



**BALUCHISTAN**  
Governor Balochistan Emphasizes Sustainable Peace...  
Page No 5



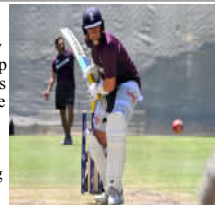
**NATIONAL**  
Former Punjab CM Manzoor Wattoo passes away in Lahore at 86  
Page No 3



**INTERNATIONAL**  
Thailand works to repatriate thousands stranded...  
Page No 8

## SPORT

Security beefed up for Ashes Adelaide Test after Bondi shooting  
Page No 7



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Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE

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## Balochistan CM Calls for Action Against Social Media Defamation, FIA Inquiry Ordered

Syed Ali Shah:

**QUETTA** — Chief Minister of Balochistan Mir Sarfaraz Bugti on Tuesday strongly criticized the unchecked spread of fake news and character assassination on social media, saying the issue has become "intractable" and poses a serious threat to democratic norms and personal dignity.

Addressing the Balochistan Assembly, the chief minister said he had been

raising concerns about the misuse of social media since day one. "I myself have been a victim of social media trolling," he told the House.

"Baseless and fake news claims so absurd that even I find them hard to believe," he added, underscoring the emotional and reputational toll such campaigns inflict.

Bugti urged the Speaker to form a special committee comprising lawmakers who have been victims of online defama-

tion. Stressing the need for deterrence, he said a few strict examples must be set. "Make two or three cases an example and the rest will correct themselves."

Defamation laws must be implemented in letter and spirit," he asserted.

Clarifying the government's stance, the chief minister said elected representatives were not afraid of accountability.

"We welcome accountability, but those who spread

fake news and defame honorable members must also be held accountable," he said, drawing desk-thumping support from both treasury and opposition benches.

Responding to the concerns raised, Speaker of the Balochistan Assembly Captain (Retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai took a firm position, directing the regional head of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to appear before the House and initiate a formal inquiry into online campaigns, in-

cluding the issue referred to as "Balochistan Leaks."

The Assembly emphasized the need for urgent legal and institutional measures to curb the misuse of digital platforms, protect reputations, and restore public trust in elected leadership.

## 'We will sit wherever we are stopped': Imran's sisters, PTI workers stage sit-in near Rawalpindi's Adiala jail

NEWS DESK:

PTI founder Imran Khan's sisters, party workers and supporters commenced a sit-in on Tuesday at Factory Naka, near Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, to demand their court-mandated meeting with the ex-premier.

A court order issued by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on March 24 this year mandated that meetings with Imran would be permitted twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, the PTI maintains that the order is not being honoured.

Despite the IHC's order, Imran's sisters — Aleema Khan, Uzma Khan and Noreen Khan Niazi — along with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afzadi, have tried and failed to meet Imran over the past several weeks. Last Tuesday, after being denied a meeting with the PTI chief, his sisters and party supporters staged a sit-in, which was dispersed early morning with water cannons.

Today, Imran's sisters marched toward the prison before being stopped. Speaking to a reporter as she marched, Aleema said, "We will sit wherever we are stopped."

When asked if she had prepared for the deployment of water cannons or a prolonged sit-in, she replied that she had brought warm clothes and a blanket, showing the latter on camera.

A large number of party workers and supporters participated in the sit-in, where a heavy contingent of police was also present.

Speaking to reporters, Aleema stated that this occurs every Tuesday at the same location, maintaining that she and her party supporters are not engaging in any illegal or unconstitutional activities.

"We have no other option left besides protesting," she said. "Our founder's demand is the restoration of the Constitution, democracy and the rule of law."

She claimed that the judiciary has been stripped of independence, unemployment is rising due to the stoppage of trade with Afghanistan and that the security situation is deteriorating.

Referring to her sister Uzma's brief meeting with Imran on December 2 and the government's claim of "political conversations" that violated jail rules, Aleema urged the government to tell the family what was discussed.

## At least 2, including police constable, killed in attack on polio team in KP's Bajaur

NEWS DESK:

At least two people, including a constable, were killed after unidentified assailants attacked a polio team in the Salarzai tehsil of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district, the police said, as the nationwide polio campaign entered its second day.

The attack comes a day after the government launched the final polio campaign of 2025, which is set to run until December 21.

Public Relations Officer (PRO) police, Israr Khan, confirmed to Dawn that two people, including a passerby and a policeman guarding the polio team, were killed in the attack on Tuesday afternoon in the Thangi area of Salarzai.

Khan identified the martyred cop as Constable Sajad Ahmed, who passed away after sustaining critical injuries, while another civilian was "shot dead by the armed men when he attempted to chase after the assailants."

"Local residents also confirmed the account, while the assailants managed to escape," Khan said, adding that the police had launched a search operation.

## 18 Passengers Abducted After Armed Attack on Coach in Ghotki

From Our Correspondent:

**GHOTKI:** Armed criminals attacked a passenger coach on the Ghotki-Guddu Kashmir Road, abducting 18 passengers after opening fire, police confirmed on Tuesday.

According to officials, the incident occurred near the Murid Branch area, where assailants stopped a coach operated by a well-known transport company and forced passengers off the vehicle at gunpoint.

At the time of the attack, around 25 people were travelling on the coach, including women.

Eyewitnesses said the attackers allowed women to leave but abducted 18 male passengers, taking them to an unknown location.

During the assault, the gunmen fired multiple shots, shatter-



ing the bus windows and causing panic among passengers.

Police stated that security forces, including Rangers, were immediately dispatched and a search operation is

underway to trace the abducted passengers and apprehend the attackers.

Checkpoints have been set up in surrounding areas, while law enforcement agencies are gathering intelligence to track the suspects' movement.

The incident has once again raised serious concerns about passenger safety and law-and-order conditions on highways in the region. Authorities have assured that all possible measures are being

taken to ensure the safe recovery of the abducted passengers.

This is a developing story and will be updated as more details emerge.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

## Balochistan's Child Marriage Prohibition Bill: A Long-Awaited Step in the Right Direction



## Editorial:

The recent passage of the Child Marriage Prohibition Bill by the Balochistan Provincial Assembly is a landmark moment in the province's journey toward protecting children and promoting social justice. While many have long awaited this legislation, its adoption now is a cause for immense satisfaction, reflecting the government's commitment to addressing a critical societal issue. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, the provincial government has demonstrated professionalism, transparency, and determination in ensuring that this bill was enacted through proper legislative procedures. The thorough review by assembly committees over the past six months shows a deliberate and consultative approach, prioritizing

consensus-driven lawmaking. This methodical process ensures that laws are not only enacted but are sustainable, widely supported, and rooted in the public interest.

While opposition voices, including those from JUI-F, have criticized the bill on religious grounds, their dissent is part of a healthy democratic debate. However, it is crucial to note that protecting children from early and forced marriages is a universal concern. The government's decision to move forward, despite protests and a walkout by opposition lawmakers, underscores its dedication to the welfare of Balochistan's younger generations.

Indeed, the enactment of this bill, though delayed, is a step in the right direction. It signals a commitment to ending

harmful traditional practices that compromise children's health, education, and future prospects.

By taking this decisive action, the Balochistan government has set a precedent for social reform, human rights advocacy, and legislative responsibility in Pakistan. In conclusion, the passage of the Child Marriage Prohibition Bill is more than just a legal milestone—it is a moral and social imperative. The government deserves praise for prioritizing the welfare of children, implementing professional legislative processes, and taking a bold step that will benefit countless lives across the province. While dialogue and debate will always be part of democracy, today marks a day when governance acted in favor of justice, progress, and the future of Balochistan.

## Malnutrition in Balochistan

Amber Munir in Balochistan shared in Quetta Voice on Wednesday, April 14, 2021 page 04. The article highlights the role of essential nutrients in human resource development along with a brief introduction of malnutrition, characterization of malnutrition, procedure of taking measurements of SAM and MAM cases, medical complications, community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM), infant and young child feeding (IYCF), etc.

Background: Surveys regarding Nutrition National Nutrition Survey (2001-2002): The National Nutrition Survey conducted in 2001-2002 assessed the nutritional levels and health status of mothers and children in Pakistan. Data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of four modules including a household questionnaire, biochemical and clinical questionnaires, and a dietary form. Additional biochemical samples including serum retinol, serum ferritin, and zinc, were collected from mothers and children under-5. Urine samples were collected from mothers and children ages 6-12 years for iodine deficiency. The survey sampled 10,656 households from 700 primary sampling units.

National Nutrition Survey (2019): The aim of NNS 2019 is to undertake a field survey and generate district-specific nutrition information related to malnutrition (both undernutrition and overnutrition) and micronutrient deficiencies among women and children in Pakistan.

