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QUETTA VOICE



CM Sarfraz Bugti Praises CTD, Police Response to Panjgur Attack, Pays Tribute to Martyred Constable

Syed Muhammad Qasem:

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has praised the timely and courageous response of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and police during the armed attacks on banks and properties in Panjgur, say-

ing their swift action helped protect public lives and property.

In a statement, the chief minister paid rich tribute to CTD constable Dura Khan, who embraced martyrdom during the operation.

He said the courage, sense of duty, and supreme sacrifice of Shaheed Dura

Khan reflect the highest traditions of the security forces and will always be remembered.

He added that the nation is indebted to such brave martyrs whose sacrifices ensure peace and stability.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti also expressed deep condolences to the family of the civilian who lost his life in the incident and

prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls and patience for the bereaved families.

Reiterating the government's firm stance, the chief minister said there is no room for terrorists and criminal elements in Balochistan.

He stressed that the state will continue decisive action

against anti-national forces and that the sacrifices of security personnel for the establishment of law and order will never go in vain.

He assured that the protection of citizens' lives and property remains the top priority of the provincial government.

Race heats up for PIA privatisation as four bidders pre-qualified

NEWS DESK:

The race to acquire Pakistan's national carrier, PIA, has officially entered its final stages, with some bidders seeking support from internationally recognised airlines.

The government's renewed effort to privatise PIA comes after a failed bid last year, when only one offer,

Rs10 billion (\$36 million) from real estate developer Blue World City, was received for a 60 per cent stake. The offer, far below the government's floor price of Rs85 billion (\$305m), was rejected.

The Privatisation Commission reopened the process in April 2025, inviting expressions of interest for a 51 to 100 per cent stake from both local and international investors.

The most serious potential buyer withdrew due to outstanding loans and tax issues.

However, most of these issues have now been addressed, and four bidders have been pre-qualified.

The pre-qualified bidders include:

Lucky Cement Consortium, led by Habibullah Khan and others Arif Habib Consortium, including Fatima Fertiliser and others

Fauji Fertiliser and Air Blue, whose position remains less clear. The first two consortia are considered the most serious contenders; both consortia are reportedly willing to bring Fauji Fertiliser on board as a partner.

The Lucky Group is reportedly investing more time and money, while the Arif Habib Consortium has shown growing interest.

Both have engaged international aviation advisors: Lucky Group appointed Turkey's Pegasus Airlines for technical consultancy, while Arif Habib brought in Sibra Aviation Partners.

Following their advice, the two serious parties have requested multiple adjustments to the privatisation structure and commission processes, most of which have been approved, clearing the way for the sale.

As the privatisation date approaches, PIA's 6,500 employees have reportedly become increasingly anxious about their future.

Analysts suggest that, based on the potential profits and financial models prepared by the prospective board, the government may raise the reserve price.

Pakistan Navy conducts successful live firing of new air defence missile

NEWS DESK:

The Pakistan Navy has successfully conducted a live weapon firing of FM-90 (N) ER Surface-to-Air Missile in the North Arabian Sea.

According to government sources, during the firepower demonstration the Pakistan Navy ship successfully engaged manoeuvrable aerial targets, reaffirming the Navy's war-fighting potential and combat capability.

Commander of the Pakistan Fleet, Rear Admiral Abdul Munib, witnessed the LWF at sea on board the Pakistan Navy Fleet unit.

He commended the officers and men involved in the firing for their commitment and professionalism.

He reiterated Pakistan Navy's unwavering resolve to ensure the seaward defence of Pakistan and to safeguard national maritime interests under all circumstances.

Two Killed, Two Policemen Injured in Armed Clash at Panjgur Market

From Our Correspondent:

PANJGUR: At least two people, including a police official, were killed and two other policemen injured during an exchange of fire between armed assailants and police at Chitkan Bazaar on Saturday.

The incident occurred in the busy Bismillah Chowk area of Panjgur.

According to police, the clash erupted during an armed attack on Habib Bank and Meezan Bank.

Heavy weapons were used during the firing, causing partial damage to a police vehicle at the scene. Authorities said it was not immediately clear how much cash the attackers managed to take.

Following the incident, police and security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to track down the assailants.



EDITORIAL VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Pact – A Historic Milestone in Bilateral Relations

Editorial: For over eight decades, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed close and cordial relations rooted in faith, friendship, and mutual cooperation.

SMIDA An Unprecedented Event The signing of a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is unprecedented.

China, Turkey And Saudi Arabia Fully Support Pakistan Equally significant is the fact that Pakistan continues to receive consistent and unconditional support from major global actors such as China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

This is Indeed A National Achievement This historic step deserves to be celebrated as a national achievement. It is a reflection of Pakistan's enduring diplomacy and its ability to transform long-standing friendships into strategic partnerships that ensure stability, prosperity, and peace for generations to come.

Land Law and Its Importance in Pakistan

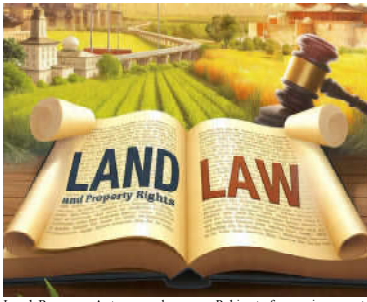
By Amir Hamza Bashir:

Land is one of the most valuable and contested assets in Pakistan. The legal framework that governs the ownership, possession, and transfer of land is known as Land Law.

Historical Background of Land Law in Pakistan

The foundation of land laws in Pakistan was laid during the British colonial era through legislation such as the Land Revenue Act and the Registration Act.

After independence in 1947, these laws continued to guide Pakistan's land management system. Today, major statutes like the West Pakistan



Land Revenue Act, 1967, and the Transfer of Property Act, 1882, remain the cornerstone of land governance and property transfer in the country.

Land Record Management and Reforms Patwari system has been responsible for maintaining land

records across Pakistan. However, it has often been criticized for corruption, manipulation, and lack of transparency.

Traditionally, the provincial projects to digitize land records and reduce human in-

terference in property registration and ownership verification. Despite reforms, Challenges in Pakistan's Land System

Pakistan continues to face issues like illegal possession (land grabbing), forged documents, and slow judicial processes. These problems create un-

certainty for investors and ordinary citizens alike.

To overcome these challenges, there is a strong need for comprehensive digital record-keeping, specialized land tribunals, and public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their property rights.

Land law is not just a legal framework — it is the foundation of economic stability and social justice in Pakistan. A fair, transparent, and efficient land management system encourages investment, infrastructure development, and public trust in state institutions.

The Author is a Student of LLB (7th Semester).

Quetta's Traffic Chaos: Urgent Reforms Needed to Fix the Crisis

Anjela Kaynat: Quetta, once a city known for its peaceful ambience, now faces an escalating traffic crisis.

Every day, thousands of commuters endure hours of gridlock, navigating congested roads, reckless drivers, and deteriorating infrastructure.

The city's transport system is on the brink of collapse, demanding immediate intervention from both authorities and residents.

The Strain on Quetta's Road Infrastructure Quetta's road network, originally designed during the colonial era, was never intended to accommodate the city's rapid population growth and rising number of vehicles.

though the city was rebuilt after the 1935 earthquake, its road capacity has remained largely unchanged, struggling to support over 1.2 million residents and the thousands of vehicles added each year.

Key roads such as Jinnah Road, Sariab Road, Liaquat Bazaar, Masjid Road, and Zarghoon Road have become perpetual bottlenecks, choked by illegal encroachments, unregulated parking, and an ever-increasing number of vehicles.

Without a structured urban transport model, these roads remain gridlocked, affecting daily life and economic activity.

Major Traffic Challenges in Quetta Severe congestion on Key Roads Traffic congestion is worst in commercial hubs such as Liaquat Bazaar, Masjid Road, and Zarghoon Road, where vehicles move at a snail's pace during peak hours.

causing massive delays. Key intersections, including Balochistan University Chowk, Meezan Chowk, Prince Road, frequently experience severe traffic jams.

