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Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE

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

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## Balochistan Declares Education an Essential Service, Imposes Province-Wide Ban on Strikes

**Syed Muhammad Qaseem:**

**QUETTA:** The Government of Balochistan has announced that education will now be treated as an essential public service, placing a six-month ban on strikes and lockouts in

all schools and educational institutions across the province.

In a notification issued by the School Education Department, authorities stated that any strike, shutdown or disruption staged by teachers or educational staff will be considered illegal under the Balochistan

Essential Education Services Act, 2019. Officials said the move aims to protect students' learning and ensure that academic activities continue without interruption.

The decision applies to both government-run and private institutions and is effective immediately.

According to the notification, strict legal action will be taken against anyone violating the ban, with penalties already provided under the law. The government emphasized that the step has been taken in the larger public interest to safeguard children's education and prevent long-term academic losses.

The restriction on strikes has been enforced under Section 6 of the Act and will remain valid for six months, covering all teaching and non-teaching staff across Balochistan.

**Dar, Saudi counterpart discuss 'current regional situation and recent developments': FO**

**NEWS DESK:**

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar exchanged views on "the current regional situation and recent developments" with his Saudi counterpart in a telephone call on Tuesday, according to the Foreign Office (FO).

Both nations have a multifaceted relationship rooted in strategic military cooperation, mutual economic interests, and shared Islamic heritage. These ties have encompassed economic assistance and energy supplies, with Riyadh being a significant source of financial aid and oil for Islamabad.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia also signed a landmark mutual defence agreement in September this year, which outlined that an attack on one party would be treated as an attack on both.

In a post on social media, the FO said that Dar expressed satisfaction with the positive trajectory of bilateral relations between Islamabad and Riyadh during the exchange, while Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan "reaffirmed his commitment to further strengthening and enhancing bilateral ties".

Dar also conveyed season's greetings and best wishes for the New Year, which were "warmly reciprocated" by Prince Faisal, the FO added.

Earlier today, the Saudi-led coalition struck what it described as foreign military support to southern separatists at Yemen's Mukalla port.

Last Saturday, Pakistan expressed its full support for Saudi Arabia's efforts to ensure peace and stability in Yemen.

"Pakistan expresses its full support for the diplomatic efforts being undertaken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for ensuring peace and stability in the Republic of Yemen."

We also commend the efforts of the United Arab Emirates in this regard," a statement from the FO read.

In November, the military leadership of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia vowed to enhance bilateral defence cooperation and reaffirmed their resolve to further deepen ties between the two countries.

"During the meeting, both sides discussed the evolving global and regional environment and avenues for enhancing bilateral defence cooperation," the ISPR said.

**Election tribunal dismisses Yasmin Rashid's challenge to Nawaz's NA-130 win in 2024 polls**

**NEWS DESK:**

An election tribunal dismissed on Tuesday incarcerated PTI leader Yasmin Rashid's petition that challenged PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif's victory from Lahore's NA-130 in the 2024 general elections.

The tribunal, comprising retired Justice Rana Zahid Mahmood, dismissed Rashid's plea on technical grounds.

It said in its decision that the petitioner had failed to comply with the requirements under the Election Act, 2017 for filing an election petition.

A written order of the tribunal is yet to be issued. Rashid had filed the petition challenging Nawaz's victory notification on April 16, 2024.

The petition argued that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had issued Sharif's victory notification in violation of the law. Rashid requested in her plea to set aside the victory of the former prime minister and to declare her a returned candidate. She alleged that the ECP manipulated the election results to ensure her defeat.

## Men Who Walked on Fire Now Seek Justice After Viral Video

**NEWS DESK:**

The men seen walking over burning embers in a viral social-media video have stepped forward, demanding justice and accountability after what they describe as coercion in the name of "proving innocence." Speaking at a press conference, they said eight people were compelled to walk on fire during a local dispute, while those truly responsible for the matter faced no consequences. They alleged that a First Information Report (FIR) was lodged against innocent individuals and that the real perpetrators were left out of the case. Calling the episode an example of pressure and intimidation, the speakers urged authorities to remove the Station House Officer (SHO) concerned, accusing the police of mishandling the investigation. Officials confirmed that the Balochistan Chief Minister has taken notice of the incident and directed a formal inquiry to determine what happened and who is responsible. However, district authorities noted that the claims made during the press conference could not be immediately verified and said the matter remains under investigation.



## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

## SBKWU Teacher Recruitment Scandal Raises Alarms for Pakistan's Education System



**Editorial:** Serious questions have emerged over the secondary teachers recruitment process conducted by Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU), triggering widespread concern about merit, transparency, and accountability in Balochistan's education system. It is essential to clarify a point that has caused public confusion: the advertised posts were NOT for SBKWU itself.

The university was only assigned the responsibility of conducting tests and interviews for Secondary School Teacher recruitment across Balochistan.

According to initial findings, hundreds of candidates who had failed were allegedly declared successful during the teacher recruitment process.

Given the scale of the exercise, involving thousands of applicants for secondary teaching positions across the province, such irregularities cannot reasonably be described as clerical mistakes.

The magnitude strongly suggests organised manipulation, carried out with the involvement of influential individuals rather than the actions of a single official.

This issue strikes at the heart of education governance in Balochistan. Secondary school teachers shape the academic foundation of students, and any compromise on merit directly damages learning outcomes.

In Balochistan, where literacy rates remain among the lowest in the country, flawed teacher recruitment further deepens an already critical education

crisis. Reports that deserving candidates were sidelined only intensify public frustration and mistrust.

All anti-corruption and accountability institutions must take immediate notice.

A transparent, independent, and time-bound investigation is necessary to identify those responsible for manipulating the recruitment process conducted under SBKWU's authority.

Accountability must reach every individual involved, regardless of status or influence.

This is not merely an administrative controversy; it is a matter of justice and the future of Balochistan's education system.

If credibility in teacher recruitment collapses, public trust in institutions will collapse with it. Balochistan cannot afford silence where integrity is at stake.

## Balochistan's education sector, implementation of article 25-A



Improving the education sector has always been the hallmark of all successive governments in Balochistan. Every government has allocated substantial funds to improve the education sector and quality of education to enable students to compete on national and international level.

Health and education, all successive governments declared their priorities.

Former Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch led nationalist government allocated around 24 percent budget to bring the province at par with other parts of the country. Dr. Baloch's government also declared emergency and announced implementation of article 25-A of the constitution to enroll all out of school children in Balochistan. The number of out of school children in Balochistan is currently over 1 million.

However, independent sources put the number high as compared to the official data. There are conflicting figures about the exact number of out of school children in Balochistan.

To be precise, positive strides were made during Dr. Malik Baloch led government to improve the education sector.

For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools.

Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transparency in the recruitment process.

This has ruined the entire education sector. Dr. Malik Baloch, the then adviser on education

Sardar Raza Muhammad Bareech led rallies against cheating to create awareness among the people regarding the curse of cheating in educational institutions.

After the removal of Sardar Raza Bareech as an adviser on education and transfers of senior bureaucrats Ghulam Ali Baloch and Saboor Kakar, no effective step was taken to improve the quality of education in Balochistan.

Now again the portfolio of education has been awarded to Sardar Muhammad Rind who belongs to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Mr. Rind has made announcements to bring what he claimed

revolutionary changes. However, improvement in education sector, enrolling out of school children in schools and improving quality of education needs a multi-pronged strategy.

Senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ali Baloch who had already served as secretary education has again been posted.

Mr. Baloch is taking a number of initiatives to improve schooling and trace out ghost schools and teaches across the province.

However, political speed breakers appear to be major obstacles in his way.

Despite being the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan spends over 70 billion rupees on primary, middle, secondary and higher education in the province.

The province spends thousands of rupees per month on a student. Unfortunately,

neither the quality nor the education standard meet national standards what to speak about international standards.

Poor quality of education is the result of poor capacity of teachers that needs to be improved to compete on national and international level.