Malnutrition status in Balochistan: Balochistan is the most under-developed of Pakistan's provinces, with a high proportion of children under five years of age who are stunted (52%) and 16 percent of who are wasted. Moreover, the prevalence of anemia among children in this age group is 57%



is the largest national nutrition survey carried out in Pakistan. It is designed to provide policymakers, program managers, and academicians a unique set of nutrition-related data including environmental, anthropometric, and biochemical indicators.

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Malnutrition status in Balochistan: Balochistan is the most under-developed of Pakistan's provinces, with a high proportion of children under five years of age who are stunted (52%) and 16 percent of who are wasted. Moreover, the prevalence of anemia among children in this age group is 57%

and nearly 49% among women of childbearing age. Numerous factors are thought to contribute to child undernutrition in Balochistan, including sub-optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices; frequent child infections (especially diarrhea diseases and measles); maternal nutritional deficiencies and/or illness and death; absence/inadequacy of micronutrient supplementation; and household food insecurity and gender inequity.

A survey conducted by the National Nutrition Cell revealed that 49% of women in Balochistan were suffering from malnutrition. Moreover, the ratio of maternal anemia was 49%, anemia among children below five years was 57% and iodine deficiency among women was 29%.

Balochistan Nutrition Program for Mother and Children (BNPMC)

In response to the challenging nutrition situation in the province, the Department of Health (DoH) launched the Nutrition Program for Mothers and Children (BNPMC) in 2016. They implemented nutrition activities among the rural and urban population of seven selected districts. The total population of these districts is 1,654,613, of which estimated target populations include 132,369 pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Stakeholders include the DoH, Peoples Primary Healthcare Initiative (providing health services at Basic Health Units in the districts), and local NGOs.

The total cost of the above project was 1,492.62 million PKR (US\$14.21 million) of which 80% were provided by the World Bank and 20% by the Government of Balochistan. A major part of the funding

(41%) was allocated to strengthen institutional arrangements which include staffing, technical assistance for capacity building, strengthening coordination mechanisms, addressing malnutrition among children and PLW (37%), and addressing micronutrient malnutrition (13.6%).

Future Plans: The aforesaid program ended in December 2019 and was limited to seven districts; whereas the malnutrition situation continues to exist in 22 districts of Balochistan.

Therefore, the Government of Balochistan has assigned DoH and PPHI to extend nutrition intervention in 22 districts for which project proposals are ready; implementation is expected from July 2021.

The author is a program officer in PPHI

## THE DILEMMA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) WEAPONS

## Masoor ul Hassan

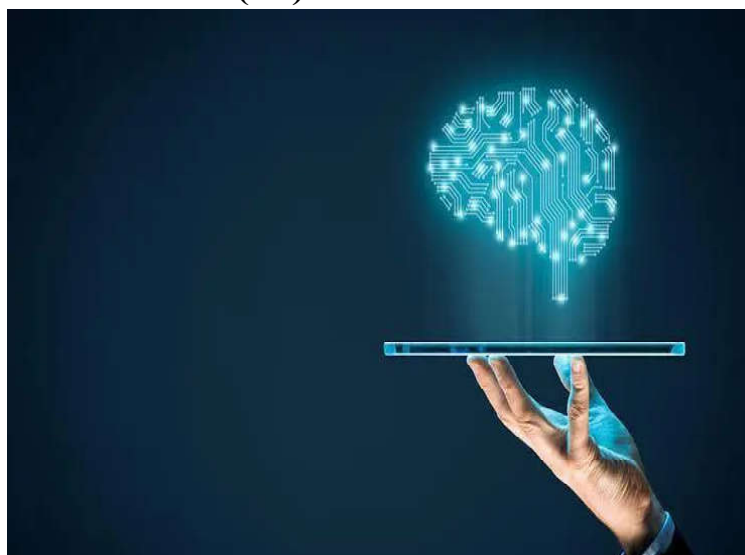
The danger associated with autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems is unacceptable. There exist a near consensus that such weapons must not be completely AI-controlled.

The design must include appropriate levels of human judgment while resorting to them. This line of thought gains more credence when the present degree of global polarization is taken into view. The international order is tilting towards autocracy and the likelihood of employment of these weapons is becoming a reality. The norms and values of world politics were subjected to heavy Trumpian Strain in the recent past when the competition of naked power showed its ugliness in international relations.

## The Genesis of warfare

The history of warfare is as old as the human race. The Book of Genesis states that Cain killed Abel and practiced his vengeance. Ever since vengeance, confrontation and bellicosity have remained pervasive throughout human history and enervation and amiability in human relations. The perception of life as a zero-sum game breeds selfishness and consequent animosity between individuals, groups, or states. Instincts of survival and protection are reflexive, thus natural for all living organisms including us humans.

War, being one of the forms of human relations, received due attention alongside increased societal complexities. War, being



one of the forms of human relations, received due attention of social scientists for defining ethical and moral issues.

Caine, who may have used a sharp stone, a strong branch of a tree, or simple brute force to strangle Abel, would be flabbergasted if he were to visit our times. The civilization we live in

today took centuries over centuries to materialize. The use of electromagnetic spectrum was considered a game-changer.

The use of electromagnetic spectrum was considered a game-changer before Counter Measures (ECM) were developed which then was countered by Electronic Counter Measures (ECM).

When the lethality of weapons created a situation of mutually assured destruction (MAD) the situation became unacceptable. Various treaties like Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

(START), and many more were signed to avert the unacceptable destruction of the human race.

Exercising restraint was never so important

Exercising restraint was never so important before the development of autonomous weapons: chemical, biological, radiological, and

nuclear. The Perils and Promises of Artificial Intelligence

Harnessing the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in warfare brought a paradigm shift in

the modus operandi of warfare. It eliminated the requirement of direct human involvement in

selecting and engaging targets. Even the smartest of the weapons were hitherto launched and guided by humans.

This development has given rise to the debate of ethics and morality all over

again. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General joined the skeptics on Twitter where he

wrote in March 2019, "Autonomous machines with the power and discretion to select targets and take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be prohibited by international law."

Word count (592) Group captain Masroor ul Hassan served as Fighter Pilot in the PAF.

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## Gilgit-Baltistan's two decades of local governance void to end in 2026

**NEWS DESK:** Elected local bodies are set to return to Gilgit-Baltistan after a 21-year hiatus. The region's election commission has announced that polls for the local government will take place on February 14, 2026, from 8.00am to 4.00pm.

Chief Election Commissioner, Raja Shahbaz Khan, issued a notification on Monday, confirming that the elections will cover various local tiers, including Union Councils, District Councils, and Municipal Corporations.

The process will follow the Elections Act, 2017, and the Gilgit-Baltistan Local Government Act, 2014. The submissions for nomination papers will open from December 22, lasting until December 26. The

final candidate list will be issued on January 15, 2026, following the scrutiny and appeal process.

Khan emphasised the institutional commitment to fairness, stating, "the transparent electoral process is considered the key instrument in democracy." He added that his vision is to make Gilgit-Baltistan's Election Commission more energetic, delivering its constitutional mandate by organising and conducting the elections honestly.

Senior judicial officers have been appointed as District Returning Officers across all ten districts to ensure the smooth conduct of the polls. The elections are considered a crucial step towards rejuvenating grassroots democracy and local de-

cision-making power, which critics consistently argued had weakened since the last local elections in 2004.

Separately, the Election Commission confirmed that the General Elections for the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly are scheduled for January 24, 2026. To prepare for this, the election commission has called an All-Party Conference (APC) for December 18, at 11.00am.

The chief election commissioner stressed that the APC's goal is to understand the opinions, suggestions, and input of all political parties. He expects the consultation to ensure the electoral process is "clean, transparent, fair, and in accordance with democratic principles."

## PIA says flight schedule affected in 4 Punjab cities due to dense fog

**NEWS DESK:** The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) said on Tuesday that dense fog has affected its flight schedule in Lahore, Multan, Sialkot, and Faisalabad, affecting both domestic and international operations.

In a statement, the spokesperson for the national carrier urged passengers travelling domestically and internationally to obtain the latest information about their flights before leaving for the airport.

The spokesperson

said that temporary changes were made to the schedule to ensure passenger safety and to avoid unnecessary delays in flight operations.

He said that dense fog affected visibility significantly, creating challenges for aircraft during landing and takeoff. He added that passengers could contact the PIA helpline for updates on the status of their flights.

According to the weekly weather outlook issued by the Pakistan Meteorological

Department, cold and dry weather was likely to be expected in most parts of the country on Tuesday.

"Moderate to dense fog/smog is likely to persist over Punjab, upper Sindh and plain areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," it said.

