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# QUETTA VOICE

Tuesday 23, December, 2025



**A Teacher Walks, A Shelterless School In The Background In Killa Abdullah District: Photo Asmat Khan Kakar**

## 45,000 Children Re-Enrolled in Balochistan Schools, Says Education Minister

**Syed Muhammad Qassem:**

Balochistan Education Minister Raheela Hameed Khan Durrani has said that around 45,000 children have returned to schools across the province as part of ongoing efforts to address the education crisis.

Speaking on the issue of school enrollment, the minister said the provincial government is taking concrete steps to bring out-of-school children back into the education system. She added that the matter of teacher appointments under the SBK (School Based Recruitment) system will also be

reviewed to ensure transparency and effective staffing in schools.

The minister acknowledged the scale of the challenge facing the education sector in Balochistan. She referred to a report issued by the Balochistan Education Department in January 2025, which

revealed that nearly 3.1 million children in the province are currently out of school.

Raheela Durrani said improving access to education remains a top priority for the government, stressing that increasing enrollment, resolving teacher shortages, and strengthening school infrastructure are key areas of focus.

Education experts say while the return of thousands of children to schools is a positive development, sustained policy measures and administrative reforms are needed to address the long-standing issue of out-of-school children in the province.

## Local bodies polls to be held on 'party basis', Punjab govt informs LHC

**NEWS DESK:**

The Punjab government on Monday told the Lahore High Court (LHC) that the upcoming local government (LG) elections in the province would be held on a "party basis".

An assistant advocate general (AAG) informed the court during the hearing of petitions filed by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI)-backed lawmaker Sheikh Imtiaz and others challenging the Punjab Local Government Act 2025 (PLGA).

The law officer also filed a report on behalf of the secretary of local government, which revealed that any political party wishing to contest the LG polls "may allow its candidates to contest elections for any political office on its party ticket".

Section 55 of the newly passed law does not, in any manner, put any party at a disadvantageous position compared to others," he said.

At this, LHC Justice Sultan Tanvir Ahmad asked whether the petitioners' grievance had been addressed, as the government itself was saying that the LG elections would be party-based.

"In that case, our concern to the extent of one point stood resolved. We requested that the government's reply be made part of the record," the petitioners' lawyers said. The judge also heard Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Director General (Law) Khuram Shahzad, who said the ECP was a constitutional body "ready to fulfil its duties".

The commission had written nearly 80 letters to the government over the past four years regarding holding local government elections and would conduct polls under whatever law the government enacted," he maintained.

"The Punjab government had given a Jan 10 deadline for election preparations," an ECP official added.

Justice Ahmad questioned why the advocate general's office had not filed a formal reply to the petitions. He directed the advocate general to submit a reply by Tuesday.

"Certain provisions of the impugned Act appeared to be inconsistent with the Constitution," the judge observed.

The judge also commented that the matter needed to be decided "promptly". In October, the ECP had announced holding the elections in the last week of December under the 2022 law.

## SHC extends order under which KU decision to cancel ex-IHC judge Jahangiri's degree remains suspended

**NEWS DESK:**

The Sindh High Court (SHC) extended on Monday an interim order that suspended a Karachi University (KU) syndicate and Unfair Means Committee's declaration cancelling the law degree of former justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, who was removed as an Islamabad High Court (IHC) judge last week.

Jahangiri has found himself mired in a fake degree controversy since last year and has been facing legal proceedings in the SHC and IHC over the matter.

While an IHC division bench, led by Chief Justice Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar, ruled on December 18 that his degree was "invalid" and his elevation to the high court was "without lawful authority", the SHC extended today its order under which KU's August 2024 decision to cancel his degree remains suspended.

The order has been suspended until the next hearing, the date for which will be decided later.

## BHC Reviews Quetta Traffic as 64 Buses, 111 Chingchis Seized

**NEWS DESK:**

The Balochistan High Court on Monday heard a constitutional petition concerning traffic regulation and transport management in Quetta, issuing firm directions to relevant authorities.

A two-member bench comprising Chief Justice Muhammad Kamran Khan Mulakhel and Justice Najamuddin Mengal presided over the hearing. Officials informed the court that action has been taken against substandard local buses, with 64 vehicles seized and their route permits sent for cancellation.

The Secretary of the Regional Transport Authority stated that a complete ban has been imposed on Qingqi rickshaws and loaders within the city. Traffic police have so far impounded 111 Chingchis. Authorities also announced a crackdown on illegal rickshaws, while deciding to issue RFID stickers to legally registered vehicles.

The court expressed strong displeasure over delays in releasing funds for traffic management. Approval of Rs188.7 million for the traffic police remains pending.



ing, prompting the bench to warn the Secretary Finance of personal appearance. The Chief Justice termed non-compliance with court orders unacceptable and directed that funds be released immediately.

The High Court ordered po-

lice to act promptly on requests made by the RTA and reviewed proposed routes for electric vehicles. Enforcement against tinted windows, fancy number plates, and illegal parking has also been intensified.

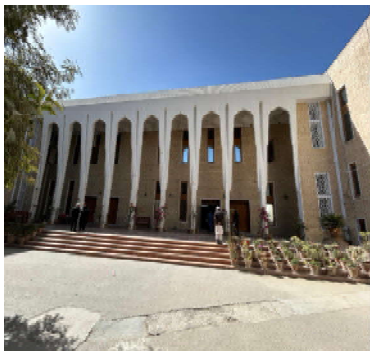
The Additional Advocate

General informed the court that a DSP Traffic office has been established at Saryab Road to improve traffic control. The court further assigned joint responsibility to the district administration and police to eliminate illegal transport. The bench also heard

a petition filed by Jalila Haider, during which reports from the traffic police and RTA were submitted. Proceedings in Civil Review Case No. 474/2025 continued, with written arguments placed on record. The hearing was adjourned until January 8, 2026.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan High Court  
Opens the Doors of Justice Wider  
Than Ever Before

**Editorial:**  
The Balochistan High Court's latest initiative — introducing a dedicated WhatsApp number and email address for public complaints — marks a meaningful shift toward openness, accessibility, and public empowerment within the judicial system.

This is not just a procedural reform; it is an invitation for citizens to engage directly with the justice system in ways that were previously difficult, time-consuming, and often intimidating.

For decades, obtaining certified copies of court judgments was a frustrating ordeal for clients and even for experienced

lawyers. Long queues, procedural delays, and administrative hurdles made the process difficult, especially for people from remote districts of the province. With digital communication now formally integrated, citizens, litigants, and counsel will be able to request and access judgment copies far more easily. This single step reduces barriers that have existed for years and ensures that justice is not only done — but also seen to be done.

Equally important is the ability for citizens to file complaints directly against lower judiciary officials or court staff if they face misconduct, delays, or

unfair treatment. Many people lacked the courage, resources, or channels to raise such concerns. This mechanism now provides them a safe and accessible option, reinforcing the idea that justice is a right, not a privilege.

The Balochistan High Court deserves recognition for taking a forward-looking approach to judicial transparency. By embracing technology, the court has empowered the public, strengthened accountability, and made justice more approachable for millions. This is a good step — one that brings the judiciary closer to the people it serves.

BUIITEMS Gains Dual Global Recognition: THE  
Rankings 2026 & UNAI SDG 8 Vice-Chair

Syed Dara

Shahid Amir  
The Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIITEMS) has brought new pride to Pakistan

tries. Institutions are evaluated across core areas such as teaching quality, research performance, industry collaboration, and international reputation. In 2026, 99 Pakistani

for the UNAI SDG Hub 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, collaborating with the University of Auckland, which serves as the Global Chair. The University of Auckland, ranked

development. With 10,000+ students, 600 faculty members, and 60 academic programs, the university stands as a beacon of growth and opportunity. Its vibrant alumni

tions are a testament to the hard work of our faculty, students, and administration who continuously strive for excellence.