The Balochistan government has announced to enroll 70000 kids in government run schools in the province. However, ground realities negate claims of the provincial government.

So far, the government has not been able to mobilize the civil society, media, political parties and tribesmen to make sure maximum enrollment of kids in educational institutions of the province.

Coordinated efforts and combined strategy by all segments of society can ensure implementation of article 25-A of the Constitution.

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## Taftan border and Balochistan Govt's response

### Quetta Voice Analysis

The sudden arrival of thousands of Zaireen at Pak-Iran border Taftan posed a serious challenge for government of Balochistan to make sure their screening and conduct medical tests in the aftermath of outbreak of COVID-19 in neighboring Iran. The federal government closed the border with Iran at Taftan on February 23rd to halt the spread of deadly corona virus.

All of a sudden over 4,000 Zaireen, students, tourists and traders gathered at Taftan, Pakistan's bordering town with Iran. The poorly equipped health officials that too less in number tried to conduct screening and tests of those entered from Iran. However, many managed to flee from the administration and used their own means of communication to reach Quetta on way to their home provinces. The drivers paid heavy fares by those fleeing the quarantine centers at Taftan.

Perhaps, in the beginning, the Balochistan government and Islamabad did not realize the gravity of situation. A wind-blowing tent quarantine center was established to keep the



Zaireen and others to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, the laboratory to diagnose the deadly disease and conduct tests of novel corona virus could not be arranged at the border soon after the closure of border.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) dispatched machinery

and laboratory to conduct the diagnosis 10 days after the closure of the border. Before installation of the laboratory, the health officials used to send tests of suspected patients to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi for diagnosis.

Though, it was imperative to install laboratory soon after

the closure of the border to make sure proper screening and diagnosis of the people.

Apart from corona virus, the Balochistan government appeared to be concerned about the security of Zaireen as well.

In the past, Zaireen were frequently targeted by terrorists on Quetta-Taftan highway. Since then, the Balochistan government has been providing security and law enforcers escort long convoys of buses from Quetta to Taftan all the time.

The Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has been closely monitoring the

unfolding situation and all the time directing the concerned quarters to halt the spread of novel corona virus.

However, loopholes in the system caused the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

Although, the Chief Minister issued statements, precautionary measures through print, elec-

tronic and shares videos on social media to sensitize the people about the deadly virus.

Nevertheless, the virus penetrated and made its way from Taftan to Sukkur prompting the Chief Minister Sindh Syed

Murad Ali Shah to say that Zaireen were not properly screened at Pak-Iran border

### Taftan

Opposition political parties in Balochistan in general and the Balochistan National Party (BNT) in particular, Sanaulah Baloch have strongly criticized the Jam Kamal led government for what they call its failure and incompetency to contain the corona virus.

Political parties, members of civil society and legal fraternity had also objected over the establishment of quarantine center at Mian Ghundi area of Quetta. They feared spread of deadly virus after establishment of center near the city rather they demanded of the government to shift the Zaireen to their home provinces directly from Taftan.

To be precise, the virus has already penetrated and now it is time for all political parties from left to right and religious to nationalists to join their hands to contain its spread.

The government needs to take all stakeholders including political parties, media, civil society and lawyers to evolve a combined strategy in the province to tackle the situation. It is not alone the job of government rather every individual to play his/her role to contain the virus before it is too late.





## Sarfraz Bugti assumes role as chief of Bugti tribes

**N E W S**  
**DESK:** Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti on Monday formally assumed responsibilities as the eighth chief of the Bugti tribes.

The position is the highest rank within the Bugti tribe after Nawab Aali Bugti, who heads all six Bugti clans and was chosen as the Nawab following the death of his grand-father, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti.

According to historical records, the title of Chief of Bugti was conferred on Mir Sarfraz Bugti's grandfather in the early 1800s, reflecting a long-standing tradition of tribal leadership and governance within the Bugti community. The turban-tying (Dastar Bandi) ceremony was held in the

Bekar area of Dera Bugti district and was attended by tribal chiefs, elders and prominent figures from the Bugti tribes. Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti was formally adorned with the turban, marking his official elevation as Chief of the Bugti tribes.