The Surge of Non-Custom Paid (NCP) and Unregistered Vehicles The unchecked influx of non-custom paid (NCP) and unregistered vehicles has compounded the traffic crisis.

A 2010 report estimated over 50,000 NCP vehicles on Balochistan's roads, causing an annual revenue loss of Rs 15 billion to the national exchequer.

By 2024, this number has surged to nearly 80,000, with a significant concentration in Quetta (Excise and Taxation Department, 2024). Despite periodic crackdowns, including the 2023 seizure of 115 NCP vehicles worth Rs 982 million (ARY News, 2023), enforcement efforts have failed to stem the tide.

either unregistered or NCP (Think Transportation, 2023), worsening congestion and lawlessness on the roads.

Lack of a Proper Public Transport System Unlike other major cities in Pakistan, Quetta lacks an organized public transport system.

With no buses or mass transit options, residents rely on rickshaws, motorcycles, and private cars, further clogging the roads.

Encroachments and Illegal Parking Worsen Congestion Unauthorized stalls and illegal parking occupy nearly 30% of road space in busy commercial zones such as Prince

Road and Jinnah Road (Think Transportation, 2023). Street vendors set up shop on sidewalks, forcing pedestrians onto the roads, while shopkeepers extend their businesses onto public spaces, further restricting traffic flow.

Deteriorating Road Conditions Over 60% of Quetta's roads are in disrepair, riddled with potholes, cracks, and poor drainage systems (PARIK, 2024).

Roads such as Joint Road, Sariab Road, Subzal Road, and Nawa Kill are among the worst affected. During rainfall, flooding exacerbates the problem, making navigation nearly impossible.

A tragic reminder of Balochistan's road infrastructure crisis occurred in 2024, when a bus plunged into a ravine in Washuk district due to poor road conditions. Despite promises of road improvements, delays in infrastructure projects continue to endanger commuters.

Weak Traffic Management and Enforcement A lack of proper traf-

fic regulation has led to frequent violations, reckless driving, and rising accidents. With an inadequate number of traffic police officers on the roads, many drivers ignore basic rules—running red lights, driving on the wrong side, and engaging in dangerous maneuvers.

Although the Balochistan government announced plans to build flyovers and underpasses in 2024 to ease congestion, financial setbacks have stalled these projects (Balochistan Express, 2024).

Practical Solutions to Fix Quetta's Traffic Woes To address Quetta's multi-faceted approach is needed, combining road expansion, better enforcement, and public transport development. Here are some key solutions:

1. Road Expansion and Maintenance • Widen key roads such as Masjid Road, Jinnah Road, and Zarghoon Road to accommodate growing traf-

fic. • Improve drainage systems to prevent road damage and flooding. 2. Regulating Non-Custom Paid Vehicles • Enforce stricter measures to curb the flux of NCP vehicles. • Introduce policies to register or phase out unregistered vehicles.

3. Establishing a Public Transport System • Launch a city bus service to provide an affordable alternative to private cars. • Develop dedicated bus lanes to improve efficiency and reduce congestion.

4. Regulating Rickshaws and Motorcycles • Implement route-based restrictions for rickshaws to prevent congestion in commercial hubs. • Create designated parking areas for rickshaws and motorcycles.

5. Strengthening Traffic Law Enforcement • Deploy more traffic police officers to ensure compliance with traffic rules.

6. Removing Encroachments and Illegal Parking • Impose heavier fines and penalties on reckless drivers. • Remove Encroachments and Illegal Parking

• Launch awareness campaigns to educate citizens on traffic rules and road safety. • Integrate basic traffic education into school curriculums to instill discipline in future generations.

Call to Action: A Collective Responsibility Every day, Quetta's residents face the frustration of endless traffic jams, reckless drivers, and poorly managed roads. Yet, the problem persists—not just because of weak governance, but because of collective negligence. Authorities must act swiftly to expand roads, enforce traffic laws, and implement public transport reforms. Citizens, too, have a role to play—by obeying traffic rules, avoiding illegal parking, and discouraging encroachments.

Neither Capitalism nor Communism

Aziz ur Rehman Agha

The Cold War may have ended, but the ideological clash between Capitalism and Communism continues to shape global politics, economics, and international relations.

However, both Capitalist and Communist systems have failed to manage political and socio-economic affairs effectively. One system suppresses personal freedom, the other deepens inequality. Both carry serious structural flaws that make them unsuitable for modern societies.

This calls for a new, balanced approach — one found in the Islamic socio-economic and political philosophy, which follows a middle path between the two extremes.

The Flaws of Communism Communism lies at one extreme of the ideological spectrum. It suppresses individual freedoms such as speech, press, and trade.

Historical examples from Maoist China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) show how intellectual freedom was crushed — books and music not aligned with party ideology were banned, and private libraries were destroyed. Similarly, in the USSR, any deviation from party thought was treated as a crime.

Communism eliminates private property and discourages entrepreneurship. Without personal incentive, individuals lose motivation to innovate and work for economic growth. As a result, this system hampers development and limits prosperity. The severe restrictions on basic rights and freedoms make communism unsustainable in modern nation-states.

The Problems with Capitalism Capitalism, which has enabled just 1% of the world's population to control more wealth than the remaining 99%, is riddled with moral and ethical values are often sacrificed for industrial gains.

Furthermore, Capitalism's obsession with rapid industrialization and profit maximization has led to environmental destruction, resource depletion, and climate crises.

It prioritizes wealth accumulation over sustainability. These internal contradictions—

growing inequality, moral decay, and ecological harm — make Capitalism an unfit model for an equitable, sustainable society.

The Islamic Socio-Economic Philosophy: A Balanced Approach Both Capitalism and

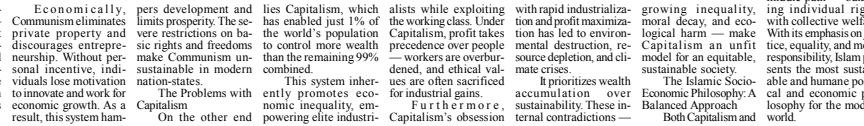
Communism fail because they represent extremes — one suffocates freedom; the other breeds inequality. Islam, however, offers a balanced socio-economic philosophy that harmonizes justice, freedom, and social welfare.

The Islamic economic system allows private ownership and business freedom, but regulates them through moral and legal checks. The obligation of Zakat (charity) redistributes wealth, preventing concentration in the hands of a few.

Meanwhile, the prohibition of Riba (usury) ensures financial fairness and discourages exploitation. Together, these principles foster economic justice, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Conclusion Neither Capitalism nor Communism provides a complete solution to humanity's political and economic challenges. Both contain inherent flaws — one curtails human freedom, the other destroys social equity.

The Islamic socio-economic model, however, offers the ideal middle path — balancing individual rights with collective welfare. With its emphasis on justice, equality, and moral responsibility, Islam presents the most sustainable and humane political and economic philosophy for the modern world.





Wholesale sugar prices drop sharply in Karachi, Punjab

NEWS DESK: Wholesale sugar prices show a clear downward trend nationwide following strict government measures to curb hoarding, speculation and artificial price hikes. The impact is most evident in major markets, particularly Karachi and Punjab, where prices have recorded a significant drop.

In Karachi, sugar prices have fallen sharply, with rates dropping from Rs200 per kilogram to Rs150 per kilogram. Market sources say the wholesale price has declined further to Rs146 per kilogram, reflecting improved supply and tighter market regulation.