Last week, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) had forecast heavy smog and fog across Punjab from Dec 12 to 16 (Tuesday) and urged citizens to adopt precautionary measures.

## Former Punjab CM Manzoor Wattoo passes away in Lahore at 86

**NEWS DESK:** Former Punjab chief minister Mian Manzoor Ahmed Wattoo passed away in Lahore on Tuesday. He was 86 years old. His grandson, columnist Hassan Kamal Wattoo, posted about the former CM's demise on social media platform X.

"With profound sorrow, we announce the passing of my beloved grandfather, Mian Manzoor Ahmad Wattoo," he said, adding that funeral prayers would be held at the Waswewala stadium in Okara at 2pm tomorrow.

President Asif Ali Zardari expressed deep grief over his demise, a post on the Presidency's X account said.

It added that the president paid tribute to Wattoo's "invaluable public service, role in strengthening democracy, and contributions to national unity." State-



run APP reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also condoled his death, saying in a statement that "services of late Manzoor Wattoo for the country's politics will always be remembered".

The deceased politician belonged to the PPP and also served as federal minister for

Kashmir affairs during the 2008-2013 PPP-led coalition government. Wattoo hailed from Deepalpur in Punjab's Okara district and had decades of experience in politics. He was born on August 14, 1939. The politician was first elected chairman of the Okara district council in 1983 and became a mem-

ber of the Punjab Assembly in 1985. He was also elected speaker of the assembly at the time. In 1988, Wattoo was again elected as an MPA (independent) and soon joined the Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League, which was part of Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) at the time. This time too, Wattoo

became speaker of the house. In 1993, he was elected as MNA and MPA from the IJI's platform but opted to remain in Punjab, becoming speaker for the third time in a row. After the 1993 election, Wattoo dislodged the provincial government of PML-N's Ghulam Haider Wynn through a vote of no-confidence and became the chief minister with PPP's support.

The PPP, which had been unable to recapture Punjab, had to accept Wattoo as chief minister in exchange for the PML-Junejo's support for it in Islamabad. Back then, Wattoo had with him just 17 MPs in the provincial assembly against the PPP's 92. After Wattoo had a fall out with PPP in 1995, then-prime minister Benazir Bhutto installed Anif Naki, another PML-Junejo man, as the new chief minister.

## IHC dismisses Justice Jahangiri's objections on CJ Dogar-led division bench hearing fake degree case

**NEWS DESK:** The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has turned down Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri's objections on a division bench, led by Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar, hearing challenges to the legitimacy of his law degree and appointment as a judge, it emerged on Tuesday.

The objections were raised by Justice Jahangiri, also an IHC judge, during the hearing of the petition challenging his qualification on Monday, with CJ Dogar and Justice Muhammad Azam Khan presiding over the proceedings.

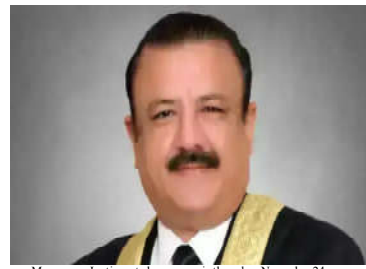
The same bench on the ground of filing of an intra-court appeal against CJ Dogar in the SC, the order stated.

The court, however, observed that "on that basis of administrative side, keeping in view the sensitive nature of allegations of having an invalid/fake degree having been levelled against a sitting judge of this court, it was deemed conducive, proper and in the fitness of things to constitute a division bench to hear this case instead of a single bench to hear lawyer Mian Dawood's petition."

A court order issued after the hearing, a copy of which is available with Dawn, said he had raised preliminary objections on the constitution of a division bench instead of a single bench to hear lawyer Mian Dawood's petition.

Moreover, Justice Jahangiri "expressed his no confidence" in the bench on the ground of filing of an intra-court appeal against CJ Dogar in the SC, the order stated.

The court, however,



to hear cases, is the sole prerogative of the chief justice. "The court also noted that "it is not a first instance of this kind wherein the division bench has been constituted to hear a certain petition".

Based on these observations, the court turned down Justice Jahangiri's objection to the constitution of the division bench to hear the case for "having no force". On Justice Jahangiri expressing a lack of confidence in CJ Dogar on the basis of an appeal filed against the latter in the SC, the court observed that the plea had been dismissed by the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on November 24.

In July, Justice Jahangiri, along with four other IHC judges, filed an intra-court appeal against the SC's constitutional bench decision of upholding the seniority of the IHC that raised Justice Dogar to the top.

The five judges requested the SC not to consider Justices Sardar Mohammad Sarfraz Dogar, Khadim Hussain Soomro and Mohammad Asif as judges of IHC until they took fresh oaths in accordance with Article 194. The intra-court appeal was fixed before the FCC following its establishment under the 27th Constitutional Amendment and eventually dismissed for non-prosecution.

Highlighting the plea's dismissal in its order for Monday's hearing, the IHC also cited various previous SC orders.

It noted that in the case Asif Ali Zardari vs The State (PLD 2001 SC 568), the SC had upheld that the "judgment of a superior court is a keeper of his own conscience and it is for him to decide whether to hear or not to hear a matter before him".

In 'Ms. Benazir Bhutto vs The President of Pakistan' (1992 SCMR 140), the issue of transfer of case before the judge on the basis of bias was explained, and it was observed that there is a marked distinction in the approach on the question of bias between a case of a judge of a subordinate court and a case pertaining to a judge of a superior court in as much as in the former case, the superior courts do grant transfer applications on the ground of a judge having personal, pecuniary or proprietary interest in the subject matter whereas in the latter case, the Supreme Court does not grant transfer application on the above ground for want of power," the IHC observed.

## IHC directs trial court to re-record witness statements in Imaan, Hadi tweet case within 3 days

**NEWS DESK:** The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday ordered the trial court hearing the case against human rights activist Imaan Mazari and her husband Hadi Ali Chattha to re-record the statements of all witnesses within three days in the controversial social media tweet case.

IHC's Justice Azam Khan issued the directives while hearing a petition challenging the trial court's November 19 proceedings, when testimonies of a prosecution witnesses had been re-recorded. The judge noted that the order to re-record statements was being issued without touching the merits of the case.

The court observed that the Supreme Court had directed a prompt decision on the matter and instructed that both parties be heard before a final ruling. "All records are before the court, a decision can be made," said Assistant Attorney General Raja Zameer-ud-Deen.

The case against human rights activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir and her husband Hadi Ali Chattha revolves



around allegedly controversial posts on X (formerly Twitter), which the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) claims were intended to incite divisions and create the impression that the armed forces were engaged in terrorism.

The case, registered on August 12, 2025, under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, reached the Islamabad High Court after the trial court's November 19 proceedings, when testimonies

were recorded. Senior lawyer Faizal Siddiqui submitted his power of attorney and will present arguments at the next hearing. Former High Court Bar President Riyasat Ali Azad, representing the accused, emphasised that Mazari and Chattha have a con-

stitutional right to a fair trial. "Give them a chance," he said. He also highlighted that on one occasion, four witnesses' statements were recorded in the absence of the accused and their pleader, questioning the reliability of such testimonies.

The court noted that certain exemptions exist in trials to ensure proceedings are not influenced. Justice Azam Khan asked whether a pleader was present since Mazari was not in court. Hadi Ali Chattha confirmed that no

pleader had been appointed, and the lawyer was also absent. Advocate Riyasat Ali Azad added that Mazari had requested an adjournment due to illness.

The Assistant Attorney General countered that repeated adjournment requests were causing delays, while Advocate Aleem Abbasi maintained that any testimony recorded in the absence of the accused or their counsel would be illegal. The court asked how long it would take to re-record the statements.



## 11 years on, APS tragedy still scars families

**NEWS DESK:** Eleven years have passed since terrorists stormed Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, but time has failed to dull the pain. For parents who buried their children, for siblings who grew up without brothers and sisters, December remains the coldest and longest month, weighed down by memory.

On December 16, 2014, terrorists turned a place of learning into a killing field, murdering 147 people, including 132 students, along with women teachers and school staff. More than 150 others were wounded in the attack that shook the nation to its core.

Among the dead were school principal Tahira Qazi and several teachers who stood between the attackers and their students, sacrific-

ing their lives in desperate acts of protection.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, a martyrs' memorial was built inside APS to honour those who were killed. Each year, families of the martyrs gather at the site to pay tribute, while a formal salute is also presented in remembrance of the victims.

On Tuesday (today), the 11th anniversary of the APS tragedy will be observed with ceremonies at the school, while families across the country will hold Quran recitations and special prayers in their homes.

As the anniversaries approach, painful memories continue to surface. A deeply emotional message by Alif Hussain, the father of a young APS student who was martyred in the at-

tack, has gone viral on social media.

