountability and efficiency.

With this initiative, Punjab is setting a

ing less than a miracle" and noting that a comprehensive cleaning system should have been established years ago. She added that the project started from zero and is improving over time, receiving positive feedback from citizens across the province.

For greater transparency, salaries and payments have been digitalised, while a Vehicle Tracking Management System and live container monitoring are being used to oversee sanitation vehicles. Waste management companies are being assessed based on KPIs, with performance determined through marks, ensuring no compromise on accountability and efficiency.

With this initiative, Punjab is setting a

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

On a question about the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP, Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

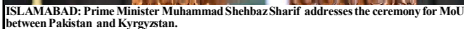
"They will not be able to control and handle the conditions that I am foreseeing," warned KPC CM.

He also lashed out at the government for not being able to tolerate and bear a chief minister from the tribal areas for the first time. Afridi said removing him would cause anger and frustration among the people from the tribal belt.

"The people of KP and Pakistan see their future in me," Afridi claimed, adding that the governor's rule would be a "win-win" situation for him as he would be able to operate freely. The KP CM said he would visit Punjab soon.

On a question about the possible imposition of governor's rule in KP, Afridi responded: "What are they waiting for? impose it today. We are not afraid of any governor's rule."

children in May and September. He added that high-quality vaccination campaigns have ensured that millions of children receive essential polio drops across the country.

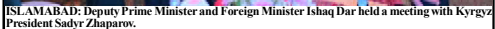


the facility to full teaching-hospital status. With a record-breaking November and three years of dedicated service, the GDA Pak-China Friendship Hospital continues to strengthen its reputation as one of Balochistan's most impactful and rapidly advancing medical institutions.

Bajaur, and Kurram, while the remaining 180 tons were distributed across eight districts of Balochistan, namely Khuzdar, Surab, Kachhi, Pishin, Killa Saifullah, Ziarat, Jhal Magi, and Quetta. Thousands of people have benefited from this humanitarian assistance.

This initiative aims to provide immediate nutritional support to households affected by floods, displacement, and chronic food insecurity. Dates, which are rich in nutrients, vitamins, and a valuable source of energy, play a significant role in strengthening food security and improving the health and well-being of disaster-affected populations.

This humanitarian response reflects the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's continued commitment, through KSArelief,



During the visit, President Zharapov will also meet with President Zardari and address the Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Business Forum.

The two sides will review the full spectrum of bilateral relations and explore new avenues to further deepen cooperation across diverse sectors, including trade, energy, defence, education, people-to-people exchanges, and regional connectivity.

**ways to advance
Kashmir cause**

ISLAMABAD (INP): A delegation of Kashmiri leaders, mostly based in the US, met Federal Minister and Chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon, along with Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Com-

The delegation included Dr Ghulam Nabi Fai, Waris Ali, Zulfikar Khan, Sardar Zubain Khan, Zaffar Ahmad Qureshi and Nazim Ahmad Qureshi.

The minister briefed the visiting Kashmiri leaders about the measures taken by Pakistan for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. He underscored the need to facilitate divided Kashmiri families on both sides of the Ceasefire Line by allowing unhindered meetings. Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon informed the participants about his forthcoming visit to the United States, where he will discuss the issue with the US administration. He also announced plans to organize an international conference on Kashmir in Islamabad soon.

Kashmiri voices globally. She said India had weaponized psychological torture and was increasingly "criminalizing the very word 'Kashmiri,'" which she described as a dangerous attempt to delegitimize Kashmiri identity.

Shamim Shawl, senior APHC-AJK leader and human rights advocate, said the base camp must "demonstrate its character" by taking more assertive positions on the Kashmir issue. She argued that despite sustained economic

Quetta Seminar Highlights Digital Media's Role in Countering Extremism

Qasem Shah, News Desk:
QUETTA: A seminar titled "Countering Violent Extremism and the Role of Digital Media" was held at the Quetta Press Club, bringing together senior officials, journalists and digital media experts to discuss how online platforms can be used to curb harmful narratives and promote responsible engagement.

Imran Shahid Ranjha, Director Press Information Department (PID) Islamabad, led the discussion by stressing that violent extremism is evolving rapidly in the digital age.

He said that online platforms, if misused, can amplify hate, misinformation and anti-state propaganda, but with coordinated efforts they



can also become powerful tools for peacebuilding. He urged youth, journalists and civil society to support positive digital initiatives and counter harmful behaviours.

seminar, Editor-in-Chief, Quetta Voice, Syed Ali Shah highlighted the crucial responsibility of every citizen to verify information before posting or sharing it.

He said fake news fuels confusion and instability, and added that responsible digital habits are essential to break the cycle of misinformation.

He called for stronger awareness campaigns to educate the public on safe and lawful use of social media.

Asad Mandokhail, Director PID Quetta, underscored the need to strengthen digital literacy, especially among young users who are most targeted by extremist content. He said coordinated public messaging, more

dia training and community engagement can significantly reduce the influence of malicious online narratives.

Senior journalist Manzoor Baloch also addressed the participants, warning that extremist groups exploit social platforms to spread misleading content.

He said journalists and media workers play a frontline role in ensuring factual reporting and promoting a healthy information environment.

Participants agreed that combating violent extremism requires a collective effort—where state institutions, media organisations, educational bodies and the public all work together to build a safer and more informed digital society.

NAB Balochistan Marks Anti-Corruption Day 2025 with Seminar and Awareness Walk



QUETTA: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Balochistan, following the directives of Chairman NAB Lt. (R) Nazir Ahmed Butt, observed International Anti-Corruption Day 2025 with a seminar and an awareness walk at the NAB Balochistan Complex. The event brought together university faculty members, students, competition winners, senior NAB officers, and media representatives, reaffirming the province's commitment to transparency and accountability. The Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) and the Secretary Revenue also participated in the ceremony.