These dual international recognitions —



and Balochistan by achieving two major international milestones — its inclusion in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2026 and its appointment as the only university from Balochistan to be ranked internationally — a remarkable achievement that underscores its commitment to innovation, research, and quality education.

Alongside this ranking success, BUIITEMS has been appointed as the Vice-Chair

among the top 1% of universities worldwide and 4th in Oceania in the 2025 Sustainability Rankings, partners with BUIITEMS to promote sustainable development, inclusive education, and youth empowerment in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Representing Pakistan and South Asia, BUIITEMS continues to drive academic excellence and sustainable progress through innovation, applied research, and education-driven

network of over 11,000 graduates and partnerships with global institutions highlight its pivotal role in advancing human capital and economic growth.

Prof. Dr. Khalid Hafeez, Vice Chancellor BUIITEMS, remarked: "BUIITEMS' inclusion in the Times Higher Education Rankings and our appointment as UNAI SDG 8 Vice-Chair reflect our dedication to advancing higher education, research, and sustainable development. These recogni-

from Times Higher Education (THE) and the United Nations Academic Impact — reaffirm BUIITEMS' position as a leading higher education institution in Pakistan, setting new standards in academic excellence, sustainability, and global collaboration.

With its vision of "Quality and Excellence in Education," BUIITEMS continues to symbolize Balochistan's progress and Pakistan's commitment to global education and sustainable development.

Illegal Israeli Attack on Gaza Hospital Sparks  
Outcry over Violation of Human Rights

By Samiullah:

In recent years, the Israel-Palestine conflict has witnessed numerous escalations, resulting in the tragic loss of countless lives and extensive damage to infrastructure. Among the most shocking incidents in this ongoing conflict is the illegal Israeli attack on a hospital in Gaza, which has sparked international outrage and underscores the pressing need for international intervention to protect the most vulnerable individuals caught in the crossfire.

The Inhuman  
Act:  
Targeting  
Hospitals:

War, even when waged between states with longstanding conflicts, is subject to rules and conventions. The fundamental principle of international humanitarian law is to protect civilians, including the wounded, children, and the elderly. Hospitals are meant to be sanctuaries in times of conflict, places where the injured can receive medical care without fear of attack. Yet, the attack on a hospital in Gaza flagrantly violated these principles and sent shockwaves through the international community.

The Impact  
of the  
Attack:

The repercussions of the attack on a hospital in Gaza were catastrophic. Innocent civilians, including chil-



dren, the wounded, and the elderly, were directly affected by this grave violation of international law. Lives were lost, and the injured faced dire circumstances with limited access to medical care. Moreover,

such actions further fuel the cycle of violence in the region, making it increasingly difficult to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

International  
Responsibility:

The United Nations and powerful nations must step up and play a pivotal role in addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict. The concept that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" has been a longstanding principle

in international relations. In this context, it should translate into a resolute commitment to safeguard the rights and safety of the most vulnerable. Powerful nations should exert diplomatic pressure on the conflicting parties

to adhere to the rules of war and peace.

Thucydides'  
Insights:  
Rules of War  
and Peace:

The ancient Greek historian Thucydides,

element of the international order. The attack on a hospital in Gaza stands as a blatant violation of these principles and underscores the necessity of enforcing them.

## To Sum Up:

The illegal Israeli attack on a hospital in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the tragic consequences that the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to impose on innocent lives. It is imperative for the international community to unite in its efforts to promote peace, protect the most vulnerable, and ensure the principles of war and peace are upheld.

As Thucydides noted, these principles are not a sign of weakness but the cornerstone of a just and humane world order.

It is high time for the United Nations and powerful nations to take proactive measures to end the suffering and work towards a lasting solution in the region.

About the  
Author:

The author, Mr. Samiullah, holds an M.Sc. in International Relations from Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad and is also a law graduate. He currently serves as the Public Relations Officer for the Ministry of Information and Public Relations in Balochistan. His unique perspective on international relations and conflict resolution adds depth and authority to this article.





## Nine bandits killed, 27 arrested in Ghotki operation

**NEWS DESK:** Nine bandits were killed while 27 were arrested in Ghotki, a joint operation by Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) and police, against the Shekhani and Mazari criminal gangs.

The operation was launched after armed bandits abducted 18 passengers from a bus traveling from Sadiqabad to Quetta near Ubauro on the night of December 15, according to a statement by the Sindh Rangers spokesperson.

Abducted passengers were recovered by security forces from the Andhari, Lathani, and Bakhani

areas near Cross Bund Khangarh Chowk. Fleeing bandits were targeted and killed by Rangers and police. These include Abdullah Dashti, Hazara alias Lala Shekhani, and Azan alias Chhailu. Police had announced bounty rewards of Rs5 million each on Hazara and Azan.

Eight more people who were already in the custody of the bandits were also recovered during the operation, while various weapons and ammunition were seized from the suspects' hideouts. The recovered arms include a 12.7 gun, LMG, RR

75, two RPG-7s, four G-3 rifles, four SMGs, three 12-bore repeaters, a 9mm pistol and ammunition of various types. Nine mobile phones and a Corolla car were also recovered.

All recovered weapons, rescued persons and seized items were handed over to Police Station Somiani, Rojhan Tehsil, Sindh. Rangers have requested the public to identify individuals providing shelter to bandits and report them via Rangers Helpline 1101 or WhatsApp number 03479001111. The identity of informants will be kept confidential.

## Multan's Nishtar Hospital sacks doctor for misbehaving with patient's family after video goes viral on social media

**NEWS DESK:** Multan's Nishtar Hospital has sacked a doctor working as an additional house officer for misbehaving with a patient's family, a video of which had gone viral on social media, it emerged on Monday.

In the video, the family members could be heard saying that the patient had passed away after doctors refused to give her a blood transfusion. When the video panned to the doctor in question, he raised his arm, showing his middle finger and walking away. A large crowd could also be seen in the video.

The doctor, identified as Qasim Jamal, was suspended from duty on Dec 19, a day after the incident occurred. Meanwhile, an inquiry committee was also formed to probe the incident.

Subsequently, the hospital issued a notification the same day stating that the doctor had been terminated with immediate effect for misconduct, and violating hospital rules and professional ethics. In the incident report dated Dec 20, the director of the Accident and Emergency Department said that the patient was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition on Thursday. It said she was in the process of being stabilised after being treated at the department and was to be transferred to a different ward for blood transfusions.

However, the patient's condition deteriorated to a point where transfusions were no longer feasible, leading to agitation among her attendants, it said.

"Attendants misbehaved with [the] doctor as well as staff on duty," the report said. "After that, [the] doctor also misbehaved and [showed an] inappropriate gesture to the attendants," it said.

It added that treatment was given to the patient "properly and accordingly".

Meanwhile, the doctor in question also issued a detailed statement on Dec 20 in response to his reaction, saying that his reaction was merely a "symbol of protest" against what he called continuous attacks and harassment by the patient's family.

Regarding the treatment of the patient, he said that her condition had been "very critical and active treatment was ongoing" but her condition deteriorated. He said that they attempted to resuscitate her but she was later declared dead.

He said that the patient's attendants then started misbehaving with doctors and staff, creating chaos in the emergency room. He added that there was "complete negligence on the part of the security staff, who allowed over twelve men with mobile cameras to enter the restricted area of the

emergency room".

He said that while he and the other staff were treating over a dozen other patients, the attendants continued to "shout, abuse, threaten and harass" him, including getting physically violent.

"After repeated humiliation, verbal abuse, physical threats and four consecutive attempted attacks, it was impossible for any human being to remain unaffected," the doctor said.

"My reaction was the result of continued provocation, not an unprovoked act. I state clearly that I did not abuse, misbehave or physically attack anyone. I did not utter a single word of profanity. My response was calm and disciplined," he said.