In his post, he recalled that his daughter had left home happily, clutching her books, on her first day of school, but never returned.

"She went to school with books in her hands and came back wrapped in a shroud," he wrote, adding that although years have passed, the pain remains fresh and many questions still linger.

He said he would never allow the sacrifices of his daughter and other martyrs to go in vain and urged the nation to choose unity, patience and humanity over hatred and despair. "The memories of the APS martyrs remind Pakistanis that no matter how great the cruelty, courage and compassion are stronger," he added.

## Dense fog continues to disrupt traffic movement across Punjab

LAHORE (INP): Dense fog continued to disrupt traffic movement across several parts of Punjab, prompting shut down of multiple sections of major motorways.

According to

Motorway Police spokesperson Syed Imran Ahmed, the M-2 motorway has been closed from Lahore to Islamabad due to poor visibility caused by thick fog. Similarly, the M-3

motorway has been shut between Faizpur and Rajana, while the M-4 motorway remains closed from Gojra to Multan. In southern Punjab, the M-5 motorway has also been

closed from Multan to Zahir Pir as foggy conditions persist. The spokesperson also said the temporary closure of motorways aims to protect commuters' lives and property, urging motorists to avoid unnecessary travel during foggy conditions.

Dense fog has also been reported on several sections of the national highway, including Manga Mandi, Pattoki, Okara and Sahiwal. Areas such as Kaswall, Iqbal Nagar, Chichawani and Mian Channu are also experiencing reduced visibility. Severe fog continues to affect Khanewal, Multan, Basit Malook, Lodhran, Bahawalpur, while Ahmedpur Sharqia, Rahim Yar Khan and Sadiqabad remain under a thick fog blanket.

In addition to fog, air quality across several cities remains extremely hazardous. Lahore earlier topped the list of the world's most polluted cities, recording 342 micrograms per cubic meter (AQI).

air quality across several cities remains extremely hazardous. Lahore earlier topped the list of the world's most polluted cities, recording 342 micrograms per cubic meter (AQI).



ANKARA: Ambassador of Pakistan to Turkey, Dr. Yousaf Junaid, Deputy Mayor of Keçören Municipality, Atilla Zorlu at commemorative ceremony held in Ankara in memory of the school children and staff who were martyred in the heinous terrorist attack on Army Public School (APS, Peshawar).

## LHC resolved 166,643 cases in 2025, marking significant achievement in judicial system

LAHORE, Dec 16 (INP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) successfully resolved 166,643 cases in 2025, marking a significant achievement in the judicial system.

The remarkable progress was attributed to Chief Justice Aalia Neelum's timely and effective judicial reforms.

CJ Aalia Neelum's transformative steps have been credited for making 2025 the best year for Punjab's judiciary. Her initiatives included the implementation of the Integrated Criminal Justice System, merit-based recruitment of judges, enhanced infrastructure, and the introduction of modern technology.

Additionally, the

establishment of video link facilities, a judicial complex for female lawyers, and welfare projects for lawyers further strengthened the public's trust in the judicial system.

One of the significant reforms was the introduction of an advanced case management system, incorporating digital tracking and the computerization of various processes to ensure faster case resolutions.

The Integrated Criminal Justice System allowed for a streamlined process from FIR registration to case decisions, making the judicial process more transparent and efficient. As part of her efforts to improve facilities

for female lawyers, women's bar rooms and a judicial complex were constructed. Furthermore, new judicial buildings were planned, and a judicial tower in Lahore is set to be constructed.

To address grievances from litigants, complaint boxes have been installed in lower courts across Punjab. Senior lawyer Ahsan Bhoon praised the performance, highlighting that the reduction in pending cases is a positive outcome of Chief Justice Aalia Neelum's leadership.

Lahore High Court Bar Secretary Farukh Ilyas Cheema also commended the chief justice for ensuring timely justice for citizens and fulfilling lawyers' demands. The number of pending cases now stands at 169,037, reflecting a reduction of 40,000 cases.

Senior lawyer Ahsan Bhoon praised the performance, highlighting that the reduction in pending cases is a positive outcome of Chief Justice Aalia Neelum's leadership.

Lahore High Court Bar Secretary Farukh Ilyas Cheema also commended the chief justice for ensuring timely justice for citizens and fulfilling lawyers' demands.

The drive was launched across AJK by the State Health Services Department with the coordination of the World Health Organization (WHO).

## Paralysis, stroke become more common in colder months: Medical expert

ISLAMABAD (INP): A medical expert has urged the public to prioritize regular check-ups during the winter, as conditions like paralysis and stroke (Fali) become more common in colder months, with around 20 percent of those affected by these conditions succumbing to them each year, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and timely healthcare to prevent severe outcomes.

Dr. Nazeer Haidri, speaking to a local media channel, shed light on the growing concern of stroke cases in Pakistan, revealing that the stroke rate in the country has now exceeded 40%.

According to his statements, more than 300,000 people fall victim to a stroke each year, which is a significant health crisis.

He highlighted that the cold winter months particularly exacerbate the situation, as people are more likely to experience health complications during this season due to factors like blood pressure fluctuations and lack of physical activity.

Expert emphasized that strokes, especially those caused by underlying conditions such as hypertension and diabetes, can be prevented with early detection and lifestyle modifications.

He urged the public to be more mindful of their health, advising regular medical check-ups to monitor

risk factors like high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and blood sugar.

He also stressed the importance of a healthy diet, regular physical activity, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption to reduce the risk of stroke.

The doctor further pointed out that stroke has become one of the leading causes of death and disability in Pakistan, with many victims unable to recover fully, leading to long-term physical and emotional suffering for both patients and their families.

He further called for greater awareness campaigns and public education on stroke prevention, urging both individuals and healthcare providers

to take proactive steps in managing risk factors, particularly during the winter months when the likelihood of a stroke is at its peak.

Responding to a query, expert explained that a lack of proper hydration and insufficient physical exercise are significant factors contributing to the rise in stroke cases. He pointed out that these habits, when combined, lead to long-term damage, emphasizing that individuals over the age of 25 are at an increased risk, with one out of every four people in this age group facing the potential threat of stroke each year due to these lifestyle factors.

A PFA spokesman said on Tuesday that the raid was conducted at a milk production unit in Muhammad Colony near Faizabad after prolonged surveillance, resulting in the seizure of four mixing machines used to manufacture counterfeit milk.

He said around 27,000 litres of prepared food from dry powder and vegetable oil was destroyed on the spot, while officials also recovered 3,200 kilograms of ghee and 2,500 kilograms of dry milk powder from the unit.

According to the spokesman, the adulterated milk was being supplied to different areas of the twin cities, adding that those involved were traced and apprehended following detailed intelligence-based monitoring.



QUETTA: MPA Farrah Azeem Shah addressing a press conference.

## President, PM reiterate govt's resolve to eradicate terrorism say no soft corner for terrorists, their facilitators.

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have reiterated the government's resolve to eradicate terrorism, saying there is no soft corner for terrorists and their facilitators.

In a separate message, President Zardari said Pakistan's commitment to defeating terrorism was absolute.

"There can be no negotiations with those who raise arms against the state or target our children," the president said in a message on the 11th anniversary of the APS Peshawar attack.

He said the memory of the APS martyrs strengthened their resolve. Pakistan would not negotiate with the enemies of peace to succeed.

Today, he said, they remembered the innocent children and staff of the APS Peshawar school whose lives were taken in the brutal terrorist attack on 16 December 2014, adding their sacrifice remained a solemn reminder of the heavy price the nation had paid in the fight against

terrorism. "We stand with the families who continue to bear this pain with courage. The nation will always honour the resilience of the APS families who transformed their grief into strength for Pakistan," he added.

The president said that they strongly condemned the Indian sponsored terrorism in Pakistan.

"The evidence of its involvement in efforts to destabilise our country is well documented. Pakistan will continue to expose these hostile activities and will defend its people with full resolve," President Secretary Press Wing, in a press release, quoted the president as saying.

The president also paid tribute to the security forces, law enforcement agencies and intelligence services whose efforts had prevented many such tragedies.

He resolved that they would continue to pursue every terrorist and every facilitator until justice was done.

"Let me take this opportunity to warn the apologists, facilitators and supporters of terrorists that the people and the armed forces of Pakistan shall not spare them and will defeat them, no matter what political, ideological or fake religious garb they try to shroud themselves in," he stressed.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, paying tribute to the martyrs of the APS Peshawar tragedy, reiterated his government's resolve to maintain an uncompromising zero-tolerance stance on terrorism and continue relentless and full force anti-terror operations till the elimination of the scourge. The prime minister, in his message on the APS attack anniversary, said that the great sacrifices rendered for Pakistan's bright future would never go in vain as the state, security institutions, and the people stood united and determined to eliminate terrorism and extremism.