Addressing the gathering, Director General Balochistan, Mr. Nauman Aslam, stressed that corruption remains a major barrier to socio-economic development and erodes public trust in state institutions. Reiterating the vision of the NAB Chairman, he highlighted the focus on pursuing mega corruption cases while discouraging frivolous complaints. He noted that this renewed direction aims to support sustainable progress and national prosperity.

DG NAB Balochistan also shared a major achievement—the successful transfer of one million acres of state land to the Forest Department, valued at more than Rs 1.3 trillion. The initiative, completed through co-operation between NAB Balochistan and the Board of Revenue, represents an unprecedented step in safeguarding government land in the province.

The Chairman NAB and the Chief Minister Balochistan lauded this milestone, with the provincial government issuing an appreciation letter recognizing DG NAB Nauman Aslam and Case Officer Deputy Director Malik Waheed Ahmed for their professional

and leadership. Chairman NAB also conveyed special appreciation for SMBR Qambar Dashti and Secretary Revenue Vardar Lal, both of whom attended the ceremony and received appreciation certificates.

Highlighting the importance of youth involvement, the DG NAB emphasized that universities play a pivotal role in shaping honest and responsible future leaders. "The students of today will become tomorrow's policymakers and professionals. Their commitment to integrity will shape the future of Pakistan," he said.

The seminar featured multiple awareness activities, including an on-site walk, while debate, essay art, and short film competitions held earlier under the campaign were

also acknowledged. Winners and runners-up received prizes and commendation certificates for their efforts in promoting anti-corruption themes. DG NAB further acknowledged the media's vital role in advancing transparency through responsible journalism, stressing the bureau's commitment to strengthening cooperation with media and academic institutions as part of its preventative strategy.

The event concluded with a renewed call for unity, transparency, and ethical responsibility. The head of NAB Balochistan urged all citizens to reject corruption, avoid shortcuts, and uphold integrity in their everyday lives, affirming that a corruption-free Pakistan is possible through collective will and principled action.

News Desk:

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and Balochistan Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has categorically rejected the social media propaganda and "false claims" being circulated regarding his recent Gadani visit.

Zehri Calls Social Media Claims "Baseless and Misleading"

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said the public's warm reception on his arrival in Gadani is clear evidence that people are politically aware and understand the reality, adding that they are not influenced by negative campaigns spread by certain groups.

Clarifies Security

Vehicles: "All Are Private, Not Government Protocol"

Responding to viral videos, Zehri clarified that all vehicles seen with him belong to his personal security fleet. He said he always uses private security arrangements, not government resources, during his routine constituency visits.

He added that if needed, he may include additional private vehicles in future visits as well.

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

their attempts will not succeed. He does not use official vehicles. He does not take government protocol.

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

The minister revealed that President Asif Ali Zardari takes special care of him and has provided personal SSU security for travel and constituency visits.

He said he may also carry more white private security vehicles in his future tours.

Didn't Take Any Protocol, Will Add More White Security Vehicles If Required'

News Desk:

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and Balochistan Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has categorically rejected the social media propaganda and "false claims" being circulated regarding his recent Gadani visit.

Zehri Calls Social Media Claims "Baseless and Misleading"

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said the public's warm reception on his arrival in Gadani is clear evidence that people are politically aware and understand the reality, adding that they are not influenced by negative campaigns spread by certain groups.

Clarifies Security

Vehicles: "All Are Private, Not Government Protocol"

Responding to viral videos, Zehri clarified that all vehicles seen with him belong to his personal security fleet. He said he always uses private security arrangements, not government resources, during his routine constituency visits.

He added that if needed, he may include additional private vehicles in future visits as well.

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

their attempts will not succeed. He does not use official vehicles. He does not take government protocol.

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

The minister revealed that President Asif Ali Zardari takes special care of him and has provided personal SSU security for travel and constituency visits.

He said he may also carry more white private security vehicles in his future tours.

Thanks People of Hub for Their Unwavering Support Mir Ali Hassan Zehri expressed heartfelt gratitude to PPP workers, local leaders, dignitaries, and residents of Hub for their consistent love and trust.

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

The minister revealed that President Asif Ali Zardari takes special care of him and has provided personal SSU security for travel and constituency visits.

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

their attempts will not succeed. He does not use official vehicles. He does not take government protocol.

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

The minister revealed that President Asif Ali Zardari takes special care of him and has provided personal SSU security for travel and constituency visits.

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

The police mobile seen in the area was only present for the security of a German delegation. He added that due to the poor condition of police vehicles, he prefers using his own private security team. Zardari Provides Personal SSU Security, Says Zehri

"No Government Protocol Used" — Zehri Sets the Record Straight

Zehri accused a few "malicious and ill-intentioned elements" of trying to misguide people through false narratives, but said

Pakistan ready to provide Kyrgyzstan access to regional and global markets through our ports, says PM Shehbaz

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Thursday that Pakistan was ready to provide landlocked Kyrgyzstan access to regional and global markets through its ports.

The premier made the remarks as he addressed the media in Islamabad alongside Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Zhaparov, following discussions between the two leaders. Zhaparov arrived in Islamabad yesterday on a two-day maiden visit to Pakistan. PM Shehbaz said in a post on X that the visit was the first by a Kyrgyz president in 20 years.

Detailing the discussions held today, the prime minister said that Kyrgyzstan was a landlocked country and therefore, "Pakistan stands ready to provide Kyrgyz Republic access to regional and global markets through our ports of Karachi, Bin Qasim and Gwadar."