"I admit that I was under severe mental stress and anger at that time. Protesting is a fundamental right of every individual and employee, and I exercised this right peacefully and non-violently," he said.

He added that the hospital rules did not clearly refer to silent gestures as violations of the law, saying, "If I had used abusive language or physical assault, it would certainly have been a violation of medical ethics, but that was not the case."

The doctor said that suspension without investigation was unfair and requested that he be reinstated in order to complete his training.

## LHC CJ suspends operation of Punjab land protection ordinance

**NEWS DESK:** Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Aalia Neelum issued an interim order on Monday to suspend the operation of the newly enacted Punjab Protection of Ownership of Immovable Property Ordinance, 2025, which empowers deputy commissioner-led committees to decide property disputes.

Justice Neelum issued the ruling during a hearing of petitions by Abida Parveen and others that challenged decisions pertaining to property disputes taken under the ordinance. Through her interim order, she also suspended decisions taken under the new legislation to take away the possession of properties.

Expressing her disapproval of the law, she remarked: "Someone should inform the government that if this law remains in force, even Jati Umra (the Shan family residence) could be vacated within half an hour."

It appears that some people want to hold all powers." Questioning the purpose of the law, CJ Neelum asked how could a revenue officer hand over the possession of a property in a matter pending before a civil court.

The judge observed that the new law had dismantled the civil setup, civil rights and judicial supremacy. "If it is up to the authorities, they would even suspend the Constitution," she added.

Justice Neelum further pointed out that in case of a deputy commissioner handing over the possession of an individual's house to someone else under the new law, the affected person did not have the right to appeal.

"The new law does not allow the high court to grant a stay in such matters," she noted.

The CJ then said that a full bench would



be constituted to further proceed on the matter adjourned the hearing.

Separately, a Punjab law officer explained to Dawn that the Punjab government could challenge the LHC's interim order before the Supreme Court under its appellate jurisdiction.

The officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the provincial government could approach the Federal Constitutional Court as well, since that case involved a question of law.

"The government may also request the proposed full bench to review the stay order. However,

its chances of obtaining relief through that route are relatively slim," he added.

The ordinance in question was approved by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on October 31 and mandates the resolution of land disputes within 90 days.

## Passport department launches 24/7 digital monitoring system

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's Passport Department has introduced a new digital system to monitor passport applications, printing and operational performance, officials said on Monday.

Under the initiative, a dedicated 24-hour monitoring room has been established at the department's headquarters in Islamabad on the directives of the Director General of Passports Mustafa Jamal Qazi.

Officials said the system is powered by a digital integrated dashboard that will allow real-time monitoring and evaluation of daily operations, both within Pakistan and at passport offices abroad.

The new framework enables end-to-end oversight of the passport process, from the submission of applications to final delivery.

Authorities said this would help improve transparency, efficiency and service delivery. In addition, staff performance, passport



printing operations, backlogs and machinery status will be tracked through the Network Management System.

Qazi said the system would significantly improve the department's performance.

He added that citizen turnout and staff efficiency across all passport offices would now be monitored centrally, and that a mechanism had been introduced to ensure immediate resolution of issues once identified.

## China-Pakistan Digital Entrepreneurship Training Center launched

**PESHAWAR (INP):** The Gansu Finance and Trade Vocational College-Overseas Training Base and the SME Entrepreneurship and

Management Pakistan Training Center were officially inaugurated here at Government Advanced Technical Training Centre (GATTC).

It marking a step forward in vocational education cooperation between China and Pakistan, China Eco-

nomics Net (CEN) reported on Monday.

Located in the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the centre aims to promote school-business collaboration and integration of industry with education.

It will enable young Pakistani students to acquire cutting-edge skills in small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) entrepreneurship and management, with a special emphasis on digital

competencies, without leaving their home region.

Approximately 50 representatives from partner institutions, government officials and student delegates attended the inauguration ceremony.

They highlighted the importance of the project in fostering technical skills that are directly aligned with market demands and contemporary economic needs.

The training facility is equipped to deliver a curriculum and practical modules jointly developed by Chinese and Pakistani experts.

The program focuses on modern business management, start-up operations, e-commerce and other essential for SME success, especially in the digital economy.

It will also serve as a hub for resource sharing, teacher exchanges and special-

ized student training programs. This inauguration fulfills the commitments made in a quadrilateral cooperation agreement signed in July this year.

The signatories were Gansu Finance and Trade Vocational College, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP TEVTA), the GATTC, Peshawar and Mera PC Pvt Limited.

## Three brothers killed in Nushki shop dispute

**NEWS DESK:** A dispute over the rental of a vacant shop escalated into an armed clash in Kili Qadirabad, Nushki, on Monday morning, leaving four people dead, including three brothers, police said.

Police officials told The Express Tribune that an argument between two parties over the shop's tenancy turned violent, resulting in the deaths of Babu Alam, Babarg and Zulqarnain Khan, sons of Dinar Khan Badini, at the scene. From the opposing side, Sohail Ahmed, son of Muhammad Ayub Badini, was also shot dead, police said.

Locals told authorities that both parties were close relatives belonging to the same tribe and that the dispute had been ongoing for some time. Residents said the exchange of fire caused panic in the area, forcing people to remain indoors for several hours.

Police reached the



site soon after the incident was reported and secured the area. The bodies were taken into custody and shifted to a hospital for post-mortem examination. Deputy Superintendent of Police Nushki said FIRs would

be registered against both sides, adding that raids were under way to arrest suspects involved in the shooting. Police said the situation had been brought under control, with additional personnel deployed in the

area to prevent further violence. A local jirga has also intervened, appealing to both sides to exercise restraint. The jirga said it planned to convene a peace jirga to help resolve the long-running dispute alongside the legal process.

Residents expressed grief over the killings and urged the authorities to take effective measures for the timely resolution of tribal and property-related disputes.







## Balochistan High Court Reviews Progress on Quetta Development Projects

**Staff Reporter:**  
QUETTA: A two-member bench of the Balochistan High Court, headed by the Chief Justice, on Monday reviewed a comprehensive progress report on various development projects underway in Quetta.

During the hearing, detailed reports supported by photographic evidence were submitted regarding ongoing work on Ansonb Road and Zarghoon Road. Several initiatives launched under the Chief Minister's Quetta Development Package were termed satisfactory and formally made part of the court record.

The court directed the authorities to ensure completion of a memorial project before Christmas and instructed that construction work at Imdad Chowk be treated as a top priority.

Officials informed the bench that work on the Sariab Service



Road storm-water drain is 98 percent complete, with only 230 meters remaining. The asphalt base

course on the same road has largely been completed, while the remaining work is progressing at an accel-

erated pace.

Regarding Airport Road, the court was told that a wastewater treatment plant has

been installed on a trial basis and is currently being solar-powered. Additionally, plans for installing wastewater

treatment plants at four more locations in Quetta were presented to the court.

The project direc-

tor was granted additional time to submit reports concerning two bridges on Sariab Road. The Quetta

Electric Supply Company assured the court of full cooperation in shifting high-tension and low-tension power lines linked to the projects.

Taking notice of congestion caused by encroachments on Sariab Road, the court ordered the authorities to prepare a comprehensive plan for fruit vendors and vehicles. A proposal was discussed to utilize a plot between Sariab Road and Jail Road as a parking area and fruit market, while it was agreed to design designated vending points for fruit and vegetable sellers on the Lahore model.

The court instructed the Quetta Cantonment Board (QCB) and the Project Director to convene an immediate meeting and ensure swift implementation of directives. Authorities were also ordered to submit a detailed progress report at the next hearing.