Aurangzeb highlights Pakistan's strategic shift to restore economic confidence

NEWS DESK: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb underscored Pakistan's strategic shift from seeking aid-based support towards trade and investment-led engagement to ensure long-term economic sustainability and mutually beneficial partnerships, particularly with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

In an interview with CNN Business Arabia, Aurangzeb highlighted the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, which reflected Pakistan's renewed economic confidence and reform momentum. He said that Pakistan has followed a comprehensive macro-economic stabilisation program for the past 18 months, which has delivered tangible and measurable results, while inflation has declined to single-digit levels from

an unprecedented 38%. On the fiscal front, Pakistan has achieved primary surpluses, while the current account deficit remains well within targeted limits. According to the finance czar, the exchange rate has also stabilised, and foreign exchange reserves have improved to approximately 2.5 months of import cover, reflecting strengthened external buffers. He maintained that the country has two major external validations, which indicate Pakistan's improving economic outlook.

Firstly, he said, all three international credit rating agencies have aligned their assessments this year by upgrading Pakistan's ratings and outlook. On the other hand, the country has completed the second review under the IMF Extended Fund Facility, with the IMF Executive Board granting

its approval earlier this week. He stated that such developments demonstrate growing international confidence in Pakistan's economic management and reform trajectory. The finance minister further emphasised that macro-economic stabilisation has been achieved through a coordinated approach combining disciplined monetary and fiscal policies with an ambitious structural reform agenda.

"Reforms are being implemented across key areas, including taxation, energy, state-owned enterprises, public financial management, and privatisation, aimed at consolidating the foundation for sustainable growth," Aurangzeb said. He also highlighted the significant progress in Pakistan's tax

reform agenda, noting that the government has successfully implemented a series of measures to broaden the tax base and improve collection efficiency. He mentioned that the government is focusing on strengthening the legal and institutional framework for tax administration, including the introduction of digital tax services and the establishment of a dedicated tax authority to enhance transparency and accountability in the process.



to-GDP ratio. "During the last fiscal year, it increased to 10.3 per cent, with a clear path towards 11 per cent," the finance minister said. He further explained that the government's objective is to reach a level of tax collection that ensures fiscal sustainability over the medium to long term.

"This is being pursued through widening the tax base by bringing previously under-taxed but economically significant sectors such as real estate, agriculture, and wholesale and retail trade into the formal net, alongside deepening compliance by reducing leakages through production monitoring systems and AI-enabled technologies. Simultaneously, the tax administration is being transformed through reforms in people, processes,

and technology," he said. The minister further highlighted efforts to improve governance in [power] distribution companies, involve private sector expertise, advance privatisation, and reduce circular debt, which has long constrained the power sector.

"Rationalising the tariff regime is essential to making energy more competitive for industry, thereby enabling industrial revival and economic growth," he stressed. He further said, "Pakistan is actively engaging with GCC partners to attract investment in priority sectors including energy, oil and gas, minerals and mining, artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture."

ing, and cooperation at international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. "This relationship is now evolving towards a new phase centred on trade expansion and investment flows. Remittances continue to play a vital role in supporting the current account, with inflows reaching approximately \$38 billion last year and projected to rise to \$41-\$2 billion this year, over half of which originates from GCC countries," he added. He further said, "Pakistan is actively engaging with GCC partners to attract investment in priority sectors including energy, oil and gas, minerals and mining, artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture."

Soldier martyred in DI Khan counter-insurgency operation: ISPR

NEWS DESK: A soldier was martyred during a counter-insurgency operation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district on Monday, in which seven terrorists were killed, the military's media wing said in a statement.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was carried out in Dera Ismail Khan's Kulachi area on the reported presence of terrorists belonging to the Indian proxy Fina Al Khawarij.

Fina-al-Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). "During the conduct of the operation, our troops effectively engaged the Khawarij loitering and after an intense fire exchange, seven Khawarij were sent to hell," the statement read.

"[A] sanitisation



operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Indian-sponsored Khawarij found in the area, as the relentless Counter-Terrorism campaign under vision 'Azm-i-Istehkam' (as approved by the Federal Executive Committee on National Security) by security forces and law enforcement agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out the

menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country," the statement concluded. Earlier, security forces killed 13 terrorists in two IBOs across KP, the military's media wing said in a statement on Sunday.

"On 12-13 December 2025, thirteen Khawarij belonging to Indian proxy Fina Al

Khawarij were killed in two separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province," the ISPR said in a statement.

It said that the first intelligence-based operation (IBO) was carried out on the reported presence of the terrorists in KP's Mohmand district, while the other was carried out in Bannu.

Earlier this year, Pakistan ranked second in the Global Terrorism Index 2025, with the number of deaths in terrorist attacks rising by 45 per cent as compared to the previous year. The Global Terrorism Index 2025, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), provides a comprehensive summary of the key trends and patterns in terrorism over the last 17 years.

Last month, security forces eliminated 22 terrorists during an operation in the Bannu district.

Punjab to field new riot control force for 'unlawful' protests

NEWS DESK: Punjab is set to raise a separate force for handling "unlawful" protests and mobs, as the Punjab Assembly's Standing Committee on Home Affairs on Monday cleared a sweeping amendment to the Police Order, 2002, to tighten control over riots, violent protests and unlawful assemblies across the province.

The proposed Police Order (Second Amendment) Act, 2025, introduces a dedicated Riot Management Unit (RMU), empowered to manage riots across Punjab with modern gear and training specifically for crowd control.

The RMU will operate under an additional inspector general of police (AIG), supervised by the provincial police officer. A key feature of the bill is the formal declaration of "riot zones." Under the new law, the deputy commissioner and district police officer can jointly declare any affected area a riot zone, allowing authorities to cordon off roads, evacuate civilians and appoint an incident commander to coordinate all departmental interventions during operations.

The bill grants legal protection to police and RMU personnel for actions taken "in good faith" during riot control, shielding them from lawsuits and prosecutions

for lawful use of force. To strengthen accountability, the amendment makes organisers, instigators and facilitators of riots financially liable. Courts will be required to order compensation for deaths, injuries, mental trauma and property damage caused during riots or unlawful assemblies. Compensation will be recoverable as arrears of land revenue, with up to three years' imprisonment for default. A new chapter, "Offences in the Riot Zone", prescribes up to 10 years' imprisonment and fines up to Rs500,000 for attacks on police, law enforcement personnel or private individuals, as well as for damage to public or private property.

Such offences will be cognisable, non-bail-



able and tried by sessions courts on a day-to-day basis, with a mandatory decision within 30 days. The bill also bars accused persons from transferring property once a case is registered and restricts foreign travel without court permission. The use of modern surveillance technology, including Safe City cameras, is allowed, with video and photographic evidence declared admissible in court. According to the statement of objects, the amendments seek to address rising public unrest, violent protests and attacks on law enforcement, while ensuring compensation for victims and clearer legal cover for police action.

The bill will now move to the Punjab Assembly for enactment.

MQM-P proposes disbursing local bodies' share through NFC as provinces fail to transfer funds to districts

NEWS DESK: Federal Health Minister and Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) leader Mustafa Kamal shared key features of his party's draft constitutional amendment, proposing the disbursement of districts' shares through the National Finance Commission (NFC) as the provinces failed to transfer funds to local bodies.

He was addressing a gathering held at the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industries on Monday.

Kamal said regional autonomy comes when all stakeholders are empowered and autonomous decision-making powers are devolved from the chief minister to union council chairmen.

He said that there is a mechanism for disbursing funds from the federal government to the provinces, but no mechanism for transferring funds from provinces to local bodies.

"It's up to a person's will to either grant Rs1,000 billion to someone or to grant nothing to another," he highlighted that the Article 140a of the Constitution stressed the devolution of political, administrative, and financial powers to elected local representa-



tives. "Every CM interprets this according to his own will," the health minister said. MQM-P leader said, "Our party held deliberations and drafted a constitutional amendment to propose some structural reforms in the NFC divisible pool."

Kamal maintained that the constitutional amendment draft prepared by his party proposed disbursing the shares of districts and local bodies through the same mechanism used to transfer federal funds to the provinces.