"Today, we pay tribute to the martyrs of the APS Peshawar tragedy, who sacrificed their precious

lives for the future of our beloved homeland. This heart-wrenching incident was a great ordeal for the entire nation, which deeply saddened us but failed to break our resolve," he remarked.

He said that the sacrifices of the innocent children, teachers, and staff of APS would always remain etched in the national conscience and only the elimination of terrorism from the country would be the meaningful justice for this heinous tragedy.

The prime minister said that the entire nation shared the grief of the martyrs' bereaved families, and saluted their patience and resilience. "Today, as Pakistan once again faces the menace of terrorism, with security personnel and innocent civilians being targeted in various parts of the country, the APS tragedy reminds us that our struggle against terrorism is not yet over," he said and prayed for the highest rank in paradise for all the martyrs of this anti-terror war and patience for their families.

para medical teams besides at 14 transit points and fixed centers across the district.

The district, he said, had been re-set up in the district to immunize the children with the polio vaccine.

"The mobile teams will visit door to door to feed the children with the polio vaccine during the campaign," he said. At least six thousand vials of the anti-polio vaccine had been managed for the vaccination during the campaign, he added.

The DHO advised the parents to cooperate the visiting mobile paramedic teams to make the national anti-polio campaign complete success.

## 04-day polio eradication drive continues in AJK

MIRPUR (INP): In Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the nation-wide 04-day polio eradication drive on Tuesday continued successfully for the 2nd consecutive day.

The campaign will continue till December 18 without any break. At least 7.12 lakh children up to five years of age, were targeted to be administered polio vaccine during the campaign.

The drive was launched across AJK by the State Health Services Department with the coordination of the World Health Organization (WHO).

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PFA dismantles major network involved in production, supply of fake milk

RAWALPINDI (INP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA), in coordination with the Islamabad Food Authority (IFA), has dismantled a major network involved in the production and supply of fake and adulterated milk near Faizabad.

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT		
The Planning and Development Department, Government of Baluchistan (GDB) is seeking recruitment against following positions purely on contract basis for Implementation Management Unit (PMU) of School Education Department. Interested candidates must provide detailed CVs indicating that they are qualified to perform the services. Eligible applicants shall have the following qualification, experience and skills as mentioned against each position:		
Sr	Position	Required Qualification & Experience
1.	Program Specialist (PPS) (One position)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor or Master's degree (16 Years of Education) in Business Management, Economics, Development Studies, Social Science, or related field. 7 to 10 years of experience as a Project Management, Community Engagement, in the public / development sector. Proficiency will be given to experience in Education related Infrastructure Development projects. Strong analytical and reporting skills. Experience with MS Office and logical reasoning. Ability to conduct field monitoring and surveys.
2.	Admin & Accounts Officer (PPS) (One position)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor's or Master's degree (16 Years of Education) in Finance, Accounting, Commerce, Business Administration (Finance, Social Science, Economics, or related field). Professional certifications such as ACCA, CA (Inter), CMA, CPA will be preferred. At least 5 years of experience in financial management, banking and related activities.
3.	Project Engineer (PPS) (Four positions)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor's or Master's degree (16 Years of Education) in Civil Engineering. 4 years' infrastructure development experience. PEC registration required. Strong command of engineering design, CAD/CAM and project supervision. Experience of Community based infrastructure projects.
4.	Regional Coordinators (PPS) (Four positions)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor's or Master's degree (16 Years of Education) in Social Science, Development Studies, Business Management, or related field. 5 years' experience in field coordination, Community engagement, Community Mobilization and Community based infrastructure project management. Strong communication and stakeholder management. Ability to travel extensively in assigned region.
5.	Procurement Specialist (PPS) (One position)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor's or Master's degree (16 Years of Education) in Supply Chain Management, Engineering, Business Administration or Social Science, or related field from HEC recognized University. 7 years' of relevant experience with knowledge of International donors' Government HEC procedures of procurement of goods, works, consulting and non-consulting services. IT Computer and reporting skills are also desired.
6.	Office Assistants (PPS) (Three positions)	Qualification & Experience: Bachelor's degree. 2-3 years administrative/secretarial experience. Proficiency in MS Office. Good communication and organizational skills.
7.	Supporting Staff (Driver/SC, Office Boy/Runners) (PPS) (One position)	Requirement: Literate, Physically fit, Valid Driving License Skills: Polite attitude, discipline, and willingness to assist.

Interested applicants shall upload their updated CVs along with covering letter addressing the Project Director and shall reach 91 2nd January 2026 before closing of office hours (5:00 PM) at email address (pmuaid@pmd.gov.pk) only. (only shortlisted candidates will be invited for interview. No TAD will be given for the interview. The candidates will be contacted on their active e-mail and phone numbers. Regional Coordinators belonging to their respective regions will be preferred.

PRO No: 2343/16-12-2025

SECTION OFFICER, CIVIL SCHOOL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT





## ADB commits more loans for reforms, budget support

**NEWS DESK:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Monday offered more loans to Pakistan for reforms in institutional capacity building and budget support on top of its existing debt stock of about \$17 billion.

The offer to Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb was made by an ADB delegation led by its Country Director Emma Fan, Director General for Central and West Asia Department Leah Gutierrez along with senior officials from the local ADB team.

The Manila-based ADB is the second largest multilateral to Pakistan in terms of the debt stock which stood at \$16.9bn as of end-June 2025 and third largest among all lenders led by China and then the World Bank.

As of now, the ADB has committed 764 public sectors loans, grants and technical assistance totalling \$43.4bn to Pakistan, according to the lending agency. Pakistan's total external debt stock stands

at \$107bn by end-June 2025, according to the IMF.

Ms Fan emphasised ADB's willingness to support reforms aimed at improving implementation efficiency and strengthening institutional capacity, and confirmed readiness to provide further budget support aligned with the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) under the International Monetary Fund, announced the ministry of finance.

The ADB delegation outlined future areas of engagement, including insurance sector reforms, public-private partnerships, pension reforms, and continued support for climate resilience and social sector development, the statement said, adding the ADB representatives expressed appreciation for Pakistan's reform progress under the IMF programme.

The country director also reaffirmed ADB's focus on development results, noting that faster project readiness and streamlined processes were essential for timely dis-



bursements and tangible outcomes and committed willingness to support reforms aimed at improving implementation efficiency and strengthening institutional capacity.

In recent months, the ADB has already approved loans to prepare various development projects including railway projects (ML-1)

to implementation phase given history of stuck up loans and projects in procurement phases due to poor management.

The delegation also updated the finance minister about ADB's growing engagement in private sector development, including potential private sector transactions, guarantees, and PPP initiatives, such as

proposed airport transactions. The strengthening of ADB's in-country presence, including the appointment of a new country operations head, was noted as a key step toward deeper engagement and improved project origination.

The finance minister expressed deep appreciation for ADB's long-standing

development outcomes, rather than approvals alone, must remain the central measure of success.

Mr Aurangzeb highlighted the government's resolve to improve project readiness and implementation, noting that delays in execution had historically diluted development impact, especially in social sectors and climate-related initiatives.

While reviewing the Pakistan's macro-economic stabilisation efforts and reform trajectory under the IMF's EFF, the minister

pointed out recent external validations, including improved credit ratings, successful IMF reviews, and the approval of the Resilience Sustainability Facility, reflected confidence in Pakistan's reform agenda.

He reaffirmed commitment to structural reforms, including taxation, energy sector, state-owned enterprises, privatisation, and public financial management.

The minister

briefed the delegation on recent progress, including the privatisation of First Women Bank, renewed interest in strategic transactions, and ongoing work on energy sector restructuring and distribution companies and said successful and visible transactions were critical to building momentum and credibility in the privatisation process. The minister also pledged "commitment to trade liberalisation and competitiveness, despite short-term resistance from protected sectors".

The official statement said the two sides reaffirmed their shared commitment to deepening the Pakistan-ADB partnership, with a strong focus on impact, accountability, private sector development, and inclusive and sustainable growth and agreed to continue close coordination as Pakistan advances its reform and development agenda under the forthcoming country partnership framework and the pipeline for 2026 and beyond.

## Smart meters become cheaper as bulk procurement reshapes power sector

**NEWS DESK:** Owing to consistent efforts and timely actions by the Power Division to promote transparency and competition, the prices of smart meters for power distribution companies have been reduced by up to 40%.

"This reduction will result in estimated annual savings of Rs150 billion at the national level," said Federal Minister for Power Ahsan Ali Khan Leghari.