"During our fruitful discussions today, we had a detailed exchange on [...] bilateral relations as well as important regional and international developments," PM Shehbaz said about his meeting with Zhaparov.

Oil industry rejects digital integration sans compensation

NEWS DESK: The country's oil industry on Tuesday rejected the unilateral imposition of a 6-12 month regulatory deadline for complete digital integration of more than 32,000 ground tanks, oil depots and petrol pumps across the country without any mechanism for Rs55 billion cost recovery.

In a formal letter to the Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) and the Petroleum Division, the Oil Companies' Advisory Council (OCAC)—an association of more than 100 dozen oil companies and refineries—has pointed out technical and financial challenges and has tested over 'dictatorial' instructions which could not be implemented as quickly. The Oil Marketing Association of Pakistan (OMAP), another industry association of smaller companies, also protested.

An industry executive told Dawn that an Ogra team led by Chairman Masroor Khan called a meeting with chief executive officers of the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to be ready to face punitive

Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, intelligence chief and National Security Adviser Lt Gen Muhammad Asim Malik, and Deputy PM Ishaq Dar, alongside others, were present at that and another delegation-level meeting.

"We have reaffirmed today, and of course in no uncertain terms, our shared resolve to elevate Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan relations to a much higher level by enhancing collaboration in political, trade, connectivity, energy, agriculture, education, defence, and of course, in cultural domains."

The prime minister noted that a business forum would be held later today to "chart new pathways for proactive collaboration in vital sectors of economic cooperation."

PM Shehbaz said that the business forum, comprising the business community from both sides, will be akin to "signing an MoU which is worth \$200 million", pledging to increase mutual trade from the current \$15-16m to \$20m in the next two years.

The bilateral trade volume had declined significantly from \$11.2m



In 2022-23 to \$5.18m in 2024-25.

PM Shehbaz called Islamabad the Kyrgyz president's "second home". "There cannot be a better moment of joy and bliss for all of us,"

Noting that a Kyrgyz president was visiting Pakistan after a period of 20 years, the premier said that "this gap between two brotherly countries is not acceptable." "As I said, it's never too late," he added, extending the visiting dignitary a warm welcome.

Stating that the two nations had "timeless" links, the prime minister said the people of both countries were connected "not only by geography but by centuries of caravans, and ideas of faiths and friendships."

"Our discussions also highlighted the need to strengthen people-to-people exchanges through cultural initiatives, tourism promotion, and academic partnerships," the premier said, adding that they agreed to hold

cultural events in Islamabad and other parts of Pakistan, as well as similar activities in Bishkek.

"Our interaction today is far more than a meeting between two brothers whose hearts beat in unison. It is as though the ancient Karakoram and the majestic Ala-Too stretch out across the horizon to embrace one another," PM Shehbaz said. He expressed the confidence that the visit will "most definitely give a fresh impetus to our already strong bilateral

relations in all fields of mutual interaction."

The prime minister thanked the Kyrgyz president and his delegation for their "commitment to strengthening our bilateral relations."

"May the radiant sun of Kyrgyzstan and the guiding glow of Pakistan's crescent and star unite to illuminate a future between our two countries of enduring peace, shared prosperity and hope for both the peoples and, of course our region, and the world beyond."

Zhaparov calls Pakistan "important partner" in his remarks.

President Zhaparov appreciated the Pakistani government and its people for their "warm reception and generous hospitality". He also confirmed that his visit was the first by a head of Kyrgyzstan in 20 years.

"I would like to emphasise that Pakistan is an important partner of Kyrgyzstan in South Asia," Zhaparov said. He later also termed Pakistan a "brotherly country and a reliable partner".

"I view Pakistan's dynamic development, its growing economic potential and its ambitious infrastructure projects as a testament to the prime minister's effective leadership," he added. "We paid special attention to activating collaboration in trade, economy, investment, transport, logistics, education and science," he detailed. "We attach particular importance to further developing the Kyrgyz-Pakistan Business Council as an effective mechanism for bringing together the business communities of both countries."

The visiting dignitary further said he considered the "full use of the transport

and transit potential of Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan to be one of the most important areas of our partnership."

Zhaparov also mentioned the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000), saying it would "serve as a cornerstone in establishing a unified energy system between Central and South Asia."

The \$1.2 billion regional power project — designed to bring the benefits of interconnectivity to Tajikistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan — is expected to become operational by January 2027, as per a Tajik minister. Speaking on academic cooperation, Zhaparov noted that more than 12,000 Pakistani students were studying at higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan. "In the field of security, we reaffirmed our shared commitment to combating terrorism, extremism and transnational crime," he said, adding that both countries also agreed to strengthen coordinative authorities to ensure peace, stability and security in the region."

Centre here to listen to provinces' stance, finance minister tells inaugural meeting of 11th NFC

NEWS DESK: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday told the inaugural meeting of the 11th National Finance Commission (NFC) that the Centre was there to listen to the stance of the provinces.

He noted that the forum was established under Article 150 of the Constitution, adding that the 10th NFC Award had expired in July this year.

"In this context, the importance of this meeting increases further," he said. He said that the federal government was of the view that the 11th NFC meeting be convened "without any delay".

He noted that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and himself had stated that he wanted to hold the meeting as soon as possible.

"The provinces had also expressed their determination to fulfil this constitutional responsibility," he said. The minister added that, however, it had to be postponed due to floods in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh. He further said that the best solution for speculation and concerns regarding the NFC was a "sincere and transparent" dialogue.

We are here today with an open mind and without any prejudice," he said, stressing that "our first priority is to listen to each other. I assured the participants

that the federal government was "here to listen to them". The minister voiced optimism that the provinces "will move forward within the spirit of cooperation."