## Governor Balochistan Meets Delegation, Assures Support for Trade and Border Issues

QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Jaffer Khan Mandokhail met a delegation led by Khan Amanullah Khan

and Haider Khan Achakzai, discussing trade and border issues affecting local communities.

The Governor acknowledged the challenges faced by traders and residents in border areas, stating that economic growth depends on strengthening trade and agriculture sectors.

He assured the delegation of his support in resolving issues



and stabilizing commercial activities, noting that the government is working to find

sustainable solutions. Qila Abdullah, particularly Chaman, and

traders and people in the area sought his assistance.

## District Council Nasirabad Approves Development Budget for 2025-26

NASIRABAD: A meeting of the District Council Nasirabad was held under the chairmanship of Haji Allah Bachaya Khan Khosa to approve the development budget for 2025-26. The meeting was attended by District Chairman Haji Farid Haq Lahri, members of the District Assembly, and officials. The council approved the budget of Rs. 1.194 billion, focusing on public welfare, infrastructure, education, and health projects. Chairman Lahri emphasized



transparency and responsibility in imple-

menting development projects, ensuring

maximum public benefit.

## Vice Chairman of the Balochistan Board of Investment & Trade, Bilal Khan Kakar,

QUETTA: Vice Chairman of the Balochistan Board of Investment & Trade, Bilal Khan Kakar, has said that the establishment of the Business Facilitation Center (BFC) is an important step toward realizing the vision of Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfaraz Bugti. The initiative aims to make the province more accessible and attractive for investors, eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, improve service delivery,

and modernize the Ease of Doing Business framework.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting regarding preparations for the inauguration of the Business Facilitation Center.

The meeting was attended by CEO BBoIT Mr. Qaim Lashari, along with other officials. During the meeting, officials briefed on the progress made so far toward making the BFC opera-

tional.

Vice Chairman Bilal Khan Kakar directed that all remaining measures be completed immediately, stating that the establishment of the BFC is a key component of the provincial government's broader economic reform agenda. The initiative aims to increase investment, strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises, and create sustainable employment opportunities

across the province.

He added that by removing barriers and reducing delays, the BFC will boost investor confidence and expand the province's economic base.

The Chief Minister's focus on promoting an investor-friendly environment reflects the province's commitment to modern governance, innovation, business development, and effective public-private partnerships.

## Deputy Commissioner Sibi Takes Notice of Firing Incident, Ensures Medical Aid for Injured Levy Official

**News Desk:**  
SIBI: Deputy Commissioner Sibi, Major (R) Ilyas Kabzai, has taken notice of the firing incident between Levy Force and robbers on National Highway N-65 at

Lumji. The injured Levy official was immediately shifted to DHQ Teaching Hospital Sibi and later referred to Sukkur for further treatment. DC Sibi visited the hospital, inquired about the

injured official's condition, and reviewed medical arrangements. The incident occurred when Tahsildar Mir Zabar Domki and Levy Force were heading from Bakhtiarabad to

Sibi, and robbers were looting passengers at Lumji. Firing ensued, injuring a Levy official.

Security has been tightened, and Levy Force is closely monitoring the situation.

## DC Naqibullah Kakar Reviews Education Sector in Crucial Meeting

GWADAR: A pivotal meeting of the District Education Group was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Naqibullah Kakar to review the progress and challenges in the education sector.

The meeting was attended by key officials, including Additional Deputy Commissioner General Dr. Abdul Shakoor, District Education Officer Zahid Hussain, District Education Officer (Female) Zaraton Bibi, and

representatives from UNICEF, RTSM, and other stakeholders. DC Kakar expressed displeasure over the absence of representatives from Balochistan Education Foundation and UNICEF, directing notices to be issued.

The meeting discussed inactive schools, teacher recruitment under Phase-IV, and issues relating to the education system. Kakar reviewed ongoing development projects, construction of school buildings, and addi-

tional infrastructure needs. He sought explanations from the Executive Engineer B&R regarding the stalled construction of Govt. Girls Degree College Gwadar, pending for six years. The meeting also reviewed field visits by officials, directing each officer to visit at least 30 schools monthly.

Action against absent teachers and salary deductions were discussed. Kakar sought details on teachers appointed un-

der SBK and contract teachers. The issue of encroachment on Model School residential quarters was also discussed. The performance of UNICEF's AEP program was reviewed, and reports were sought from CPD and Social Welfare Department on informal education centers and unregistered madrasas.

The DC directed officials to prepare videos of schools to address issues like solarization, warehouses, and basic facilities.

Great People to Fly With

پی آئی اے کا عالمی وقار بحال کرنے کیلئے  
وزیر اعظم محمد شہباز شریف کا تاریخی اقدام

پاکستان انٹرنیشنل ائیر لائنز PIA  
کی نجکاری

لائسہ ٹیلی کاسٹ

شفاف اور قابل اعتماد نجکاری کے عمل کی لائیو ٹیلی کاسٹ اور سٹریمنگ  
23 دسمبر 2025 کو 3:30 بجے

Privatisation Commission: Facebook | X | YOUTUBE | INSTA  
GOP: Facebook | X | YOUTUBE | TV Channels

نجکاری۔ راہ خوشحالی

# Three in race as PIA bid opens tomorrow

**NEWS DESK:** The Privatisation Commission is all set to privatise Pakistan International Air-lines Corporation Ltd (PIAC) on December 23 (Tuesday), as only three bidders remain in the race after the exit of Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd.

According to the programme circulated by the Privatisation Commission on Sunday, bids will be submitted between 10:45am and 11:15am, while bids will be opened at 3:30pm, a process that will be shown live on television networks, as decided by the government.

The three bidders are: a consortium comprising Lucky Cement Limited, Hub Power Holdings Limited, Kohat Cement Company Limited, and Metro Ventures (Private) Limited; a consortium comprising Anif Habb Corporation Limited, Fatima Fertiliser Company Limited, City Schools (Private) Limited, and Lake City Holdings (Private) Limited; and Air Blue (Private) Ltd.

Chairman of the Privatisation Commission and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation, Muhammad Ali, said during a YouTube interview that Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd had decided to quit the bidding process for PIA.

Mr Ali explained that on Tuesday, after submission, the sealed bids will be placed in a transparent box, following which the board of the Privatisation Commission will meet and fix the reference price.

Thereafter, the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) will meet and approve the reference price, which will be announced during the opening of the bids.

He further explained that if bids are higher than the reference price, there would be an open auction. However, if the bids are less than the reference price, priority will be given to the highest bidder.

About the next step, the adviser said that the federal cabinet will approve the transaction within days, followed by the signing of the documents which the Privatisation Commission has received from the bidders. After the signing of the documents, the commission will have 90 days to fulfill some procedures, including the transfer of properties, liabilities and leased aircraft.



As per the transaction structure, the bidding will be on the basis of a 75 per cent stake in PIA. Out of the 75pc bidding amount, 92.5pc will go to PIA instead of the national exchequer, while only 7.5pc will go to the national exchequer.

He said 25pc of PIA shares will remain with the government, which will be a valuable asset. However, the successful bidder will have the option to acquire the remaining 25pc after payment of

leave it with the government. According to Mr Ali, the valuation of the remaining 25pc shares of PIA will take place after the decision on the 75pc stake. The government has given bidders the option to decide whether to pay for the remaining 25pc within 12 months with a 12pc premium.

The bidders will have to take a decision on the 75pc stake on

Tuesday, whereas for acquiring the remaining 25pc, they would have to take a decision within 90 days. He said the bidders had sought to make payment for the 75pc stake over one year; however, the government did not agree to this proposal. If the performance of PIA declines within a year, the bidder would decide against the purchase, and if per-

formance improves, the bidder would decide in favour, which would be unfair to the government, he said. He said the winning bidder will deposit two-thirds of the bid within 90 days, while the remaining one-third will be deposited within a year. Mr Ali said the revival of PIA would have an impact on GDP growth and the economy as a whole. Pakistan has the lowest contribution of the aviation industry to GDP. Compared to 18pc in the UAE and 8.5pc in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's aviation sector contributes only 1.3pc to GDP. However, due to the potential in PIA, this percentage would increase considerably, he said.