The federal minister made these remarks on Monday after a report on smart meters was presented. He stated that the adoption of transparent and internationally competitive procurement processes had reduced the price of a three-phase smart meter from around Rs45,000 to less than Rs25,000, bringing it close to the price of a conventional three-phase meter.

Similarly, the price of a single-phase smart meter has been reduced by Rs7,000. These prices are exclusive of applicable taxes. The minister said that improved planning by the Power Division and positive changes in the Pakistan Engineering Council's regulations encouraged strong participation by international companies.

"Barriers to entry were removed and bulk procurement of smart meters by all power distribution companies led to reduced prices due to reduced costs of raw materials and supplies," he said.

Continuous monitoring and the introduction of clear and competitive standards for smart meters also helped bring prices down.

According to the minister, the estimated annual savings of Rs150 billion are

based on the replacement of defective and outdated meters by power distribution companies. In addition, the installation of new meters will provide further financial relief to electricity consumers.

This benefit will be reflected in lower costs shown in demand notices for new connections.

He added that lower smart meter prices would speed up digitalisation in the power sector and further improve the performance of the national grid.

Leghari further said that smart meters would help eliminate incorrect readings, allow quick detection of electricity theft, enable prepaid billing, provide consumers with direct access to usage data, support faster power restoration without the need for a lineman and offer several other benefits.

**NEWS DESK:** Businessmen fear economic activity in the port city and the province will come to a standstill and local production will shut down due to a nine-day-old cargo transporters' strike, which has disrupted the movement of goods across the province.

Representatives of multiple bus—siness bodies urged the Sindh government to intervene and address the situation stemming from the strike, which has a crippling impact on industrial production and supply chains.

In a letter to the Sindh chief minister, Overseas Investors Chambers of Commerce Industry (OCCI) Secretary General Abdul Aleem said the situation was a very serious concern for the industry and commerce in the country.

He said he had raised this matter on Dec 12 with the Punjab and Sindh chief secretaries, but it partially eased the situation in Punjab only. However, the situation in Sindh and Karachi port, inward and outward movement of

goods, has remained unchanged, he added. "Many of our members have reported that trucks from Punjab are still unable to enter Karachi and port operations have also been severely constrained, and several major manufacturing facilities are now at imminent risk of shutdown," he informed the Sindh CM.

Sindh CM urged to intervene to address issue as cargo unions and several major manufacturing facilities are now at imminent risk of shutdown, he informed the Sindh CM.

The OCCI member reported production lines shutdown this morning, with some others anticipating closures

between tomorrow (Tuesday) and Wednesday," he said, adding that the OCCI members further report that essential raw materials and finished goods are stranded across highways.

According to Pakistan Vanas-pati Manufacturers Association (PVMA) Chairman Sheikh Umer Rehman, the supply of edible oil, ghee and essential daily-use commodities has been affected, while the transportation of industrial raw materials has come to a halt. Mr Rehman warned the suspension of raw material supplies could

paralyse the production process, leading to severe repercussions for the economy. He said the delivery of imported goods had come to a complete standstill, resulting in consignments being stuck at ports and exposing businesses to substantial financial losses in the form of demurrage and detention charges.

Pakistan Association of Large Steel Producers' General Secretary Wajid Bukhari said the goods transporters' strike had a crippling impact on industrial production and supply chains. Prolonged disruption could

result in layoffs, wage losses for workers, and long-term damage to Pakistan's industrial credibility, he feared.

He urged the federal and provincial governments to engage in talks with the transporters, review the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 2025, and adopt a balanced approach that ensures road safety without paralysing the industry and production.

The current wave of protests by transporters began in response to the enforcement of the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 2025 on Dec 8, under which traffic authorities imposed increased fines, strict penalties, vehicle impoundment, and FIRs against drivers and transport operators. Transport unions argue that the ordinance has been implemented without adequate consultation and has made routine transport operations financially unviable.

While negotiations temporarily eased tensions in some areas of Punjab on Dec 13, major transport hubs, including the All Pakistan Transport Federation.

## Businesses panic as transporters' strike 'cripples' supply chains

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## Rate cut too meagre to address major challenges, industry leaders complain

**NEWS DESK:** The decision of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to lower the policy rate by 50 basis points to 10.50pc drew mixed reactions on Monday, with a foreign investors' body welcoming it while the country's wider business community criticised it as marginal and ineffective for boosting local production and exports.

The Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) viewed the rate cut as a prudent measure. "The State Bank has taken a cautious and measured step to ease financing conditions," OCCI's Secretary General and Chief Executive Abdul Aleem said.

Mr Aleem said the unexpected reduction is positive and will help stimulate business activities by lowering borrowing costs while preserving overall economic stability.

MNCs' association terms SBP move "cautious" for fostering stability.

He added that the chamber notes that a gradual approach "allows businesses to plan



investment decisions with greater confidence and helps ensure that the impact of ease remains aligned with sustainable economic growth objectives."

However, local business leaders expressed disappointment, arguing the minor adjustment fails to address the severe challenges they face.

"Such a token adjustment falls far short of what is urgently required to revive Pakistan's fragile economy and restore business confidence," Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(KCCI) President Muhammad Rehman Hanif said.

Mr Hanif said neither the marginal cut nor the prevailing economic realities offer meaningful relief to businesses struggling under an exceptionally high cost of doing business. Despite a visible decline in inflation, borrowing costs in Pakistan remain among the highest in the region, he said.

"Regional economies such as China, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia and Sri Lanka maintain single-digit interest rates, enabling their in-

dustries to access affordable financing, expand capacity, and remain competitive in global markets, while the situation in Pakistan is opposite," Mr Hanif said.

Mr Hanif noted when the cost of financing remains prohibitively high, businesses defer expansion plans, shut down marginal units, and reduce employment, ultimately leading to lower economic output and reduced government revenues.

Echoing that sentiment, leaders from other major trade bodies said the small reduction

would fail to encourage new investment or create jobs.

"The 50 basis point cut would not resolve the industries' problems and fail to boost exports under the challenging business environment," Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FPCCI) Senior Vice President Saquib Fayyaz Magsoo said. "The interest rate should be brought down to a single digit to at least come at par with regional peers."

Industries are currently burdened with exorbitant energy prices, high fuel prices, excessive taxation and a volatile exchange rate. Business leaders argue that maintaining a high interest rate regime suffocates productive economic activity.

Ahmed Azeem Alvi, president of the SITE Association of Industry, termed the move insufficient. "People are losing jobs every day."

The government must bring the policy rate down to single digits so that the economy can breathe and employment opportunities can grow," he said.

## Monetary policy eased as SBP lowers policy rate to 10.5pc

**NEWS DESK:** The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday reduced the policy rate by 50 basis points to 10.50pc.

The decision was aimed at reinforcing the ongoing recovery in economic activity without undermining price stability. The decision came at a time when most market participants had expected the SBP to maintain the policy rate, reflecting concerns over

inflation risks, external account pressures and the IMF's repeated calls for caution.

The IMF, following the completion of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) reviews, had underlined the importance of maintaining an "appropriately tight" monetary stance and ensuring that real interest rates remain positive on a forward-looking basis.

Against this backdrop, the SBP's move was widely viewed as a calculated deviation rather than a wholesale shift in policy direction.

According to the MPC, economic activity has continued to gain traction, supported by robust improvements in key high-frequency indicators.

Large-scale manufacturing (LSM) recorded 4.1% year-on-year growth in Q1-FY26, with broad-based increases across most sectors.

Rising sales of automobiles, fertiliser and cement, along with higher imports of machinery and goods, pointed to

strengthening industrial momentum.

The central bank argued that easing financial conditions would help consolidate these gains and support investment.

Developments in the agricultural sector also reinforced the MPC's relatively optimistic outlook. Data on wheat sowing, input availability and government-backed incentive programmes suggested that wheat production could surpass official targets, supporting rural incomes and food supply.

Improved performance in agriculture and industry is expected to spill over into the services sector, prompting the SBP to maintain its projection that real GDP growth in FY26 would remain in the upper half of the 3.25-4.25% range.

On the external front, the MPC noted that the current account deficit stood at \$0.7 billion during July-October FY26, broadly in line with expectations. Imports expanded in tandem with rising economic activity, while exports remained resilient.



## Amoura has key role as Algeria seek AFCON redemption

**NEWS DESK:** Striker Mohamed Amoura is set to be a key figure as Algeria seek redemption at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Morocco after disastrous campaigns in the past two editions.

The Desert Foxes won the premier African football competition a second time in 2019, edging Senegal 1-0 in the final in Cairo. But in two AFCON appearances since they failed to win a match in six attempts and twice made humiliating first-round exits, leading to the sacking of coach Djamel Belmadi.