He noted that the "signing of the National Fiscal Pact by the provinces was very significant."

It is a "testament to our shared commitment and ability to work together in the national interest," the finance minister said.

He appreciated the cooperation of provinces in achieving the economic growth in the country," Aurangzeb said.

He noted that the forum provided an "opportunity to bring together the best minds and advance the process of shared thinking and mutual learning."

He hoped that the discussions would continue in the upcoming weeks, and urged members to "move forward with full coherence and mutual respect," the minister said.



Flat cotton output triggers calls for policy reforms

NEWS DESK: The local cotton industry is facing a deepening crisis as the data released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) on Wednesday showed a decline in national arrivals and growing stress on the ginning and spinning sectors.

Experts warn that without urgent policy reforms, research investments and protection from unchecked imports, the economic strain on the entire cotton value chain will intensify.

According to Business Club analyst Haseeb Ahmad, total cotton arrivals as of Nov 30 stood at 5,133,620 bales, down from last year's 5,190,725 bales.

He noted that un-sold stocks have reached 667,257 bales. "The numbers paint a troubling picture. We are producing less, consuming



less, and relying more on imports," Ahmad remarked.

Head of Technology Transfer at the Central Cotton Research Institute—te, Multan, Sajid Mahmood—said the PCGA rep-ort "highlights the severity of the cotton crisis". He explained that Punjab recorded a shortfall of

110,437 bales compared to last year, down 4.9pc, while Sindh showed a slight increase.

"The most critical issue is the absence of a viable support price," Mahmood said. "Farmers shift to profitable crops like sugarcane and rice, while climate extremes, along with pests such as

Rsl3bn telecom projects okayed to connect 5.5m rural residents

NEWS DESK: The Universal Service Fund (USF) on Wednesday approved nine new telecom projects worth Rs13.05 billion to provide high-speed internet and voice services to 5.55 million unserved and underserved residents across the country.

The approved projects include the Next Generation Broadband Services for Sustainable Development (NGBSD), with six projects set to deliver high-speed broadband and voice services to 1.267m people across 753 mauzas in seven districts.

The USF board also approved three projects to lay 1,428km optical fibre network across 178 towns and union councils in four districts, enabling connectivity for 4.29m people.

The new projects received formal approval during the 101st Board of Directors meeting of the USF, chaired by its Chairman and Information

Technology Secretary Zarrar Hasham Khan.

The meeting was attended by PTA Chairman retired Maj Gen Hafeezur Rehman, Member Telecom Jahanzeb Rahim, independent board members Muhammad Yousuf and Ayla Majid, USF CEO Chaudhry Mudassar Naveed, and other senior officials.

The USF board awarded the projects to various service providers following a rigorous and transparent process, selecting the lowest compliant bidders.

The NGBSD projects will be initiated in Umar Kot district (Sindh), Gujranwala, Mandi Bahauddin and Muzaffargarh districts (Punjab), Kohat and Mansehra districts (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Khuzdar district (Balochistan). The optical fibre projects will cover Sialkot and Narowal districts (Punjab) and the

Quetta-Ziarat region. Zarrar Hasham emphasised the urgent need to enhance fibreisation and base transceiver stations (BTS) nationwide, urging the USF to lead this effort within its mandate.

He said USF projects play an instrumental role in empowering rural communities, with connectivity serving as a key driver for digital growth and the IT sector.

He also noted the fund's vital support for the IT industry, freelancers, and essential health and education services.

To date, approximately 39.4m rural residents have been served or enabled with broadband, voice, and fixed-line services through USF projects, he added.

Mudassar Naveed outlined the highlights of the new projects, detailed the transparent bidding process, and explained the expected positive impact in the designated areas.

Messi, Ronaldo take rivalry to sixth World Cup

NEWS DESK: Two adjacent transparent bins in London became the venue for a silent but heated debate in 2015, with smokers depositing their stubbed-out butts to settle a burning question: who was the best soccer player in the world, Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo?

As a way to encourage people to use bins for their butts, the biggest career rivalry in 21st-century soccer proved to be an effective conduit.

A decade on, however, the debate still rages as the duo head towards becoming the first men to appear in six World Cups.

Ronaldo and Messi have each scored more than 800 goals for club and country, winning nine Champions Leagues and 13 Ballon d'Or trophies between them.

Messi's fans argue that his World Cup triumph for Argentina in 2022 puts him top of the pile, but Ronaldo wor-

shippers cite his titles across Europe's major leagues, a tally of 954 goals, including 143 for his country, and being the most-capped male international footballer with 226 appearances for Portugal.

Next year's tournament in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, when Ronaldo will be 41 and Messi turns 39, will surely be their last.

World Cup 2006 Ronaldo was 21 and Messi almost 19 when they became their countries' youngest World Cup goalscorers when they debuted in the tournament in Germany.

Messi did not play in the quarter-finals, where Argentina were beaten by the hosts on penalties. The next day, Ronaldo scored the decisive penalty in a shootout with England, before facing heartbreak in the semi-finals, where Portugal lost to France.

World Cup 2010 Ronaldo, the Portugal captain, scored only one goal in South Africa



before Portugal lost to champions Spain in the last 16.

Messi, who failed to score in the tournament as Argentina were ousted by Germany for

the second straight time, faced heavy criticism back home, with fans accusing him of caring less about his country than his club Barcelona.

World Cup 2014

Portugal had a forgettable campaign as back home, with fans scoring in every group game and winning four straight player-of-the-

match awards. Argentina, however, lost the final to Germany. A tearful Messi's Golden Ball trophy was no consolation.