Of PIA's 34-aircraft fleet, only 18 aircraft are currently in operation. However, PIA has air service agreements with 97 countries, besides landing rights in over 170 countries. PIA's current net profit is Rs11 billion, with equity of Rs30bn. He said liabilities of Rs26bn will remain

with PIA, and bidders will pay these over five years.

About the employees, he said that under the proposed agreement, no employee can be fired for one year. Employees' pensions and perks are fully protected, while the pension liabilities of retired employees, including medical benefits and discounted tickets, will be borne by the holding company.

He said that in 2011, PIA had 11,500 employees, which has now reduced to 6,500, a reduction of 5,000 employees over five years.

Mr Ali said PIA is such an asset that if not properly managed, colossal sums of money will be lost; however, if run with proper management, it could generate mammoth earnings. With a country of 250 million people, PIA has customers, destinations, routes and landing slots.

What is required, he said, is investment, the addition of aircraft and efficient management, which the government cannot provide.

## Building material prices hit record high

**NEWS DESK:** New federal and provincial taxes, along with continuous increases in electricity, gas and transportation costs, have led to an unprecedented rise in the prices of all building materials.

In the market, top-quality bricks are now priced at Rs25,000 per thousand, prompting contractors to rely more heavily on old bricks.

A bag of cement is available at Rs1,350, steel at Rs255,000 per ton,

gravel at Rs3,500 per ton, sand at Rs3,000 per trolley, masonry labour at Rs2,500 per day, and general labour at Rs1,500 per day.

Prices of cement plaster, standard marble, plumbing materials and electrical supplies have also increased by up to 30 per cent. The upward trend in building material prices continues. Contractors say building material costs have seen record increases over the past two years.

Contractor Haji

Sultan Mahmood said that three to four years ago, a four-marla double-storey house could be completed for Rs7.5 to 8 million, but the estimated cost has now crossed Rs10 million. Due to this, contractors have shifted from constructing four- and five-marla houses to building two- and three-marla units for sale. Five-marla plots are now divided into two units of two-and-a-half marla each, with double-storey houses built on them.

## Tax-to-GDP ratio to stall over five years, IMF expects

**NEWS DESK:** With a 1.4 percentage-point increase in the tax-to-GDP ratio last year, mostly through additional revenue measures worth Rs2.5 trillion, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now expects the federal tax contribution to remain stagnant over the next five years and a slight improvement coming from provinces.

The latest IMF estimates suggest Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) receipts rose from 8.9 per cent of GDP in the fiscal year 2023-24 to 10.3pc in 2024-25, but still missed the Fund's programme target of 10.7pc.

For the current fiscal year, the IMF projects FBR revenue at 11.1pc of GDP, which would then remain flat at that level until FY30.

In absolute terms, FBR revenue increased from Rs9.3tr in FY24 to Rs11.74tr in FY25, with a massive shortfall. For the current year, collections are projected at Rs13.98tr, implying a shortfall of Rs328 billion under existing assumptions.

The IMF noted that tax revenue collection in FY25 fell short by Rs1.24tr relative to budget projections and by Rs524bn relative to

the lender's first review target. About Rs850bn of the shortfall relative to the budget reflected faster-than-expected inflation deceleration and lower-than-expected GDP growth in FY25.

Forecasts provincial taxes to offset stagnant federal collections. The inflation deceleration at the end of FY25 led to a revenue shortfall of Rs157bn relative to the first IMF review target. The remaining portion of about Rs380bn was broadly linked to administrative and enforcement challenges that remained unaddressed throughout FY25, chiefly because of prolonged settlement of tax court

cases that delayed the recovery of significant revenue amounts.

Overall revenues, including non-tax receipts, rose sharply to 15.9pc of GDP by the end of FY25 from 12.6pc in FY24. The Fund attributed the increase mainly to stronger receipts from the petroleum levy and State Bank profits.

The IMF expects the petroleum levy to remain a key source of revenue, rising from Rs1.02tr in FY24 to more than Rs2.2tr by FY30. It projected the levy's contribution at about 1.1pc of GDP over the medium term, rising to around 1.2pc in the current and next fiscal years before easing back.

The Fund projected direct taxes to remain unchanged at 5.5pc of GDP through FY30, while the sales tax ratio is expected to hover around its existing level of 3.5-3.6pc of GDP.

It said major contributions are projected to come from provincial taxes on the expectations of successful implementation of the agriculture income tax and sales taxes on services.

The Fund expects the provincial tax-to-GDP ratio to increase from the current 0.9pc to 1.3pc of GDP in FY27, rise further to 1.6pc of GDP in FY28 and stay flat until FY30.

In absolute num-

bers, the four provinces that collected Rs92bn in FY25 are expected to deliver Rs1.22tr during the current fiscal and further improve their collection to Rs1.77tr in FY27.

They would build upon this base to collect Rs2.5tr in FY28, Rs2.8tr in FY29 and cross Rs3.1tr in FY30.

The Fund said projected FBR collections would depend on advancing reforms in revenues through tax policy simplification and base broadening, supporting fiscal sustainability and creating space for climate resilience, social protection, human capital development and public investment.

It noted that FBR revenues rose 26pc year-on-year in FY25 to 10.3pc of GDP, a historically high level, but overall tax revenue still fell short of the target by 0.3pc of GDP.

Largely due to delays in resolving court cases over disputed taxes (0.4pc of GDP) and lower-than-expected inflation. Lower-than-budgeted federal subsidies and grants, estimated at 0.2pc of GDP, helped offset the impact of the revenue shortfall.



## New platform launched to digitise agri finance

**NEWS DESK:** The Finance Division, in collaboration with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the Pakistan Banks Association (PBA), has launched Zarkheze, a digital platform aimed at digitising agricultural finance and expanding access to formal credit for small farmers.

Under the initiative, farmers will be able to apply digitally through the Zarkheze app for financing of up to Rs1 million. After verification and agronomic assessment, applications will be forwarded to the bank chosen by the farmer for processing.

The programme provides that 75 per cent of the financing will be disbursed in kind for the purchase of agricultural inputs through banks' pre-approved agri-vendors. Farmers will also receive advisory services through the Land Information Management System (LIMS).

Officials said the



product was designed not only to provide financing but also to improve productivity by ensuring access to quality inputs and advisory services.

To encourage banks to increase lending to small farmers, the government has offered 10pc first-loss coverage and an operational cost subsidy of Rs10,000 per borrower for the net increase in banks' outstanding borrowers.

Commenting on

the initiative, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said it was part of the government's push for financial inclusion and rural development, adding that it would support national food security goals.

SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad said Zarkheze "is a pivotal step in improving the small farmers' access to finance".

He stressed that digitising the credit process would reduce

hurdles for small farmers and make formal lending more accessible and timely, while also supporting the goal of promoting digital payments in the rural economy.

PBA Chairman Zafar Masud said the banking industry would continue to work closely with the Ministry of Finance and the SBP to expand outreach and streamline processes for farmers across the country.

"By leveraging advanced technology and innovative credit assessment methods, we aim to improve access to finance for smallholder, particularly landless, farmers operating within a largely undocumented sector," he added.

The Zarkheze application is available on the Google Play Store. Farmers may also visit their nearest bank branch for assistance with digital onboarding.

## Gold hits record high on US rate cut bets; silver joins rally to hit all-time peak

**NEWS DESK:** Gold prices surged to a record high on Monday, riding on growing expectations of further US interest rate cuts and strong safe-haven demand, with silver also joining the rally to hit an all-time peak.