"We want to add the districts in the central divisible pool of the NFC as the provinces are, so the local bodies may get their shares directly from federal government without the intervention of provinces,"

he said. "We have not a benediction bestowed upon us, I handle them from utmost care," he said.

He added that his party is here to utilise whatever space remains to deliver results. "We voice our concerns at all the relevant platforms; authorities listen to us, acknowledge our concerns; however, we need an immediate fix."

"No one ignores the potential of Karachi; no one says that we don't want to fix the issues of this city, but when will this fixation begin? No one knows."

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PPP wins PS-9 Shikarpur by-election, Form 47 issued

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) formally announced the results of the by-election in Shikarpur's PS-9 constituency and issued Form 47. The PS-9 seat fell vacant following the demise of former provincial assembly speaker Agha Siraj Durrani.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, the Returning Officer has released Form 47, declaring Pakistan People's Party candidate Agha Shehbaz Khan Durrani successful with 72,964 votes.

of Pakistan, the Returning Officer has released Form 47, declaring Pakistan People's Party candidate Agha Shehbaz Khan Durrani successful with 72,964 votes.

from PS-9 Shikarpur. Maulana Rashidullah Shah secured second position with 9,489 votes. The voter turnout in the PS-9

Shikarpur by-election stood at 31.68 percent. A total of 88,017 votes were cast across 178 polling stations. The seat had fallen vacant following the passing of former Sindh Assembly Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani.

Out of the 178 polling stations in the constituency, 84 were declared sensitive and 54 highly sensitive.

The total number of registered voters in the constituency is 277,792, including 148,128 men and 129,245 women.

Strict security arrangements were put in place to maintain law and order at polling stations. More than 3,000 police officers and personnel were deployed, while Rangers and the Quick Response Force remained on alert.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding power sector.

Justice Tariq Jahangiri expresses no confidence in IHC CJ Dogar-led bench

ISLAMABAD (INP): Islamabad High Court (IHC) Justice Tariq Jahangiri has expressed a lack of confidence in the bench headed by IHC Chief Justice Sardar Sarfraz Dogar in the degree controversy case and requested that the matter be transferred to another bench.

The hearing of the case related to Justice Jahangiri's academic degree was conducted by a bench comprising Chief Justice Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Azam Khan. Justice Jahangiri and the counsel for the Islamabad Bar Association appeared before the court during the proceedings.

Justice Jahangiri stated that he had received the notice on Thursday and that it did not include a copy of the petition. He said the case was old and requested time to obtain and review the petition.

Justice Jahangiri formally objected to Chief Justice Sarfraz Dogar presiding over the bench, to which the Chief Justice responded that both were judges and that a petition had been filed against Justice Jahangiri.

Justice Jahangiri argued that this amounted to a conflict of interest, stating that the Chief Justice could not hear a case against him. He maintained that setting such a precedent in quo warranto proceedings could have far-reaching and damaging consequences.

He also stated, under oath, that his degree was genuine, adding that the university had never declared it fake nor claimed that it had not issued it.

He further contended that a writ of quo warranto is heard by a single bench, not a division bench. He also objected to being restrained from judicial work, calling it unprecedented in judicial history. In response, the CJ remarked that Justice Jahangiri would receive the same justice as any other individual.

Justice Jahangiri further said that even in murder cases, charges are framed after seven days, whereas he had been given only three days' notice. He cautioned that setting such a precedent in quo warranto proceedings could have far-reaching and damaging consequences.

Injured DSP couple celebrates wedding anniversary at Shikarpur hospital

SHIKARPUR (INP): A couple of DSPs, who had been seriously injured due to firing by dacots during an encounter in Shikarpur, Sindh, celebrated their wedding anniversary at an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a hospital. A large cake was cut to mark the occasion.

Both husband and wife, DSP Dr Zahoor Ahmad Soomro and DSP Paras Bakhrani, dressed in gowns of patients, had a smile on their faces, which was full of life and vitality. They joined their bandaged hands together to make the sign of a heart.

Motorways M2, M-3, M-4, M-5 closed due to thick fog

MULTAN (INP): Thick fog again blanketed several areas of Punjab and Sindh on the night between Sunday and Monday, paralyzing routine life and disrupting road traffic on the Motorways due to low visibility.

A spokesman of the Motorway Police said that the thick fog has badly affected the flow of road traffic in several cities of Punjab and Sindh.

Therefore, they celebrated the big day at a hospital. DSP Paras has now been shifted from the ICU to a room, while her husband, Dr. Soomro, has been discharged from the hospital.

However, he is still present with his wife at the hospital.

When the BBC approached them on Saturday evening, Paras had been shifted to a room. However, she was in pain and was not in a position to speak for the next few days.

The spokesman also said that the Motorways, including M2 from Shikarpur Niaz Baig to Hiran Minar, M3 from Dargkhana to Faizpur, M4 from Pindi Bhattian to Abdul Hakeem, M5 from Zahir Pir to Rohri, and M11 from Lahore to Sambral, have been closed to all types of traffic.

The Motorway police have also requested people to stay home and avoid unnecessary travelling. Dense fog has also disrupted traffic at several places on the National Highway due to low visibility.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and HRD, Chaudhry Salik Hussain addressing the event regarding International Day for Migrants.

200-meter extension planned for Surbandar Fishing Jetty breakwater

Gwadar (INP): Under a new development plan, the Surbandar Fishing Jetty breakwater will be extended by 200 meters to protect the jetty and the nearby fishing settlement from sea erosion and to enhance the facility's operational life. Director General of the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) Moim-ur-Rehman Khan said during an inspection visit, Gwadar Pro reported on Monday.

The proposed extension is aimed at the safeguarding key infrastructure from increasing marine hazards and ensuring the sustainability of the fishing jetty, which plays a vital role in the local fisheries-based economy, according to an official statement.

During the visit, officials reviewed the damage caused by sea erosion to the existing breakwater and discussed measures to prevent further deterioration.

The extension project is expected to improve the durability of the jetty and provide additional protection to the fishing town.

The GDA chief also inspected ongoing construction, expansion and repair work on the Coastal Highway to Surbandar link road and directed engineers and contractors to complete the project within the stipulated timeframe while maintaining high standards.

Khan reviewed repair work on the Surbandar floating jetty and instructed that all materials used must be suitable for harsh marine conditions. He emphasized the use of durable, long-lasting materials, particularly high-quality wood capable of withstanding seawater and extreme weather.

Stressing the need for sustainable operations, the director general directed the project director to develop a business model for the Surbandar Fishing Jetty.

He said the facilities have significantly improved boat anchoring, fish loading and unloading, and timely access to markets, contributing to economic activity in the coastal belt.

He was also accompanied by GDA Chief Engineer Haji Syed Mohammad, Surbandar Jetty Project Director Haji Mohammad Hanif and contractor Haji Sharif Zamel and others.

Indian forces arrest 200 Kashmiri youth in fresh valley-wide crackdown

ISLAMABAD (INP): In another wide-ranging crackdown in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Indian police, backed by paramilitary forces, have detained approximately 200 Kashmiri youths across the Kashmir Valley, branding them as so-called over-ground workers.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the large-scale operation began on Saturday and continued into Sunday morning at several locations, including Srinagar and other parts of the Kashmir Valley. In coordinated raids targeting what authorities termed an "OGW network," nearly 200 youths were taken into custody under the pretext of questioning.

The label "over-ground workers" is widely seen as a term coined by the Indian military establishment to legitimize the arrest of ordinary Kashmiris. While police claim the detentions are intended to disrupt alleged support systems for pro-freedom groups, human rights observers and local residents caution that such actions often ensnare civilians with no proven links to militancy. They warn that the broad use of the "OGW" label fuels fear among the population and erodes basic rights, noting that mass detentions frequently occur without transparent legal grounds or due process in the occupied territory. The crackdown comes amid ongoing heightened operations across the occupied territory. Hundreds of coordinated raids, coordination and search operations, and interrogations of individuals have taken place over recent weeks, reflecting a sustained and wide-ranging strategy by the occupation authorities.