In the next two years, Argentina lost the finals of the Copa America and the Copa America Centenario, both to Chile on penalties. A heartbroken Messi announced his retirement from international football, but reversed his decision later.

World Cup 2018 Both Argentina and Portugal suffered second-round exits. Messi scored only one goal in the group stage before defeat by France in the last 16. Ronaldo, who had won the European Championship with Portugal two years earlier, scored a hat-trick in their first group fixture, a 3-3 draw with Spain. However, he missed a penalty

against Iran, before Portugal lost to Uruguay in the second round.

The following year, Ronaldo helped Portugal win their first Na-

tions League title, scoring a hat-trick in the semi-finals.

World Cup 2022 Portugal were impressive, but for once it was not because of Ronaldo, who was dropped to the bench for the knockout stage as they lost in the quarter-finals.

Messi, however, delivered for his team from the start to finish. He became the first player to score in every round of a World Cup, netting seven times between the group stage and the final, where he struck twice against France and netted Argentina's first penalty as they won the shootout 4-2.

Messi finally stood alongside Diego Maradona in the hearts of Argentina's fans.

For very different reasons it seemed as if the 2022 tournament would be the end of the World Cup road for both ageing superstars, but they appear to be set for one more crack.

Mitchell Starc surpasses Wasim Akram as most prolific left-arm pacer in Test history

NEWS DESK: Australian veteran Mitchell Starc became the most prolific left-arm pacer in Test history on Thursday, surpassing Pakistan great Wasim Akram.

The 35-year-old bagged England's Harry Brook at the Gabba in Brisbane on day one of the day-night second Ashes Test for his 415th wicket since his debut at the same ground 14 years ago.

It moved him past Wasim, widely recognised as the greatest left-arm bowler the sport has seen. Wasim played 104 Tests for his 314 wickets with Starc reaching the milestone



in his 102nd, helped by a career-best 7-58 in the first innings of the opening Ashes Test at Perth.

Starc is now 16th

on the all-time wicket-taker list and could move above both India's Harbhajan Singh (417) and South Africa's Shaun Pol-

lock (421) in the current pink-ball Test. After that he will have New Zealand's Richard Hadlee (431) in his sights.

Visa chaos and host city threats: how Trump disrupted World Cup plans

NEWS DESK: Organizing a World Cup is never simple. But when the host is Donald Trump, it's even more complicated.

In just six months, the United States along with Mexico and Canada will host soccer's flagship tournament.

And the mercurial US president has infuriated his co-host neighbors, threatened to relocate matches, and imposed visa restrictions.

Travel restrictions Hundreds of thousands of overseas fans are expected to flock to the host countries — in particular the US, which is staging 82 of the tournament's 104 games.

They will arrive in a nation led by a president who has made anti-immigration policies a cornerstone of his second term, which has been marked by widespread and divisive raids and deportations.

And Trump is tightening the screws. After an Afghan national allegedly shot two National Guard members near the White House, killing one of them, he announced plans to "permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries."

Nineteen countries — including World Cup participants Haiti and Iran — have faced US travel restrictions since June, and have now had asylum decisions frozen indefinitely.

Iran briefly said it would boycott Friday's World Cup draw in Washington, in response to the US refus-



ing visas for several members of its delegation, but later rescinded the threat.

Visa 'vetting'

While obtaining visas to visit the US can sometimes take weeks or even months, Trump recently unveiled a special fast-track process for people with World Cup tickets. Football fans following their teams will receive priority for visa appointments.

But US Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a warning to those hoping to come for the tournament. "Your ticket is not a visa," Rubio said at the announcement.

"It doesn't guarantee admission to the US. It guarantees you an expedited appointment, you're still going to go through the same vetting."

Shifting venues Trump has repeatedly threatened to move World Cup matches away from several Democratic-run cities for supposed security reasons.

Among those potentially at risk, Boston

is scheduled to host seven games. San Francisco and Seattle have six matches apiece, and Los Angeles is the setting for eight.

Moving games would be an organizational nightmare for FIFA, not to mention the fans who have already booked flights and accommodation.

Doing so could also face legal obstacles. Host city contracts can only be terminated in the event of catastrophic events like natural disasters, war or riots — although there is more flexibility in terms of rescheduling specific, individual matches. Adding to the uncertainty, Trump has already deployed National Guard troops to many of the same Democratic-run cities this year over the objections of local and state leaders, saying they are needed to counter crime and left-wing activism.

And raids by immigration agents in cities like Los Angeles, where Trump has vowed to hunt down undocumented migrants, have raised tensions and created a climate of fear, particularly among Latino communities.

Both the deployment of troops and the immigration raids could continue until and throughout the World Cup.

Tense neighbors Trump's foreign policy has been notable for its aggressive treatment of allies and foes alike, and co-hosting the World Cup with the US has not afforded Canada and Mexico any special treatment.

Trump has im-

NEWS DESK: India are all in a spin after losing a scarcely believable 20 coin tosses in a row in one-day internationals — at odds of more than a million-to-one.

Stand-in captain KL Rahul admitted he was flummoxed at the run of bad luck that goes all the way back to the 2023 World Cup final in Ahmedabad, when Rohit Sharma was in charge.

"I've been practising, but clearly it's not working," said Rahul after losing the flip again in the second one-day international against South Africa in Raipur on Wednesday.

The odds against losing 20 consecutive coin tosses are 1,048,576 to one, a statistical anomaly that Rahul wants to end in the third and final South Africa ODI on Saturday in Visakhapatnam.

"Honestly, that's



the most pressure I've had because we haven't won a toss in a long time," Rahul said after seeing opposite number Temba Bavuma call correctly, yet again.