His place was taken by Vladimir Petkovic, who took Switzerland to take Euro Championship tournaments and one World Cup during a seven-year reign. The 62-year-old born in Bosnia &

Herzegovina rang the changes when he took charge of Algeria last year, including giving more opportunities to Amoura.

His faith in the 25-year-old, now with Bundesliga outfit Wolfsburg, has been richly rewarded with Amoura becoming the leading scorer in 2026 World Cup African qualifying with 10 goals.

Amoura tormented a variety of rivals as Algeria secured a fifth appearance at the global showpiece, scoring a hat-trick against Mozambique and two each against Botswana, Somalia and Uganda.

Since then he also found the net in an AFCON warm-up victory over Zimbabwe as Algeria prepare for Group E showdowns with Sudan, Burkina Faso and Equatorial



Guinea. It is a mini-league where the main objective is to get past the first round, (then) go as far as possible in the tournament," he said after announcing his squad. Amoura told the Algerian media he is optimistic Algeria will win Group E and qualify for the round of 16. "It is a strong group. We respect every team, but fear no team. Algeria have a balanced squad that includes some outstanding players. "Our goal is to go deep into the tournament and represent our country in the best possible way. We want to make our supporters happy and fight for the title.

There is no secret to my scoring 10 goals in World Cup qualifiers. My achievements are due to hard work and the confidence given to me by my teammates and coaches.

"It is a huge honour to wear the Algerian jersey. I want to help my team as much as possible, whether it is scoring, creating goals or dropping back to defend."

Amoura hailed Petkovic for creating an atmosphere during training camps that is conducive to success for a country that also won the AFCON in 1990.

"The atmosphere is excellent. It is serious, focused and there

is a desire to give our best. It has to be that way because the 2025 AFCON is packed with strong teams."

Amoura left Wolfsburg for Algeria at the weekend after scoring in a 3-1 league win at fellow bottom-half club Borussia Moenchengladbach.

He and Ivorian teenager Yan Donnadie are the leading African scorers in the Bundesliga this season with six goals each.

Amoura made his professional debut just five years ago with Entente Setif. He made an immediate impact leading to transfers to Lugano and Union Saint-Gilloise before joining Wolfsburg last year.

He initially left Union on loan, but the German club, releasing the potential of the Algerian, made the move permanent this year.

## Security beefed up for Ashes Adelaide Test after Bondi shooting

**NEWS DESK:** Police armed with rifles will be part of a beefed up security presence at the third Test between Australia and England at Adelaide Oval after the Bondi Beach shooting attacks, officials said, while flags will be flown at half-mast.

South Australia state Premier Peter Malinauskas said extra measures would be in place for the Ashes clash that starts on Wednesday, although there was no intelligence pointing to an elevated threat level.

"Given the events that have occurred in Sydney, there will be additional protocols put in place at Adelaide Oval," he said late Monday.

"This is done only as a precautionary measure, but it is appropriate that we are in an increasing sense of alertness just at the moment."

An attack by a father and son on a Jewish celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach on Sunday killed 15 people with dozens injured.

One of the assailants was killed, while the other is in a critical condition in hospital.



South Australia Police Commissioner Grant Stevens said special security-response police, armed with rifles, would be present in and around the Adelaide Oval during the Test.

"There's a balance between the concern about police officers carrying rifles in and about the community, balanced with the need for us to be able to effectively respond to an event, should an event occur and these officers are specifically trained for that purpose," he said.

"There's no intelligence at this time to indicate that there are any increased levels of threat or security risks around the cricket or any other community event," he said.

Cricketer Australia and the England and Wales Cricket Board released a joint statement to pay tribute to the Bondi Beach victims, saying they were "horrified".

"All of our thoughts are with the victims, their friends and families, the Jewish community and the people of Australia at this deeply distressing time," they said.

"Our condolences go out to all those affected."

There will be a moment of silence observed before the Test and players from both sides will wear black armbands.

"While sport can seem insignificant at times like this, we have the unusual opportunity to bring millions of people together to pay tribute, to console and to contemplate what we want our nation to be," said Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg.

"We will continue to look at ways cricket can support and honour those who have been affected by the Bondi shootings and thank those who provided assistance during and since this tragedy."

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## Messi mania peaks in India's pollution-hit capital

**NEWS DESK:** Football superstar Lionel Messi ended his whirlwind tour of India on Monday with a lap of honour in New Delhi, thrilling thousands of fans and thanking them for "all the love and support".

The 38-year-old Argentine great greeted chanting supporters at a nearly packed Arun Jaitley Stadium, usually home to cricket, with fans dressed in Argentina jerseys waving flags and shouting his name.

"It was beautiful to receive all the love and support. I knew it was there, but to receive it firsthand was, well, amazing", Messi told the crowd, speaking in Spanish, saying he will "definitely be back".

Clad in a pink jersey and black trousers, Messi enthralled the audience with his charisma as he kicked footballs into the crowd and obliged star-struck delegates being presented with a T20 World Cup ticket and an Indian jersey by the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) Jay Shah.

India — a nation of 1.4 billion — are a cricket powerhouse, but struggles on the football pitch and are 142nd on the FIFA rankings.

Former India football captain Bhaichung Bhutia took the stage with Messi, who signed

new Delhi, and its



Argentina jerseys for the Indian star and his family.

His final stop in India went smoothly after a chaotic opening day on Saturday, when fans vandalised a stadium in the city of Kolkata, where his brief presence left the crowd frustrated.

Heavy security left fans struggling to catch a glimpse of him. Many had paid more than \$100 for tickets, and they broke down barricades and stormed the pitch after the superstar abruptly left the arena.

In New Delhi on Monday, thousands of excited fans dismissed hazardous choking air pollution to see their hero.

"I'm very excited to see Messi, I have been watching him since my childhood", said 29-year-old fan Sumesh Raina.

New Delhi, and its

wider sprawling metropolitan region of 30 million residents, is regularly ranked among the world's most polluted cities, due to a deadly mix of emissions from power plants, heavy traffic, as well as the burning of rubbish and crops.

Levels of cancer-causing PM 2.5 microparticles hit more than 300 micrograms per cubic metre in parts of New Delhi on Monday, according to monitoring organisation IQAir, 20 times the World Health Organization's recommended daily maximum.

A study in The Lancet Planetary Health last year estimated that 3.8 million deaths in India were linked to air pollution.

Messi, who is in India as part of his so-called GOAT Tour along with his Inter Miami

team-mates Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul, seemed unperturbed by the toxic air.

He looked in good spirits as he kept up his energy with fans and football enthusiasts in his 35-minute stay at the stadium.

Messi had also visited the cities of Hyderabad and Mumbai, where he met cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar and Indian football star Sunil Chhetri.

The footballer won his second consecutive Major League Soccer Most Valuable Player award last week after propelling Inter Miami to the MLS title and leading the league in goals.

The former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain forward will spearhead Argentina's defence of the World Cup in June-July in North America.

Messi, however, were far from done and they drew level on the stroke of halftime with Potulski's powerful header after the Bayern defence were caught napping.

With the hosts back in control and wasting a double chance through Gnabry and Kane at the start of the second half, Mainz struck again in the matter of time until Bayern scored and they did it in the 29th minute with in-form 17-year-old Karl turning a Serge Gnabry cutback in for his third league goal of the season. Karl has now scored four goals in his last five starts for Bayern across all competitions.

Bayern having more than 85% possession in the first 15 minutes.

Mainz did hit the post through Kai-Ingo Voigt, but the Bavarians then forced a string of superb saves from Bayern's goalkeeper Daniel Baer, including stopping Kane's pinpoint blank header and tipping Michael Olise's shot wide.

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## Shaheen pulled out for dangerous bowling on BBL debut



**NEWS DESK:** Shaheen Afridi's much-anticipated Big Bash League (BBL) debut turned sour as the Pakistan fast bowler was withdrawn from the attack for dangerous bowling during Brisbane Heat's clash against Melbourne Renegades in Geelong.

Having opted to field, Heat endured a difficult evening as Shaheen struggled for control.

In the 18th over of the Renegades' innings, the left-arm delivered two waist-high full

tosses — one each to Tim Seifert and Ollie Peake — prompting the umpires to remove him from the bowling attack under the league's safety regulations.

Shaheen reacted with a wry smile as Heat captain Nathan McWeney was forced to complete the remaining two deliveries of the over.

The incident capped a testing initiation for the fast bowler, who finished with figures of 0-43 from 2.4 overs, conceding three no-balls and two wides.

The evening had begun on a more promising note, with Shaheen bowling three dot balls in his second over amid considerable fanfare, heightened by the presence of Pakistan teammate Mohammad Rizwan, who was also making his BBL debut for the Renegades.