Human rights groups say the wave of arrests further heightens the erosion of civil and political rights in Kashmir, where arrests are often justified under the pretext of "preventive detention" through draconian laws. They caution that such operations deepen mistrust among the population and exacerbate the already fragile socio-political environment in the territory.

Traffic Police officials said the black paper covering the vehicle's windows was removed on the spot. They stated that Haider's son was driving the vehicle at the time of the incident and that the challan was issued at Islamabad Express Chowk.

They also confirmed that the seat belt violation was among the primary grounds for issuing the ticket.



KUWAIT: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik held meeting with Kuwait's Minister of Oil Tariq Sulaiman Al-Roumi.

New JIT in Dr Warda Mushtaq murder case begins working

ABBOTTABAD (INP): The new Joint Investigation Team (JIT) formed after the removal of DPO Abbottabad to probe the murder of Dr. Warda Mushtaq, who was a medical officer at DHQ Hospital, Abbottabad, began its working on Monday.

The team visited the places where the deceased was taken after her abduction and where her body was concealed. The team also visited Dr. Warda's grave.

Sonia Shimroz has also been included in the team. Besides that, there are doctors, lawyers, the officials of the CTD, Special Branch and the prosecution in the team.

Also on Monday, the administration sealed and took in its possession an old gurdwara which Waheed, the husband of Rida, a suspect in Dr. Warda murder case, had obtained on lease and turned it into a shopping mall. Suspect in murder case produced in court before Dr. Warda's killing.

Pervaiz, who had been taken into custody in connection with the murder of Dr. Warda, was produced before a local magistrate where he recorded an important statement.

On Sunday, a key suspect in the murder case of Dr. Warda, identified as Shamrez, was killed during a police encounter in Abbottabad.

According to details, Shamrez had been an absconder in the case and was also wanted in connection with multiple murder cases before Dr. Warda's killing.

Authorities said that police had conducted a series of raids over ten days in pursuit of the suspect, eventually locating him in Thandiani.

When officers attempted to apprehend him, Shamrez allegedly opened fire on the police, prompting a counteraction that resulted in his death.

Shamrez was reportedly hired as a professional killer in the Dr. Warda case. Investigators revealed that after the murder, Dr. Warda's body had been concealed in Thandiani by the suspect.

Reko Diq Mining Company Empowers Chagai Youth through National Young Leaders Conference Participation

News Desk
CHAGAI – Reko Diq Mining Company (RDMC) has taken a significant step towards youth empowerment by supporting the participation of 20 young leaders from District Chagai in the prestigious Young Leaders Conference (YLC).

The YLC, organized by the School of Leadership (SoL), brings together talented youth from across Pakistan to enhance their leadership skills, encourage dialogue, and foster personal growth. The selected participants, comprising 10 young men and 10 young women, were chosen through a rigorous merit-based process, showcasing their potential as future leaders. Before attending the conference in Karachi, the participants visited the Reko Diq Project site,



where they met with RDMC's General Manager, Ryan Mitchell, and senior management team. Mitchell emphasized the YLC as a transformative opportunity for the youth to discover their potential and become ambassadors of their communities.

The participants gained valuable insights into the project's technical and scientific aspects, touring the Geology Core Shed and Laboratory, and learning about the Tethyan Belt and regional geology.

This initiative reflects RDMC's commitment to community engagement and youth empowerment, aligning with the recommendations of the Community Development Committees (CDCs). The program aims to inspire and equip the next generation of leaders in Chagai and beyond.

Mobile Tower Blown Up in Turbat's Kalatak Area, No Casualties Reported

From Our Correspondent:
TURBAT – A mobile phone company's tower was destroyed in an explosion in the Kalatak area on Tuesday, according to local officials.

Authorities said unidentified individuals planted an explosive device near the communication tower in the outskirts of Turbat. The blast caused the structure to collapse, though no casualties were reported.

Police have cordoned off the site and launched an investigation to determine the nature of the device and identify those responsible.



PISHIN: Annual Examination Results Ceremony Held at Government Boys Middle School



News Desk:
A ceremony was held at Government Boys Middle School, Kalli Dab Khanzai, to distribute certificates for the annual examination results. The event was attended by senior journalist Ayub Tareen, Headmaster Nasrullah Ansari, and tribal elder Malik Ehsamuddin, along with teachers, students, and parents who actively participated.

The ceremony's chief guest was Ayub Tareen, Bureau Chief of Hum News in Quetta and General Secretary of Quetta Press Club. He not only appreciated the

praised the students' hard work, the guidance of teachers, and the support of parents. The school awarded special prizes and certificates to the position holders to encourage them and inspire other students to work diligently.

excellent performance of the students and also presented a special contribution of PKR 20,000 to Headmaster Nasrullah Ansari for school uniforms, demonstrating his commitment to education. In his address, he stated that the students' achievements were the result of their dedication, parental support, and the tireless efforts of teachers, and he emphasized that many more

International Anti-Corruption Day Observed in Sibi



SIBI: A seminar was held in Sibi to mark International Anti-Corruption Day, organized by NAB Balochistan. The event was attended by district officials, students, teachers, civil society members, and representatives from various sectors.

Commissioner Sibi Division, Asadullah Faiz, and

DIGP Sibi Range, Barkat Hussain Khoso, were the chief guests. Deputy Director Anti-Corruption, Shah Zaman Mandokhail, and other officials also attended.

Speakers emphasized that corruption is a major obstacle to societal and national development, weakening institutions, economy, and social structure.

They noted that Pakistan, despite its natural resources, has lagged in development due to corruption.

The speakers stressed that nepotism, favoritism, and violation of merit have eroded institutional foundations.

They urged youth to adopt honesty and transparency, saying that livelihood is determined by Allah, and illegitimate means only damage dignity and respect.

Deputy Director Anti-Corruption, Shah Zaman Mandokhail, presented shields to Commissioner Asadullah Faiz and DIGP Barkat Hussain Khoso. Cash prizes were distributed to students who excelled in a speech competition.

Quetta Division Commissioner Reviews Operation Against Illegal Afghan Residents and Other Foreigners

QUETTA: Commissioner Quetta Division, Shahzeb Khan Kakkar, chaired a review meeting of the ongoing operation against illegal Afghan residents and other foreigners.

The meeting, attended by Deputy Commissioner Quetta Mehruallah Badini, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, FIA, police, and other law enforcement agencies, decided to intensify the operation, conducting two major operations weekly and increasing checks at hotels, bus stations, and other areas.

Briefing the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Quetta stated that over 30,000 illegal residents have been deported from Quetta, while Deputy Commissioner Kala Abdullah reported 23,000 deportations. Deputy Commissioner Pishin said 34,000 out of 35,000 Afghan residents have been returned from two camps, and the camps have



been handed over to the district administration.

The meeting was informed that some foreigners are hiding in urban areas using fake identity cards, and a new mechanism has been developed to verify identities.

Commissioner Kakkar directed the administration, police, FC,

and FIA to intensify operations, adopt a joint strategy to deport maximum individuals, and ensure strict checks at hotels and transport hubs.

He emphasized that the district administration's coordinated efforts will ensure the return of all illegal individuals soon.

Gwadar Port Authority Chairman and MPA Discuss Public Issues and Development Plans



GWADAR: Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Maulana Hidayat ur Rahman Baloch met with Gwadar Port Authority Chairman Noor Haq Baloch to discuss public issues and development plans in Mulla Band Ward.

The meeting, attended by former Chairman Municipal Committee Gwadar Sharif Miah Dad, Councillor Faisal Ullah

Baksh, and Naveed Muhammad, focused on drainage issues and the construction of an effective drainage system to mitigate flood-related problems.