Three Indian captains — Sharma, regular ODI skipper Shubman Gill and Rahul — have all tried and failed to win a toss since the last correct call against New Zealand in November 15, 2023, at the World

Cup semi-final in Mumbai.

"Rahul said he'd been practising, but how do you know what the opposition captain is going to call?" batting great Sunil Gavaskar told broadcaster JioStar.

"Because you know, for the first game, it was Aiden Markram who was captain."

"So Markram might be a person who likes opting for

'heads', and Temba Bavuma might be a captain who likes to opt for 'tails'."

Former South Africa pace bowler Dale Steyn said Faf du Plessis once asked Bavuma to toss for him after a lengthy losing sequence.

"It's the first time I have ever seen a captain ask one of the other players to come and do a toss," said Steyn. "Temba also lost that toss."

Ravindra, Latham tons put New Zealand in command of West Indies Test



NEWS DESK: Big centuries by Tom Latham and Rachin Ravindra put New Zealand firmly in control of the first Test against the West Indies with a lead of 481 at stumps on day three in Christchurch on Thursday.

The pair put on 279 for the third wicket before Latham was out for 145.

Ravindra followed soon after for 176.

At stumps, Will Young was 21, Michael Bracewell was on six and New Zealand were 417-4 to go with their 64-run first innings lead.

"If you asked what a perfect day looked like it would probably look something like that," Ravindra said after surviving two dropped catches to post his fourth Test century.

"It comes with the territory. You have a couple of cover drives and you nick a couple, some go close, some go to hand, it's all part of the game."

"That's my natural game. I go out there, play my shots, obviously within reason, sometimes it gets me out but lucky enough I've had some good games recently."

The West Indies would need to break their own record fourth innings chase to overhaul New Zealand, having reached 418-7 to beat Australia in 2003.

But coach Floyd Reifer did not believe it was beyond them.

"The pitch is getting better for batting. Losing three-four wickets on day four that will be a good day for us," he said.

New Zealand captain Latham laid the foundations of the innings in a clinical 84-run opening stand with Devon Conway, who made

"If one or two of our guys score hundreds that will be good as well. Anything is possible. We've got to take it session by session."

After two days of overcast skies favouring swing and seam bowling, the pitch flattened out under bright sunshine.

The West Indies suffered from a lack of discipline, giving away 23 extras including 11 wides.

Latham and Ravindra presented contrasting styles as they set a New Zealand-best third wicket partnership against the West Indies and Latham passed 6,000 Test runs.

New Zealand captain Latham laid the foundations of the innings in a clinical 84-run opening stand with Devon Conway, who made

37. After a brief partnership with Kane Williamson, who fell for nine, Latham was on 40 when he was joined by Ravindra in an aggressive move.

While Latham was methodical and largely

chanceless, Ravindra took to the bowling in one-day mode and made the West Indies suffer for dropping him on eight and 13.

His 176 came off 185 deliveries, with one six and 27 fours. Latham faced 250 deliveries for his 145 and hit 12 fours.

For the West Indies, Kemar Roach had both Latham and Williamson caught behind to return figures of 2-61.

Ojay Shields took 2-64, bowling Ravindra with a yorker and having Conway caught at square leg — AFP

Macron urges Xi to step up efforts on Ukraine, rebalancing global trade

NEWS DESK: French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday urged Chinese leader Xi Jinping to cooperate more closely on geopolitics, trade and the environment, as the European Union (EU) seeks China's help to end the war in Ukraine while Beijing looks for diplomatic wins amid US tariffs.

A large business delegation is accompanying Macron on his fourth state visit to the world's second-largest economy, as he seeks to bolster his foreign policy credentials and secure commercial deals for French industry in a bid to revitalise his political legacy in the final years of his term after a tumultuous summer, and ahead of the 2027 presidential election.

China, for its part, wants to ease trade frictions with the 27-strong EU over its heavily subsidised electric vehicle sector, while presenting itself as a reliable trading partner and an alternative market to the US as global economies

face recession risks resulting from US President Donald Trump's tariffs.

"Now, more than ever, dialogue between China and France is vital," Macron told his host during their meeting today at Beijing's Great Hall of the People. "I propose a positive three-fold agenda for our relations, one of geopolitical stability, of economic rebalancing, and of environmental sustainability."

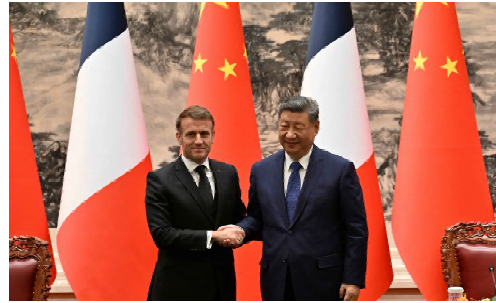
"We have to continue to rally in favour of peace and stability in the world," he added, referring to the conflict in Ukraine. "Our ability to work together is decisive."

Economic opportunities face political constraints. Tomorrow, Xi will accompany Macron to southwestern China's Sichuan province, a lavish treatment considering Xi seldom joins visiting world leaders once they leave Beijing.

But despite the apparent bonhomie between the two men, analysts say significant political constraints weigh on their partnership.

The Chinese leader is not expected to approve a long-anticipated 500-jet Airbus order, as that would weaken Beijing's leverage during trade talks with the US, which is pressing for new Boeing purchase commitments.

Similarly, Xi is unlikely to lift the minimum



prices that most of France's cognac industry must meet to sell to Chinese consumers, given that the preceding anti-dumping probe was launched in response to the wider EU's decision to impose import tariffs on Chinese EVs.