Spot gold rose 1.2 per cent to a record \$4,391.92 an ounce, while spot silver climbed 2.7pc to \$34.44 per ounce, hitting a historic high of \$69.23.

Bullion has gained 67pc so far this year, shattering multiple records and breaching the \$3,000 and \$4,000 per ounce milestones for the first time. It is poised for its highest annual gain since 1979.

Silver has surged 138pc year-to-date, vastly outperforming gold, underpinned by robust investment inflows and persistent supply constraints.

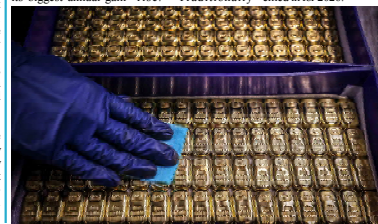
"With December usually producing positive returns for gold and silver, seasonality is on their side," said StoneX senior analyst Matt Simpson. "Given that gold has already risen 4pc this month and we're nearing the end of the year, bulls may want to tread with caution as volumes are to deplete and odds of profit-taking are also likely on the rise." Traditionally

viewed as a safe-haven asset, gold has been supported by heightened geopolitical and trade tensions, steady central bank buying and expectations of lower interest rates next year.

A softer dollar has provided an additional tailwind by making the metal cheaper for overseas buyers.

Markets are currently pricing in two US rate cuts for next year despite the Federal Reserve signalling caution. Non-yielding assets such as gold tend to benefit in lower interest rate environments.

Simpson said two Fed rate cuts were pencilled in for 2026.





## Five-wicket Duffy prompts West Indies collapse as New Zealand win series 2-0

**NEWS DESK:** New Zealand crushed West Indies by 323 runs on Monday to win the third Test at Mount Maunganui and seal a 2-0 series victory, with Jacob Duffy's five-wicket haul proving crucial.

The hosts set a target of 462 and bowled out the tourists for 138, wrapping up the innings four overs after tea following a dramatic collapse either side of lunch.

Duffy finished with 5-42 and was backed up by Ajaz Patel, who claimed 3-23, while opener Brandon King top-scored for West Indies with 67.

New Zealand's Devon Conway scored 227 and 100 in two innings, while captain Tom Latham scored 137 and 101 — the first opening pair in first-class cricket history to score twin centuries in the same match — to set up the win.

The series began with a draw in Christchurch, before New Zealand won the second Test in Wellington.

"It was a pretty clinical performance," Latham said. "Winning the toss, batting first, being able to get close to 600, the perfect blueprint."

"And then obviously doing what we did with the ball... guys sort of playing the test with the bat was obviously really pleasing," he said. Scamer Duffy and spinner Patel posed constant danger to both edges of the bat on a cracked surface that offered uneven movement and bounce.

West Indies collapsed from 87 to 112-8 either side of lunch after starting the day on 43-0.

King dominated early, hitting a flurry of cuts and drives and scoring 53 of his team's first



59 runs. New Zealand captain Latham's field placements had lacked aggression but that changed after the drinks break when Duffy broke the opening stand, with King glowing a rising delivery to Glen Phillips at

another, with first-innings centurion Kaveem Hodge falling for a duck.

Duffy then dismissed Alick Athanaze for two and Justin Greaves for nought in successive overs, leaving the West Indies reeling.

He struck again two overs later, with Alick Athanaze edging to keeper Tom Blundell for 2, before removing Justin Greaves for nought with an edge to Daryl Mitchell at slip.

Duffy then had Roston Chase caught off the gloves by Latham at slip for five, capping

a miserable series for the West Indies captain. Chase scored just 42 runs at an average of seven in three matches, the second-worst figures for a captain dismissed six or more times in a Test series.

"I think I had a tough series, very below par for my standards," Chase said.

"I didn't really lead from the front on the field."

"Leading in terms of words and encouraging and inspiring the team, that was all good and well, but in terms of going out there and producing for the team, I thought that I let myself down and the team down as well."

Patel claimed Shai Hope's wicket for three from 78 balls after a controversial lbw review. Hope did not offer a shot but the ball was deemed to be hitting his foot on the full and going on to hit the stumps.

Phillips then took his first wicket of the match by bowling Kemar Roach, who was nursing a hamstring strain. Rachin Ravindra was introduced in the final session and snared Anderson. Phillips' wicket with an lbw, before Duffy wrapped up the innings by bowling Jayden Seales.

## Morocco overcome early nerves to beat Comoros in AFCON opener

**NEWS DESK:** Africa Cup of Nations hosts Morocco overcame a nervy start to beat the Comoros 2-0 in the tournament's opening game on Sunday after Brahim Diaz and substitute Ayoub El Kaabi scored second-half goals.

It was a far from convincing showing, however, from highly fancied Morocco who are 97 places above the small Indian Ocean island nation and had to toil hard for the points in the rain at Rabat's Complexe Sportif Prince Moulay Abdellah.

Morocco squandered an early penalty and were goalless at halftime despite dominating possession, eventually breaking the deadlock in the 55th minute when Noussair Mazraoui did well to keep the ball from going out of play before passing it square for Diaz to side-foot home.

El Kaabi scored a trademark bicycle kick goal in the 74th minute, 10 minutes after coming on as a substitute, to ease the tension.

Morocco looked initially to be labouring under a heavy burden of expectation and tiny



Comoros comfortably held them at bay before the superior firepower of the hosts ensured victory.

The hosts could have been ahead as early as the 11th minute after a soft penalty awarded for a challenge by Iyad Mohamed on Diaz. But Soufiane Rahimi hit the spot kick straight down the middle.

striking the knee of goalkeeper Yannick Pandor and watching the ball loop away to safety.

But they eventually broke down the resistance as Diaz got deserved rewards for his continual probing and El Kaabis goal ensured a respectable scoreline.

Pandor made sev-

eral other good stops to keep down the score in the closing stages as his teammates began to tire, although Comoros had a chance for an equaliser four minutes after Diaz's goal but Rafiki Said shot straight at Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou in their first chance of the match.

Coach felt opening game was always going to be hard. The opening game is always difficult but we came good in the second half, said Morocco coach Walid Regragui.

Morocco extended their record-breaking run of successive victories by a national team to 19. In October, they went past the previous best

of 15, set by Spain from 2008-09.

There will be concern in the home camp, however, after captain Romain Saiss limped off after 18 minutes, with the centre back leaving the field in tears. He spent the first half of the year sidelined by ankle surgery and only last month returned to the national side after a years absence.

Mali and Zambia meet on Monday in the next Group A clash in Casablanca on the second day of the month-long tournament.

There are also two Group B matches as Angola meet South Africa in Marrakech and Mohamed Salah leads Egypt against Zimbabwe in Agadir.

## Schwarz breaks World Cup duck Barca's Raphinha, Yamal strike in Villarreal win

**NEWS DESK:** Barcelona wingers Raphinha and Lamine Yamal guided the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win at 10-man Villarreal on Sunday.

Brazil international Raphinha won and converted an early penalty before Villarreal's Renato Veiga was sent off before half-time for a late lunge on teenager Yamal.

The 18-year-old slotted home Barca's second midway through the second half, as Hansi Flick's side restored their advantage on Real Madrid, second, and won an eighth consecutive league game.

Villarreal are fourth after Atletico Madrid moved ahead of them with a 3-0 win at Girona earlier on.

"We're happy because we finish the year as leaders, which was our objective, and now we can rest," Barca midfielder Freddie Jorg told DAZN.

"Villarreal have fast players who break rapidly, and we have to manage that a bit better. But in the end I think we were superior, and I would say comfortable, but I think it was a deserved win."

Flick launched into an impassioned defence of Raphinha on Saturday after he was not included in FIFA's 'The



Best team of the year earlier in the week, and the winger quickly repaid his critics.