A joint visit to Mulla Band Ward is planned to assess the situation.

The Chairman announced that Gwadar Port Authority in collaboration with Pakistan Navy,

will reopen the long-closed Red Crescent Hospital, providing basic medical facilities to thousands of residents.

The meeting also discussed issues faced by Kopek contract employees, mole holders, and administrative matters related to Gwadar Port.

The Chairman stated that the water crisis has been largely controlled, and a 50

MW power plant has been approved by the federal cabinet, resolving the electricity issue.

MPA Maulana Hidayat ur Rahman Baloch praised the Chairman's efforts, saying that his leadership and strategy are yielding positive results,

and all relevant institutions are working together to resolve Gwadar's issues.

The myth of stability and Pakistan's economic underperformance

NEWS DESK: A "generally" held opinion is that Pakistan's economy has performed better in military-led governments and that democracy has held back our economic potential. The last such episode under General Musharraf (1999-2007) saw a high growth rate, better-managed fiscal policy and a high level of investment.

Based on a rather superficial analysis of these facts, it is believed that sustained economic growth requires political stability, which is not possible under a democratic dispensation where politics trumps economics. About the military rule and economic growth, we now understand that Pakistan's foreign policy role in the evolving geopolitical situations has facilitated inflows and consumption, which jacked up growth. During the last 10 years, essentially since the Panama scandal, Pakistan has entered a new "hybrid" regime of economic and political governance.

This hybridity, or being on one page, is considered the sole guarantee of a stable and predictable economic policy, which is what, we are told, investors are always looking for. With each passing year, this bond has been strengthened. The current regime is the third iteration of this model. The amendment in the Army Act and the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) clearly point in this direction.

Despite these flawless arrangements, it should be clear that we have not seen any noticeable foreign direct investment (FDI).

The last spike in FDI came with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) investments, with around \$27 billion over 2013-2018. That period culminated in a huge current account deficit of \$18 billion in 2018. Since then, or even before, the export level has been falling in a relative sense. The levels of poverty and unemployment have gone up. Clearly, the hybrid regime theory, the imaginary foundation of political stability, though well implemented, is not delivering.



Have we oversold the slogan of political stability as a precondition of sustained economic growth? I am not concluding, but I am questioning the theory here.

There is an inherent instability in any democratic dispensation, as changes in the political mandate can lead to shifts in economic policy. It is not dissimilar to the uncertainty and fatality of market forces. In that manner, both democracy and market economy share some characteristics. We cannot predict their outcome. While operating within a larger environment of policy uncertainty, investors, whether local or international, demand certainty in institutional arrangements. They want property rights, easy regulations, transparency and co-operative administration. That depends on

impartial courts and a professional bureaucracy. Businessmen also need high skilled human capital and a healthy workforce.

Pakistan does not have a shortage of financial capital but is clearly short of institutional and social capital. Therefore, we now need to move beyond the slogan of political stability and talk more seriously about what really matters. This is where, unfortunately, we have seen failure of all operating administrative, military

or hybrid. Can a non-political and technocratic approach fix it, as recently argued by Atif Mian? I tend to disagree. A short-term process work as follows: Nominations of directors to the board are made by the line minister responsible for that particular SOE. So, in the case of PPL, for example, the Ministry of Petroleum or the Petroleum Division (PD), as it is now called - nominates a panel of directors. This is sent to the federal government, which is the approving authority.

That the line ministry has the responsibility for nominating directors sits at the heart of the problem. The reason is that the PD is also a

regulator of PPL. So, there is a fundamental conflict of interest in having the regulator select the board of a company it regulates.

It gets worse. Senior officials at the PD nominate themselves as members of the board, which means that, on a board of 10 directors, three or four will be ministry bureaucrats. And of course, the other so-called independent directors will be people they - the officials - have nominated. Any reasonable arbiter of corporate affairs will accept that a board so constituted is not only conflicted but can also never work.

have been proposed and, in some cases, accepted.

The Export Development Surcharge, a useless nuisance of the last 30-odd years, a deduction of 0.25% on all exports, is now abolished. Another working group has proposed tax cuts reaching a total of Rs75 billion over the next two years. One group has recommended devaluation of the exchange rate as per the real effective exchange rate, which indicates that our exchange rate is over-valued by 4%.

These are not transformative measures and will not directly and immediately address the crisis of institutional and human capital shortage. However, these are solid and meaningful changes that we can appreciate.

In the long term, we need to embrace economic democracy. This is a leap from the Indonesian constitution, and its recent economic growth story tells us that it has worked really well. Their high level of growth and FDI, and

a per capita income already surpassing \$5,000, is a great transformation.

Quoting the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) note on the Indonesian model of economic democracy, "The regulation of the economic system in a country is inseparable from the national resource and asset ownership system, the resource allocation mechanism, and the mechanism for implementing the national production and distribution process."

That economic democracy and business competition are two things that I run smoothly and cannot be separated in economic life." A sustained, informed, inclusive and transparent conversation on economic transformation has to start now. Pakistan will continue to experience political instability; however, we can evolve and achieve broad agreement on the economic roadmap, its direction and institutional design.

Central bank slashes policy rate by 50 bps to 10.5pc

NEWS DESK: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday reduced its policy rate by 50 basis points to 10.5 per cent, effective from December 16. In a statement, the monetary policy committee (MPC) noted that inflation remained within the 5-7 per cent target range on average during July-November FY26, though it said that core inflation proved to be "relatively sticky".

"On balance, the inflation outlook remains broadly unchanged, mainly owing to the relatively benign global commodity prices and anchored inflation expectations, amidst [a] prudent monetary policy stance," the statement read. The MPC further observed that economic activity was increasing based on an improvement in key high-frequency indicators, including a higher-than-anticipated increase in manufacturing output during the first quarter of the 2026 fiscal year.

"Nonetheless, the MPC noted that the global environment remains challenging, particularly for exports, which may have some implications for the macroeconomic outlook," the statement read. "In this backdrop, while ensuring the ongoing price stability, the MPC noted the availability of space to support sustainable economic growth."

Additionally, the committee observed some developments since its last meeting in May, namely a rising policy rate to support sustainable economic growth. "In the agricultural sector, incoming information about major crops also support the input conditions and government-backed incentive schemes indicates that wheat production may surpass the target," the MPC stated.

"Led by sizable SBP profit transfer, the overall and primary fiscal balances recorded surpluses during Q1-FY26," the statement read. "The global environment remains fluid, characterised by generally supportive commodity prices, but also evolving tariff-related dynamics and challenging financial conditions." The MPC added that high-frequency indicators support positive assessments of ongoing momentum in sectors, such as large-scale

manufacturing. It further noted that the sale of automobiles, fertiliser, cement and the imports of machinery and intermediate goods, "all signal a positive outlook for industrial activity."

On the other hand, the committee said that the ongoing challenging export environment poses some risks for industrial output.

"In the agricultural sector, incoming information about major crops also support the input conditions and government-backed incentive schemes indicates that wheat production may surpass the target," the MPC stated. "The latest information on area under wheat crop, input conditions and government-backed incentive schemes indicates that wheat production may surpass the target."

"The Board of an SOE shall be given autonomy and independence in the discharge of its functions under this Act or any other applicable law in accordance with the adopted business plan and no administrative or standing instructions by any Division of the federal government shall apply to any state-owned enterprises."

While imports increased with economic recovery and domestic demand resilient, exports came under pressure due to a sharp decline in food shipments, especially rice. Despite subdued financial inflows, SBP's foreign exchange reserves rose above \$17.6 billion following the receipt of \$1.2 billion from the IMF, and are projected to reach \$17.8 billion by June 2026.

The MPC also highlighted fiscal developments, noting that the government's fiscal balance recorded a surplus of \$0.7 billion during Q1-FY26, in line with expectations.