However, Shaheen soon lost his rhythm, missing his lengths and struggling with consistency.

He was not reintroduced until the 13th over, when the Renegades took the power

surge, and was promptly taken for 19 runs.

Matters worsened in the 18th over, where he leaked 15 runs before being pulled out of the attack.

The Renegades capitalised fully, posting an imposing 212 for 5. Seifert led the charge with a commanding 102 off 56 balls, while Peake provided late impetus with 57 from 29 deliveries.

Rizwan, batting at No. 3, failed to make an impact, scoring four off 10 balls before being dismissed by left-arm spinner Paddy Dooley.

## Bayern need late Kane penalty to rescue home draw

**NEWS DESK:** Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich needed an 87th-minute penalty from forward Harry Kane to rescue a 2-2 home draw against basement side Mainz 05 in the Bundesliga on Sunday but still managed to extend their lead at the top to nine points.

Goals from Lee Jae-sung and Kasper Potulski had put the visitors in the driving seat after Lennart Karf's first-half opener for the Bavarians, before England captain Kane netted his 18th league goal of the season to save the hosts' blushes and narrowly avoid their second league loss of the season. Bayern are in top spot on 38 points, with RB Leipzig second on 29 following Friday's 3-1 loss at Union Berlin and Borussia Dortmund in third, on goal difference, after their 1-1 draw at Freiburg.

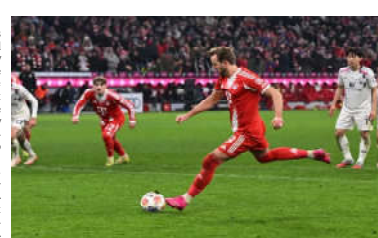
They have also reached the 50-goal mark in their 14th Bundesliga match of the season, the fastest in league history.

"We were in complete control for the first 44 minutes and had many chances to score," Kane said. "The sudden

equaliser just before halftime changed the momentum."

"We came out of the break dominant again, but lacked the last touch. They then scored a nice goal, and we had to fight back. We've had a lot of games in a short period, but that's no excuse," added the Bundesliga's leading scorer. "Of course, we wanted to go into the winter break with two wins. A draw at home is disappointing, but we have to accept it and move on."

The Bundesliga will go into its traditional winter break from December 21 to January 9. It was one-way traffic at the start with



Bayern having more than 85% possession in the first 15 minutes.

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## Thailand works to repatriate thousands stranded at Cambodia border crossing

**NEWS DESK:** Thailand is working out how to repatriate up to 6,000 citizens unable to return home through a major border crossing in Cambodia closed as fighting along the contested border extended into a second week, authorities said on Tuesday.

The militaries of the Southeast Asian neighbours are clashing at several locations on their 517km land border, both have said, with no signs of abatement, despite international efforts to negotiate a ceasefire.

Cambodia's closure of its checkpoint in the city of Poipet has prevented the return of thousands of Thai workers gathered there has displaced more than half a million people and killed nearly 40 on both sides since last Monday.

Hun Sen, Cambodia's influential former leader, has said the closure aimed to pro-



tect civilians from what he called indiscriminate firing by Thai forces in the area.

But checkpoints were open in areas free of fighting and air travel was unrestricted, he added.

In Bangkok on Tuesday, the foreign ministry said Thais in Poipet could seek help to arrange air travel home from the consulate in the city of Siem

Reap, the gateway to the Angkor Wat temple complex.

It urged others still in Cambodia to contact officials if they needed to leave.

Efforts to end the fighting have included calls from US President Donald Trump, who also brokered a halt to a five-day conflict in July by using trade negotiations as leverage.

"The army said

there has been continuous fighting across the border line. The situation is still in flux," said Surasart Kongsiri, a spokesman of the Thai defence ministry, with fighting reported in eight border provinces.

Cambodia's forces would "continue to stand strong, brave and steadfast in their fight against the aggressor", its defence ministry said.

There was no international pressure for a ceasefire, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told journalists in response to a question.

"No one is pressuring us. Who is pressuring whom? I don't know," he said, but did not answer a query whether Trump was using the threat of tariff measures to pressure Thailand to stop the conflict.

The neighbours have long disputed sections of the frontier but the scale and intensity of the latest clashes, stretching from forested inland areas near the Laos border to coastal provinces, are unprecedented in recent history.

Each side blames the other for starting the fighting. Malaysia will host a special meeting of Southeast Asian foreign ministers next week as the regional bloc tries to re-establish the ceasefire.

## US military says strikes on 3 vessels in eastern Pacific kill 8

**NEWS DESK:** Strikes on three alleged narco-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean killed eight people on Monday, according to the US military, as part of an ongoing campaign that has ended more than 90 lives.

"Intelligence confirmed that the vessels were transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and were engaged in narco-trafficking," US Southern Command said in a post on X, adding that "a total of eight male narco-terrorists were killed during these actions—three in the first vessel and two in the second and three in the third".

The post includes video footage of three separate boats floating in water before they are each hit by strikes.

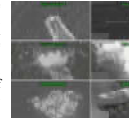
Since early September, the US military under Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth has targeted alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, destroying at least 26 vessels and killing at least 95 people.

The strikes have been accompanied by a massive US military buildup in the Caribbean that includes the world's largest aircraft carrier and a slew of other warships, with US President Trump insisting the goal is

combating narco-trafficking while Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro says he suspects it is a pretext for regime change in Caracas.

During one of the first strikes, survivors of an initial attack on a boat were killed after the US launched a second strike on the vessel, a controversial move that has generated accusations of a possible war crime.

Hegseth has maintained he did not order a second strike, instead attributing it to US Admiral Frank Bradley.



## Bondi Beach attack suspect travelled on Indian passport

**NEWS DESK:** The father and son accused of one of Australia's deadliest mass shootings spent nearly the entire month of November in the Philippines, Australian police said on Tuesday, with the father entering the country on an Indian passport.

Sajid Akram, 50, and his son Naveed Akram, 24, who allegedly killed 15 people and wounded dozens at a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney's Bondi Beach, were reportedly in the Philippines from November 1 to 28. Australian police said the purpose of the trip is under investigation, and that the suspects reportedly received military-style training during their stay.

The attack on Sunday was Australia's worst mass shooting in nearly 30 years and is being investigated as an act of terrorism targeting the Jewish community.

The death toll now stands at 16, including Sajid Akram, who was shot dead by police. His son and alleged accomplice, Naveed Akram, remains in critical condition in hospital after also being shot.

Islamic State-linked networks are known to operate in the Philippines and have wielded influence in the country's south. These networks have since been reduced to weakened cells operating mainly in Mindanao, far from the scale of influence they held during the 2017 Marawi siege.

"Early indications point to a terrorist attack inspired by Islamic State, allegedly committed by a father and son," Australian Federal Police Commissioner Kris Barrett

said at a news conference.

"These are the alleged actions of those who have aligned themselves with a terrorist organisation, not a religion," Police said the vehicle registered to the younger man contained improvised explosive devices and two homemade flags associated with ISIS, a militant group designated as a terrorist organisation by Australia and many other countries.

The father and son allegedly fired on hundreds of people at the festival during a roughly 10-minute killing spree at one of Australia's top tourist destinations, forcing people to flee and take shelter before both were shot by police.

"Only Australians of Jewish faith are forced to worship their gods behind closed doors, CCTV, guards," Maimon told reporters in Bondi, after laying flowers at the temporary memorial and paying his respects to the victims.

"My heart is torn apart... it is insane."

A string of antisemitic incidents in Australia has unfolded in the past 16 months, prompting the head of the nation's main intelligence agency to declare that antisemitism was his top priority in terms of threat to life.

At Bondi, the beach was open on Tuesday but was largely empty under overcast skies, as a growing number of flowers was established at the Bondi

tional tourists each year.

Olivia Robertson, 25, visited the memorial before work.

"This is the country that our grandparents have come to for us to feel safe and to have opportunity," she said.

"And now this has happened right here in our backyard. It's pretty shocking."

Ahmed al Ahmed, the 43-year-old Muslim father-of-two who charged at one of the gunmen and seized his rifle, remains in a Sydney hospital with gunshot wounds. He has been hailed as a hero around the world, including by U.S. President Donald Trump.

A GoFundMe campaign set up for Ahmed has raised more than A\$1.9 million (\$1.26 mil-

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Tougher gun laws in Australia's gun laws are now under review after police revealed Sajid Akram was a licensed gun owner with six registered weapons. Police clarified on Tuesday that Akram received his gun licence in 2023, not 2015 as previously stated.

Pavilion, metres from the location of the shooting.

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Pavilion, metres from the location of the shooting.

Read: 11 killed, dozen injured in shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach

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