An easing of Chinese duties on EU pork shipments is also expected, as Beijing seeks to pressure Brussels into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

economic security policies next month to reduce the bloc's reliance on China.

"No matter how the external environment changes, our two countries should always demonstrate the independence and strategic vision of major powers," Xi told Macron, adding that China remained committed to promoting peace in Ukraine and

into agreeing to a minimum price plan for China-made EVs. France voted in favour of the EV tariffs in the October 2024 vote.

And any overtures on Ukraine Xi might make to Macron would follow recent Chinese assurances to Russia of China's continued support.

The EU is also poised to unveil new

Uzbekistan reopens Afghan border after four years

NEWS DESK: Uzbekistan has fully reopened its only border crossing with Afghanistan, which had been closed to travellers since the Taliban took power in 2021, as it seeks to foster trade links with its neighbour.

The five former Soviet republics of Central Asia — Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan — had feared the Taliban takeover would lead to the spread of radical Islamism in the region.

But four years after the Taliban seized power, economic liberalisation is overriding their initial security concerns.

The Tarmeh-Hairatan bridge crossing point, linking Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, is operational again. Travellers can now travel directly and safely between the two countries.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry said on Tuesday. It added that the visa regime between the two countries remained in place.

The government body said shutting the border had forced people to take a detour via Tajikistan in order to reach the major Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, only 75 kilometres (46 miles) from the Uzbek border.

The probe found US defence secretary's Signal unit to discuss strikes on Yemen could have put US troops at risk: reports

Probe found US defence secretary's Signal unit to discuss strikes on Yemen could have put US troops at risk: reports

NEWS DESK: The Pentagon's independent watchdog said US defence Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of the commercial messaging app Signal to discuss strikes on Yemen could have put American troops at risk, US media reported on Wednesday.

The probe by the inspector general's office concluded that Hegseth did not, real-time intelligence, violate rules on classification because he has the authority to declassify information, the reports said, citing sources familiar with the results of the investigation. The watchdog's conclusion — which has been transmitted to Congress — is nonetheless likely to reignite debate over conduct by Hegseth, who is already under fire over US strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats that experts say amount to extrajudicial killings.

The probe was sparked by the Atlantic magazine's revelation in late March that its editor-in-chief was inadvertently included in a Signal chat in which US officials, including Hegseth and then-national security adviser Mike Waltz, discussed strikes on Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels.

The magazine initially withheld the details the officials discussed, but later published them after the White House insisted that no classified information was shared and attacked the editor, Jeffrey Goldberg, as a liar. The chat included messages in which Hegseth revealed the timing of strikes hours before they happened and information on aircraft and missiles involved, while Waltz sent real-time intelligence on the aftermath of the military action.

In a post to X late on Wednesday, Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell called the review "a TOTIAL exoneration of Secretary Hegseth".

Waltz, fired, Hegseth survives



While border crossings had been prohibited for private individuals since August 2021, goods could still be traded across the border to a limited extent.

Afghans could also travel without a visa to the Uzbek free-trade zone of Airtom, built to boost trade.

The commerce chamber said on Wednesday that the border had been reopened since November 23.

The Amu Darya River marks the border between the two countries. The point is located near the city of Termez, on the Friendship Bridge, through which the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, as did some Afghan soldiers fleeing the Taliban advance in 2021.

Central Asian countries are launching major infrastructure projects, such as railways, to gain access to the sea via Afghanistan, a relationship that has benefited the Taliban, which relies on Central Asia for Afghanistan's food and energy security.

The Atlantic said that Waltz had set some of the Signal messages to disappear after one week, and others after four, saying it raised questions about whether federal records law was violated.

Trump rejected calls for military withdrawal from Lebanon, and largely pinned the blame on Waltz, whom he ultimately replaced as national security advisor, appointing him as US ambassador to the United Nations instead.

US media then reported in April that Hegseth had created a second Signal chat in which the March Yemen strikes were discussed with people.

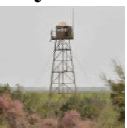


US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.

US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.



While border crossings had been prohibited for private individuals since August 2021, goods could still be traded across the border to a limited extent.

Afghans could also travel without a visa to the Uzbek free-trade zone of Airtom, built to boost trade.

The commerce chamber said on Wednesday that the border had been reopened since November 23.

The Amu Darya River marks the border between the two countries. The point is located near the city of Termez, on the Friendship Bridge, through which the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, as did some Afghan soldiers fleeing the Taliban advance in 2021.

Central Asian countries are launching major infrastructure projects, such as railways, to gain access to the sea via Afghanistan, a relationship that has benefited the Taliban, which relies on Central Asia for Afghanistan's food and energy security.

The Atlantic said that Waltz had set some of the Signal messages to disappear after one week, and others after four, saying it raised questions about whether federal records law was violated.

Trump rejected calls for military withdrawal from Lebanon, and largely pinned the blame on Waltz, whom he ultimately replaced as national security advisor, appointing him as US ambassador to the United Nations instead.

US media then reported in April that Hegseth had created a second Signal chat in which the March Yemen strikes were discussed with people.

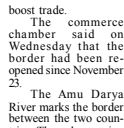


US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.

US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.



While border crossings had been prohibited for private individuals since August 2021, goods could still be traded across the border to a limited extent.

Afghans could also travel without a visa to the Uzbek free-trade zone of Airtom, built to boost trade.

The commerce chamber said on Wednesday that the border had been reopened since November 23.

The Amu Darya River marks the border between the two countries. The point is located near the city of Termez, on the Friendship Bridge, through which the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, as did some Afghan soldiers fleeing the Taliban advance in 2021.

Central Asian countries are launching major infrastructure projects, such as railways, to gain access to the sea via Afghanistan, a relationship that has benefited the Taliban, which relies on Central Asia for Afghanistan's food and energy security.