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The reason state enterprises keep bleeding trillions

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have suffered a staggering cumulative loss of Rs 9 trillion since 2014. There are multiple reasons for this. Among them, for example, are chronic operational inefficiencies such as poor cost controls, outdated systems and weak financial discipline. This, in turn, leads to corruption. Employees in key positions use their privilege to get kickbacks in procurement and the award of contracts.

Weak financial controls mean that such corruption often goes undetected. And if it is detected, the perpetrators fear no reprisals, due to the incompetence and often collusion of security agencies tasked to investigate such corruption.

There is also the issue of overstaffing and political hiring. Every new government that comes in seeks to reduce its cronyism into SOEs. A blatant example of this is PIA, a one-time leader in aviation, which is now reduced to a shadow of its former self primarily by politically motivated overstaffing.

Mismanagement and weak leadership often result from the lack of professional and merit-based hiring and promotions. Anytime a strong competent leader is appointed, usually by accident, the establishment, realising that he is not pliable to their whims, gets to work to remove him.

This has happened in recent years, for example, at Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), an incident to which I was personally a witness. The absence of competent leadership results in the lack of accountability, poor or no strategic planning, resistance to reform and failure to innovate. In today's highly competitive business environment, these failures amount to the kiss of death for any organisation.

One could make a powerful argument that all the ailments mentioned above result from a single overriding factor. And that is the lack of an independent and professional board. Look across the boards of all SOEs today, and you will see people sitting on them who simply lack the qualifications, competence and industry-specific experience that is needed at this level.

The issue that needs to be looked at is who appoints the directors on these boards and on the basis of what basis.

The appointments process work as follows: Nominations of directors to the board are made by the line minister responsible for that particular SOE. So, in the case of PPL, for example, the Ministry of Petroleum or the Petroleum Division (PD), as it is now called - nominates a panel of directors. This is sent to the federal government, which is the approving authority.

That the line ministry has the responsibility for nominating directors sits at the heart of the problem. The reason is that the PD is also a regulator of PPL. So, there is a fundamental conflict of interest in having the regulator select the board of a company it regulates.

It gets worse. Senior officials at the PD nominate themselves as members of the board, which means that, on a board of 10 directors, three or four will be ministry bureaucrats. And of course, the other so-called independent directors will be people they - the officials - have nominated. Any reasonable arbiter of corporate affairs will accept that a board so constituted is not only conflicted but can also never work.

Consider now the following direct quote from Section 17 of Chapter 6 of the SOE Act 2023, which regulates the governance of SOEs: "The Board (of an SOE) shall be given autonomy and independence in the discharge of its functions under this Act or any other applicable law in accordance with the adopted business plan and no administrative or standing instructions by any Division of the federal government shall apply to any state-owned enterprises."

On the other hand, the transporters have refused to surrender before the government till the acceptance of their demands, including suspension of the controversial clauses of the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 2025, stopping registration of FIRs against drivers, imposition of heavy fines and impounding vehicles on various traffic laws violations. "We will not call off the strike until the acceptance of our genuine demands," said Khalid Arain of the Punjab Stone Transporters Association based in Sardogha. "We can call off the strike if, at least, some responsibility can give us an assurance to resolve our issues within the shortest possible time. If not, we are requesting the government to cooperate for the sake of a huge number of people of FY26 who work due to the strike."

At present, the work on all the ongoing development projects in Lahore and other parts of Punjab after the suspension of delivery of supplies of construction material due to the ongoing wheel-jam strike by goods transporters. The situation of dust pollution, smog and other environmental issues has also worsened due to the incomplete projects, Dawn has learnt.

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SBP cuts policy rate by 50 basis points to support growth amid contained inflation

NEWS DESK: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday, the monetary policy committee (MPC) said average inflation remained within the medium-term target range of 5-7 percent during July-November FY26, supported by relatively benign global commodity prices and anchored inflation expectations.

Although core inflation continues to show rigidity, the MPC assessed that the real policy rate remains adequately positive, creating space to cautiously support sustainable economic growth without undermining price stability.

With economic activity still dull, the SBP appears to be responding to the need for incremental growth support. Importantly, the quantum of the cut is modest



suggesting a cautious approach. SBP is signalling flexibility while remaining mindful of inflation risks and external account vulnerabilities. Waqas Ghani Kukawada, Research Head of JS Global, noted. The move is positive for Equities and we may see optimism in the stock market tomorrow.

The central bank noted that economic activity is gaining traction, reflected in strong high-frequency indicators. For FY26, the MPC expected 4.1 percent year-

on-year growth in large-scale manufacturing in Q1-FY26. Based on these trends, real GDP growth for FY26 is expected to remain in the upper half of the projected range of 3.25-4.25pc. In terms of the financial sector, the MPC said that the current account posted a cumulative deficit of \$0.7 billion during July-October FY26, in line with its expectations.

While imports increased with economic recovery and domestic demand resilient, exports came under pressure due to a sharp decline in food shipments, especially rice. Despite subdued financial inflows, SBP's foreign exchange reserves rose above \$17.6 billion following the receipt of \$1.2 billion from the IMF, and are projected to reach \$17.8 billion by June 2026.

The MPC also highlighted fiscal developments, noting that the government's fiscal balance recorded a surplus of \$0.7 billion during Q1-FY26, in line with expectations.

While imports increased with economic recovery and domestic demand resilient, exports came under pressure due to a sharp decline in food shipments, especially rice. Despite subdued financial inflows, SBP's foreign exchange reserves rose above \$17.6 billion following the receipt of \$1.2 billion from the IMF, and are projected to reach \$17.8 billion by June 2026.

Goods transport owners strike forces development projects in Punjab to stop

NEWS DESK: The ongoing development projects — both public and private sectors — have come to a grinding halt in Lahore and other parts of Punjab after the suspension of delivery of supplies of construction material due to the ongoing wheel-jam strike by goods transporters.

The situation of dust pollution, smog and other environmental issues has also worsened due to the incomplete projects, Dawn has learnt.

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No 'out-of-pocket expenses' for childbirth in China from 2026

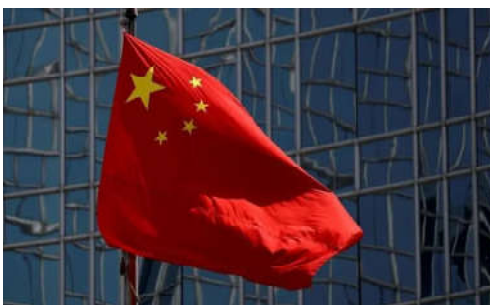
NEWS DESK: China will cover all out-of-pocket expenses related to childbirth next year, said the country's national healthcare security administration, as authorities try to incentivise more young couples to have children.

By 2026, China will aim to offer nationwide full reimbursement for all policy-covered medical expenses related to childbirth, including prenatal checkups, the administration said.

It would "improve the level of medical expense coverage for prenatal examinations, striving to achieve 'no out-of-pocket expenses' for childbirth," it said in a report on Saturday.

The move comes as Beijing grapples with how to boost the country's flagging population. China's population dropped for the first time in decades in 2022 and has continued to slide through to 2024.

Demographers expect the trend to con-



tinue due to declining birth rates, while the country's shrinking workforce and growing elderly population is likely to create additional strains for already indebted local governments.

China's birth rates have been falling for decades as a result of the

one-child policy that was in place from 1980-2015, as well as rapid urbanisation.

The high cost of childcare and education, as well as job uncertainty and a slowing economy, have also discouraged many young Chinese from getting married and starting a

family. Some Chinese provinces, including in Jilin, Jiangsu and Shandong, have already unveiled policies to make childbirth almost free of charge.

China said in March that it would "actively" respond with policies for its rapidly growing elderly and its young people, including providing childcare subsidies and making pre-school education free.

Authorities have previously tried to encourage couples to have babies by expanding maternity leave, financial and tax benefits, and housing subsidies.