Raphinha produced an all-action display at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica, where the match was played instead of in Miami, after La Liga's plans to take this game to the United States were scrapped in October. Barca were poor defensively and struggled in their build-up play, but the quality of wingers Raphinha and Yamal and their goal-keeping Joan Garcia's outstanding performance decided an entertaining encounter.

Jules Kounde blocked Villarreal striker Ayoz Perez's shot before Raphinha drew a foul from Santi Comesaña to win a penalty at the other end.

The winger dispatched it confidently in the 12th minute and nearly added the second with a superb effort from distance which crashed back off the bar.

Kounde deflected a cross into his own net as Villarreal fought back, but the goal was disallowed for offside in the build-up. Barca stopper Garcia saved from Tajon Buchanan after an Alejandro Balde mistake as Villarreal almost levelled.

The visitors' job was made easier by Veiga's needless red card for an ugly, late lunge on Yamal before the interval. The champions got their second goal after a scramble in the box, with De Jong weeing up Yamal to fire home after 63 minutes.

Joan Garcia made

stunning saves to deny Rafa Marin and Georges Mikautadze to help Barca end 2026 with three points and a third clean sheet in their last three games across all competitions.

Kounde went off hurt before the end, potentially adding to Flick's problems at the back following Andreas Christensen being diagnosed with a partially torn knee ligament.

Barca finish the year in better shape than rivals Real Madrid, who beat Sevilla 2-0 on Saturday, but still with plenty of their own concerns to worry about.

"Now's not the time they're giving out the trophies, but we're doing well, on a good path, we're leaders, we're alive in the (other competitions), so we're happy."

## Pakistan played 'fearless, not careless' cricket to win Under-19 Asia Cup, says head coach

**NEWS DESK:** Head coach Shahid Anwar said that Pakistan had achieved their goal of playing "fearless but not careless cricket" after they won the Under-19 Asia Cup with a crushing victory over India on Sunday.

Opener Sameer Minhas led the way for Pakistan at the ICC Academy Ground in Dubai with a breathtaking 172 to set up a massive 191-run victory for his side.

"We began a process on June 17 (this year)," recalled Shahid at a news conference in Islamabad on Monday, following the team's arrival and a meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif where a Rs100m cash award was announced.

"It was an unprecedented step... we called up 70 players, conducted trials and gave each player four matches each and then they participated in a regional One-day tournament," he added.

"The top performers, 30 of them, then took part in a five-month long camp... that's how the team was made."

"We wanted to play fearless but not careless cricket. We wanted a united team and the result is in front of us."

Team mentor and manager Sarfaraz



Ahmed, who led Pakistan to the Under-19 World Cup crown in 2006, hailed a "team effort."

"We had players that had the potential to do something big," said Sarfaraz.

"The coaches did a lot of hard work and the players responded... our job was to give them the confidence to play to their full potential. My message to them was to play their natural game, and in a way that they remember it for the rest of their lives."

Yousaf said the players had the full backing of the team management.

"We spoke about playing fearless cricket and the management backed us to play our natural game," he said. "I was focused on doing well and making

that any loss will be our [management's] concern, while any victory will be attributed to your efforts. Our morale never went down."

Shahid pointed to the fact that the coaching staff was lucky to have been blessed with qualified players.

"In a group cricket, most of the work is on basics," he said. "We were lucky in the sense that these players had two qualities that we only needed to polish: one that they didn't give up and second that they were adaptable after his dismissal."

Sameer's stunning ton was naturally one of the major talking points at the news conference, and the batter said that he stuck to his natural game.

"I was focused on doing well and making

runs in the final and that helped me," said Sameer.

The political rivalry between India and Pakistan, more often than not, spills onto the cricket field and Sarfaraz said he made sure his players did not make any gestures in response to their counterparts.

India skipped the customary handshakes, a practice they have been carrying on since the men's Asia Cup 120 years ago, while one of their batters, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, made a 'shoe-pointing' gesture after his dismissal.

"India's behavior regarding the game was not good, and their players' conduct was unethical," he said. "But we celebrated the victory, enjoying sportsman's spirit."

## Williamson opens up about New Zealand future

**NEWS DESK:** When Kane Williamson leaves the Bay Oval field on Monday at the end of the Black Caps' third Test against the West Indies, he may never do New Zealand whites again.

The Black Caps' finest ever batsman, boasting 9,461 Test runs to his name at an average of 54.7, said Sunday he will ask himself whether it's his last Test as his team chases a day five victory in Mount Maunganui.

"As you get to the latter stages (of your career) those thoughts certainly enter your mind," said the 35-year-old.

Williamson has not made a concrete decision over his future in Test cricket, but he is leaning more towards family than cricketing commitment.

"It's almost series by series," Williamson said of his commitment to the Black Caps.

After the West Indies Test series there's a pretty long break away from the (Black Caps), and there will be more conversations had.

"We'll just cross those bridges as they come." What is clear is Williamson is no longer prioritising his role with



New Zealand.

On Tuesday, Williamson and his family will fly to South Africa where he will play in the SA20 tournament.

Williamson is no longer obliged to play for New Zealand, having signed a casual playing agreement that gives him freedom to pick and choose when he is available.

It will be six months before Williamson might consider New Zealand's call again, first for a one-off Test against Ireland in May 2026, and then a three-match series against England in June.

New Zealand host

India for two Test matches in October and November, before a four-Test tour to Australia in December 2026 and January 2027.

"Going to England and Australia are really mouth-watering prospects and great opportunities because they are tough tours," Williamson said.

"I've been involved with a few of them before, and my position is still the same, executing that balance (between family and cricket) as well as I can."

Many Black Caps fans hoped Williamson would be the first New

Zealander to cross the 10,000-run threshold before he hangs up his hat. It is likely that if he were to make himself available, he would hit that mark in 2026.

But Williamson said he is not driven by stats, or his place in the history books.

"I've never used this team for my own personal gain," Williamson said.

"I know cricket's saturated in stats, but you're wanting to go out and contribute to a team that you care about, so whatever runs you get aren't really yours, they're for the team."

## Moscow car blast kills Russian general hours after US talks on plan to end Ukraine war

**NEWS DESK:** A car bomb killed a senior Russian general in southern Moscow on Monday morning, the latest high-profile army figure to be blown up in a blast that came just hours after Russian and Ukrainian delegates held separate talks in Miami on a plan to end the war.

Kyiv has not commented on the incident, but Russian investigators said they were probing whether the blast was "linked" to "Ukrainian special forces".

The attack was similar to other assassinations of generals and pro-war figures that have either been claimed, or are widely believed to have been orchestrated, by Ukraine. Lieutenant General Pavel Sararov, 56, head of the Russian General Staff's training department, was killed when the bomb, which had been placed under his parked car, detonated in a residential quarter of southern Moscow.

AFP reporters at the scene saw a mangled

white Kia SUV, its doors and back window blown out. The frame was twisted and charred from the blast.

The scene had been cordoned off by security forces, and investigators were sifting through the debris. Eyewitnesses reported a loud bang.

"We absolutely didn't expect it. We thought we were safe, and then this happens right next to us," local resident, Tatiana, 74, told AFP.

"The windows rattled, you could tell it was an explosion," said Grigory, 70, who also declined to give his surname.

"We need to treat it more calmly. It's the cost of war," he added.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it was "working through various lines of enquiry into the murder. One of them involves the possible organisation of the crime by Ukrainian special services".



Sarovarov fought in the Russian army's campaigns in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya in the 1990s, according to his official biography on the defence ministry's website.

He also commanded Russian forces in Syria in 2015-16. Talks intensify

The Kremlin said Putin had been informed about Monday's killing, which came after three days of talks in Miami as

the United States intensifies its efforts to broker an end to the four-year war.

Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov and US special envoy Steve Witkoff had also called those meetings

on Sunday. Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev also met with the US team, which included Jared Kushner,

US President Donald Trump's son-in-law. Witkoff had also called those meetings

"productive and constructive".

An initial 28-point plan to end the war put forward by Trump adhered to Moscow's core demands, triggering panic in Kyiv and European capitals.

Ukraine and its allies have since been working to refine the plan, though Kyiv says it is still being asked to make massive concessions, such as giving up the entire eastern Donbas region to Russia.

The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has expressed scepticism over whether Russia really wants to end the war, an attack claimed by Ukraine's SBU security service.

A Russian military blogger, Maxim Fomin, was killed when a statue exploded in a Saint Petersburg cafe in April 2022.

And in August 2022, a car bomb killed Daria Dugina, the daughter of ultranationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin.

over eastern Ukraine.

Since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, Kyiv has been blamed for several attacks targeting Russian military officials and pro-Kremlin personalities in Russia and in Russian-controlled Ukrainian regions.

General Yaroslav Moskalik, a deputy of the General Staff, was killed in a car blast near Moscow in April.

In December 2024, Igor Kirillov, the head of the Russian radiological, chemical and biological defence forces, was killed when a booby-trapped electric scooter exploded in Moscow, an attack claimed by Ukraine's SBU security service.

A Russian military blogger, Maxim Fomin, was killed when a statue exploded in a Saint Petersburg cafe in April 2022.

And in August 2022, a car bomb killed Daria Dugina, the daughter of ultranationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin.

## Sudan drone attack on market kills 10

**NEWS DESK:** A drone attack on a busy market in Sudan's North Darfur state killed 10 people, it said.

The council did not identify who carried out the attack, which it said had also sparked "fire in shops and caused extensive material damage".

There was no immediate comment from either the Sudanese army or the RSF.

The war's current focal point is now South Kordofan and clashes have escalated in Kadugli, the state capital, where a drone attack last week killed eight people as they attempted to flee the army-controlled city.

market in the RSF-controlled town of Malha on Saturday. The attack killed 10 people, it said.

The council did not identify who carried out the attack, which it said had also sparked "fire in shops and caused extensive material damage".

There was no immediate comment from either the Sudanese army or the RSF.

The war's current focal point is now South Kordofan and clashes have escalated in Kadugli, the state capital, where a drone attack last week killed eight people as they attempted to flee the army-controlled city.

The conflict has effectively split Sudan in two, with the army controlling the north, east and centre while the RSF dominates all five state capitals in Darfur and, with its allies, parts of the

## Israel, in illegal move, approves 19 new settlements in West Bank

**NEWS DESK:** Israel's security cabinet approved the establishment of 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank, a move the country's far-right finance minister said on Sunday was aimed at preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The latest approvals come days after the United Nations said the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank — all of which are illegal under international law — had reached its highest level since at least 2017.

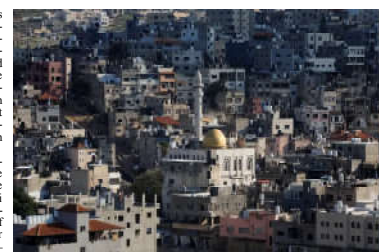
The Israeli government's decision brings the total number of settlements in the occupied West Bank to 128, according to a statement from the office of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

"The proposal by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz to declare and formalise 19 new settlements in Judea and Samaria has been approved by the cabinet," the statement said, without specifying when the decision was taken.

Decision brings the total number of settlements in the occupied West Bank to 128, according to a statement from the office of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

"On the ground, we are blocking the establishment of a Palestinian state," he said in the statement.

"We will continue to develop, build, and settle the land of our ancestral heritage, with faith in the justice of our path," he said.



UN chief condemns move

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned Israel's "renewed" expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, along with about three million Palestinian residents.

Smotrich's office said the 19 newly approved settlements are located in what it described as "highly strategic" areas, adding that two of them — Ganim and Kadim in the north-west West Bank — would be re-established after being dismantled two decades ago.

Five of the 19 settlements already existed but had not previously been granted legal status under Israeli law, the statement said.

While all Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory are considered illegal under international law, some wildcat outposts are

also illegal in the eyes of the Israeli government.

Many of these, however, are later legalised by Israeli authorities, fueling fears about the possible annexation of the territory.

US President Donald Trump has warned Israel about annexing the occupied West Bank.

"Israel would lose all of its support from the United States if that happened," Trump said in a recent interview to Time magazine.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, and violence there has soared since the Gaza war erupted in October 2023.

Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,027 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since the start of the fighting in Gaza, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures.

At least 44 Israelis have been killed in the occupied West Bank in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations during the same period, according to Israeli data.



and hunger crisis. The North Darfur Emergency Rooms Council, one of hundreds of volunteer groups co-ordinating aid across Sudan, said a drone strike hit Al-Harra

A source from a humanitarian organisation operating in Kadugli said on Sunday that humanitarian groups had "evacuated all their workers" from the city because of the security conditions.

Like Darfur, Kordofan is home to numerous Sudanese Arab ethnic groups. Much of the violence that followed

Doctors without Borders (MSF) said on Sunday that measles was spreading in three of the four states in Darfur, a vast region covering much of western Sudan.

"We will continue to develop, build, and settle the land of our ancestral heritage, with faith in the justice of our path," he said.

## Bangladesh rejects India's dismissal of protest outside its high commission in Delhi as 'misleading propaganda'

**NEWS DESK:** Bangladesh has rejected India's dismissal of a protest outside its high commission in New Delhi as "misleading propaganda", saying the incident was "highly regrettable".

According to Bangladesh media, around 20 to 25 protesters gathered in front of the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi on Saturday evening. According to mission officials, the protesters raised anti-Bangladesh slogans and issued threats against the Bangladesh high commissioner, Prothom Alo reported.

In response, the Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal issued a statement on Sunday saying India had taken



note of "misleading propaganda" in sections of the Bangladesh media on the incident.

"The fact is that about 20-25 youth gathered in front of the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi on December 20 and raised slogans in protest against the horrendous killing of Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh, while also calling for the protection of all minorities in Bangladesh," he said.

According to Prothom Alo, Das — a garment factory worker — was beaten to death on December 18 in Mymensingh, Bangladesh on allegations of blasphemy, after which his body was set on fire. It reported that 10 people had been arrested in connection

with the incident.

"There was no attempt to breach the fence or create a security situation at any time. The police stationed at the spot dispersed the

group after a few minutes," the Indian official said.

"Visual evidence of these events is available publicly for all to see. India is committed to en-

sure the safety of foreign missions/posts in its territory in accordance with the Vienna Convention," he added.

"India continues to keep a close watch on the evolving situation in Bangladesh. Our officials remain in touch with Bangladesh authorities and have conveyed to them our strong concerns at the attacks

on minorities. We have also urged that the perpetrators of the barbaric killing of Das be brought to justice," he said.

In response, the Bangladesh foreign ministry issued a statement, saying that the "unjustifiable incident at the Bangladesh High Commission residence in New Delhi on December 20 is highly regrettable and cannot be accepted as 'misleading propaganda'".

"The miscreants were allowed to carry out their activities right outside the premises of the high commission, creating panic among the personnel in-

side the complex," it said, adding that the commission was not made aware of the event beforehand. The statement, however, took note of the Indian government's "commit-

ment" towards the safety of Bangladesh diplomatic posts in India.

Bangladesh also rejected "an attempt of the Indian authorities to depict an isolated attack on a Bangladesh citizen, who happens to belong to the Hindu community, as attacks on minorities".

The statement said that the government "promptly apprehended the suspects in this incident". It noted that "the intercommunal situation in Bangladesh is better than in many other parts in South Asia".

"Bangladesh believes that it is the duty of all governments in the region to ensure protection of minorities in their respective countries," the statement added.