The Atlantic said that Waltz had set some of the Signal messages to disappear after one week, and others after four, saying it raised questions about whether federal records law was violated.

Trump rejected calls for military withdrawal from Lebanon, and largely pinned the blame on Waltz, whom he ultimately replaced as national security advisor, appointing him as US ambassador to the United Nations instead.

US media then reported in April that Hegseth had created a second Signal chat in which the March Yemen strikes were discussed with people.



US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.

US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.

Millions of lives upended by Asia floods, 'extreme' rainfall on the rise

NEWS DESK: Officials in Indonesia and Sri Lanka battled Wednesday to reach survivors of deadly flooding in remote, cut-off regions as the toll in the disaster that hit four countries topped 1,500.

In Indonesia, survivors expressed growing frustration about the slow pace of rescue efforts and delivery of humanitarian groups warned the scale of the challenge was almost unprecedented, even in a country that has faced no shortage of natural disasters.

Monsoon rains paired with two tropical storm systems dumped record deluges across Sri Lanka, and parts of Indonesia's Sumatra, southern Thailand, and northern Malaysia last week. World Meteorological Organization (WMO) spokesperson Clare Nullis told reporters in Geneva that Indonesia's situation will be "more problematic as time goes by." "Like an earthquake"

At an evacuation centre in Pandan, 52-year-old Reinaro Waruwu told AFP he was "disappointed" in the government's immediate response and the

In Indonesia, 770 were confirmed dead, the country's disaster management agency said on Wednesday, revising the toll down from 812 it announced earlier in the day. Another 463 people are also missing.

Information is only trickling in as many regions remain physically cut off by flood damage, isolated by electricity failures and communications outages, or both.

"It's very challenging logistically to respond," said Ade Soekadhi, executive director of aid group Mercy Corps Indonesia.

The extent of the damage and the size of the affected area are regularly being updated, hoping to send hygiene equipment and water, both from Jakarta and locally. He said reports of food and water shortages were already "very concerning" and the situation will be "more problematic as time goes by."

At an evacuation centre in Pandan, 52-year-old Reinaro Waruwu told AFP he was "disappointed" in the government's immediate response and the

A separate weather

A search of the truck uncovered a Glock pistol chambered in .357 SIG with 27 rounds, three additional loaded magazines, a ballistic plate, and a handwritten notebook containing detailed notes on possible attacks. The notebook included a sketch labelled "UD Police Station," marked entry and exit points, and the name of a University of Delaware police officer. Investigators said the notes outlined "premeditated assault plans," including methods to evade law enforcement.

Local US media outlets also reported that the notebook included references to "martyrdom" and phrases such as "kill all," although these details do not appear in the DoJ complaint.

Khan was arrested Wednesday in Canby, Oregon, after a police officer found his white pickup truck parked in Canby Park West after hours. Police said Khan refused commands to exit the vehicle and resisted arrest before being taken into custody.

Delaware's Wilmington city and did not make any mention of his nationality.

Khan was arrested Wednesday in Canby, Oregon, after a police officer found his white pickup truck parked in Canby Park West after hours. Police said Khan refused commands to exit the vehicle and resisted arrest before being taken into custody.

Delaware's Wilmington city and did not make any mention of his nationality.

Khan was arrested Wednesday in Canby, Oregon, after a police officer found his white pickup truck parked in Canby Park West after hours. Police said Khan refused commands to exit the vehicle and resisted arrest before being taken into custody.

Delaware's Wilmington city and did not make any mention of his nationality.

Khan was arrested Wednesday in Canby, Oregon, after a police officer found his white pickup truck parked in Canby Park West after hours. Police said Khan refused commands to exit the vehicle and resisted arrest before being taken into custody.

Delaware's Wilmington city and did not make any mention of his nationality.



While border crossings had been prohibited for private individuals since August 2021, goods could still be traded across the border to a limited extent.

Afghans could also travel without a visa to the Uzbek free-trade zone of Airtom, built to boost trade.

The commerce chamber said on Wednesday that the border had been reopened since November 23.

The Amu Darya River marks the border between the two countries. The point is located near the city of Termez, on the Friendship Bridge, through which the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, as did some Afghan soldiers fleeing the Taliban advance in 2021.

Central Asian countries are launching major infrastructure projects, such as railways, to gain access to the sea via Afghanistan, a relationship that has benefited the Taliban, which relies on Central Asia for Afghanistan's food and energy security.

The Atlantic said that Waltz had set some of the Signal messages to disappear after one week, and others after four, saying it raised questions about whether federal records law was violated.

Trump rejected calls for military withdrawal from Lebanon, and largely pinned the blame on Waltz, whom he ultimately replaced as national security advisor, appointing him as US ambassador to the United Nations instead.

US media then reported in April that Hegseth had created a second Signal chat in which the March Yemen strikes were discussed with people.

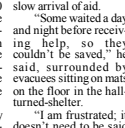


US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.

US officials have said Lakanwal was part of a CIA-backed unit in Afghanistan. He entered the US in 2012 through then-president Joe Biden's Operation Allies Welcome scheme for those fearing reprisal by the Taliban forces, who seized control of Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal.

"They (the Americans) trained him, they assigned him, and through an illegal process, contrary to any international standard, they brought him from Afghanistan to the United States," Muttuqi said.



While border crossings had been prohibited for private individuals since August 2021, goods could still be traded across the border to a limited extent.

Afghans could also travel without a visa to the Uzbek free-trade zone of Airtom, built to boost trade.

The commerce chamber said on Wednesday that the border had been reopened since November 23.

The Amu Darya River marks