Seven killed in drone strike on Sudan hospital

NEWS DESK: A drone strike Sunday on an army hospital in the besieged southern Sudanese city of Dilling left seven civilians dead and 12 injured, a health worker at the facility told AFP.

The victims included patients and their companions, the medic said on condition of anonymity, explaining that the army hospital "serves the residents of the city and its surroundings, in addition to military personnel."

Dilling, in the flashpoint state of South Kordofan, is controlled by the Sudanese army but is besieged by rival paramilitary forces.

The greater Kordofan region is currently facing the fiercest fighting in Sudan's war between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), as both seek to wrest control

of the massive southern region.

The RSF controls swathes of Kordofan along with their allies, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) faction led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, which has a historic foothold in the region's Nuba Mountains. Together, the forces have besieged the region's key cities with army divisions, in-

cluding Dilling and South Kordofan state capital Kadugli, some 120 kilometres (75 miles) south.

Last week, SPLM-N said the capture of Dilling and Kadugli was "only a matter of time", urging the army and its allied militias to withdraw.



Hong Kong court finds tycoon Jimmy Lai guilty in landmark security trial

NEWS DESK: Hong Kong's High Court on Monday found tycoon and pro-democracy campaigner Jimmy Lai guilty of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces in the city's highest-profile trial under a China-imposed national security law that could see him jailed for life.

The landmark case has drawn international scrutiny of Hong Kong's judicial independence amid a years-long crackdown on rights and freedoms in the global financial hub after 2019 pro-democracy protests that Beijing saw as a challenge to its rule.

While 78-year-old Lai's supporters see him as a freedom fighter, Beijing sees him as a conspirator and a conspirator advocating for US-backed protesters against Hong Kong and the mainland. Chinese authorities have rejected accusations of eroding the city's rule of law.

"There is no doubt" that Lai "had harboured his resentment and hatred of" China for many of his adult years, Judge Esther Foh told a packed courtroom as the tycoon, wearing a pale green jumper and a grey jacket, sat with his arms folded.

The two other judges in his case were Alex Lee and Susanna D'Almada Remedios. Lai, the founder of the now-shuttered Apple Daily newspaper, is one of the most prominent critics of China's Communist Party leadership, has already spent five years in jail, facing a slew of litigation under the sweeping security legislation that Beijing enacted in response to the 2019 protests.

A pre-sentencing

hearing where Lai can plead for leniency is scheduled for January 12. His lawyer Steven Kwan said Lai will decide whether to appeal after the sentencing.

Hong Kong's national security police chief Steve Li said on Monday he welcomed the verdict.

Lai, who suffers from health issues including diabetes and high blood pressure, was found guilty on two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and one of conspiracy to publish seditious material. He had pleaded not guilty on all counts.

The verdict books a year that marked the essential disappearance of Hong Kong's democratic opposition

building. Lai's trial began in December 2023 in the former British colony that reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, with the verdict seen as a potential fresh diplomatic flashpoint.

Countries including the US and Britain, as well as rights groups, say the trial is politically motivated and have called for Lai's immediate release.

US President Donald Trump raised Lai's case with Xi in a meeting in October and has said he would do his utmost to "save" Lai.

Beh Lib Yi, Asia-Pacific director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, called the verdict a "sham conviction" and "a disgraceful act of persecution".



under pressure from Beijing. The Democratic Party voted to disband on Sunday.

Outside the court, people overnight formed a queue more than a block long, some with camping gear, seeking to attend the verdict. Police were monitoring the area around the

"The ruling underscores Hong Kong's utter contempt for press freedom," she said.

"Jimmy Lai's only crime is running a newspaper and defending democracy."

Media advocacy group Reporters Without Borders also described Lai's trial as "a

recent years.

Chinese national security authorities have warned they would crack down on any "anti-China" individuals who tried to use the fire to "plunge Hong Kong back into the chaos" of 2019, when massive pro-democracy protests triggered a political crisis.

16 killed in mass shooting on Jewish festival in Australia

NEWS DESK: Gunmen killed at least 16 people and wounded at least 40 others on Sunday after opening fire at a gathering celebrating the Jewish festival of Hanukkah on Sydney's Bondi Beach, in what Australian police described as a "terrorist" attack.

The shooting took place during the annual 'Hanukkah by the Sea' event, which police said was attended by more than a thousand people at one of Australia's most popular and crowded beaches. Emergency services responded to reports of gunfire at 6:47pm local time.

Initially, New South Wales police said at least 29 people were rushed to nearby hospitals from the beach. One of the alleged gunmen was killed at the scene, while a second suspect was critically injured, authorities said.

Later in the early hours of Monday, police gave an updated death toll, confirming that 16 people were killed and at least 40 others injured in a shooting, who remain in hospital.

The police statement did not specify whether the toll included one of the shooters, who died in the attack.

Police declared the incident a "terrorist" attack and said suspected improvised explosive devices had been found inside a vehicle near the beach that was linked to the deceased suspect.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the shooting was a targeted attack on Jewish Australians on the first day of Hanukkah.

"This is a targeted attack on Jewish Aus-

tralian on the first day of Hanukkah, which should be a day of joy, a celebration of faith," Albanese said.

"An act of evil, anti-Semitism, terrorism has struck the heart of our nation. An attack on Jewish Australians is an attack on every Australian," he added, while praising ordinary citizens who intervened during the attack as "heroes".

As gunfire erupted, crowds fled in panic from the beach in eastern Sydney, which is typically packed with swimmers, surfers and tourists, especially at weekends. Witnesses described scenes of chaos as people ran for safety.

"We heard the shots. It was shocking. It felt like 10 minutes of

ing discarded items strewn across the grassy hill overlooking Bondi Beach, including towels, bags and an abandoned children's stroller left behind by people fleeing the area.

Paramedics were seen tending to wounded people lying on the grass, according to images broadcast by public broadcaster ABC. A weapon that appeared to be a pump-action shotgun was lying by a tree near the beach.

British tourist Timothy Brant-Coles told AFP he saw "two shooters in black" after the gunfire broke out. "There was a shooting, two shooters in black with semi-automatic rifles," he said, adding that he saw multiple people who had been shot and wounded.

Another British tourist said he witnessed people dragging children away from the beach as shots rang out. "People were dragging their kids away, there were something like 40 shots."

It sounded like shooting, said Bianca, a 26-year-old Sydney

hospital and we don't know exactly what's going on inside," he said. "We do hope he will be fine. He's her 100 per cent."

Prime Minister Albanese also hailed Ahmed and others who intervened as "heroes", saying their actions may have saved lives.

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Gaza struggles to pull bodies from rubble as storms rock damaged buildings

NEWS DESK: Gaza authorities warned on Monday that more war-damaged buildings could collapse as heavy rain batters the devastated enclave, hampering efforts to recover bodies still trapped under rubble.

At least two buildings collapsed on Friday, killing a minimum of 12 people, according to local health officials. Storms have also flooded and washed away tents sheltering displaced families, causing deaths from exposure. Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire in October after two years of intense fighting, but humanitarian agencies say aid entering Gaza remains severely limited, leaving nearly the entire population homeless.

Gaza Civil Defence spokesman Mahmoud Basal urged the international community to pro-



vide mobile homes and caravans instead of tents. "If people are not protected today, we will witness more victims — children, women, entire families — inside these buildings," he said.

Mohammad Nassar said the six-storey building where his family was staying, previously damaged by Israeli strikes, collapsed on Friday. The family had earlier been forced out of a tent by flooding during bad weather. "I saw my son's hand sticking out from under the ground," Nassar said. "My son was under the rubble and we were unable to get him out." His 15-year-old son and 18-year-old daughter were killed. Gaza authorities estimate around 9,000 bodies remain buried under rubble from Israeli bombing, but say they lack heavy machinery to speed up recovery.