Members of the Nawab Bugti family, including Nawab-zada Zamran Saleem Akbar, were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Mir Sarfraz Bugti called for dialogue and negotiations with the state, urging armed Baloch groups to abandon violence and return to the national mainstream. He said the Baloch nation was being pushed into a futile war and stressed that no political or national objectives could be achieved

through violence.

He appealed particularly to Baloch youths who have taken to the mountains to reconsider their path and opt for talks with the state. "I make this appeal on behalf of the state and the government to return and join national institutions. Other-wise, the state knows how to establish its writ," he said. The chief minister thanked the Bugti tribes for placing their trust in him, saying the turban was not merely an honour but a sacred responsibility. "This turban is a trust that demands justice, courage, brotherhood, love and sincerity. I promise to stand by you with honesty, hard work and full dedication, and I will never disappoint my people," he said.

## Justice Khalid sworn in as Azad Kashmir SC judge

**NEWS DESK:** Justice Khalid Yousaf Chaudhary was sworn in as a permanent judge of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Supreme Court on Monday, three days after his appointment was made by the AJK President on the advice of the Chairman of the AJK Council - the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

The oath was administered by Chief Justice Raja Saad Akram at a ceremony held in the apex court building.

The event was at-

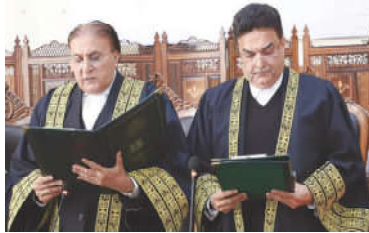
tended by serving and former judges of AJK's superior judiciary, office-bearers and members of lawyers' bodies, and senior civil servants.

Among those present were Justice Raza Ali Khan, senior puisne judge of the AJK Supreme Court, and Justice Sardar Liaqat Hussain and Justice Chaudhry Khalid Rasheed, the Chief Justice and a judge of the AJK High Court, respectively.

Born in June 1969 in Mirpur, Justice Yousaf

earned his law degree from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, in 1995, followed by a certificate in Islamic studies from the International Islamic University, Islamabad, in 1996.

During his career as a practising lawyer, he had held various offices in lawyers' bodies, including the AJK Bar Council. In May 2018, he was appointed as a judge of the AJK High Court along with three other members from the bar and one from the bench.



## Pak-Afghan trade disruptions fuel regional instability: experts

**NEWS DESK:** Exclusionary economic measures cause prolonged disruptions in Pakistan-Afghanistan trade and transit, and generate wide-ranging economic and social consequences across the region. Uncertainty, rather than cost alone, has emerged as the most damaging factor, eroding livelihoods, weakening regional connectivity and placing disproportionate strain on border communities between the two countries. These concerns were raised at an online dialogue on "Exploring Pathways to Pa-

kistan-Afghanistan Trade and Economic Connectivity" organised by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) as part of its the beyond boundaries initiative on Monday.

The dialogue convened policymakers, customs officials, business leaders, and economic experts from Pakistan and Afghanistan to reflect on the evolving trade dynamics and their broader regional implications. Khan Jan Akkozay, Co-President of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(PAJCCI), said peace in the region was inseparable from economic stability, adding that robust and predictable trade formed the foundation of durable bilateral relations.

Without continuity in trade, he cautioned, broader objectives of peace and regional integration would remain fragile.

Fazal Moqem Khan, former president of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, called for the establishment of cross-border economic zones to institutionalise trade.



## PIA to restart London route, its most popular international service



**N E W S**  
**DESK:** Pakistan International Airlines will resume direct flights to London after a six-year gap, operating four weekly services from Islamabad starting March 29, the national flag carrier announced on Tuesday.

The flights, expected to depart from Terminal 4 at London Heathrow Airport, mark PIA's return to its first and most popular international route following the suspension of direct operations in July 2020.

PIA is already operating three weekly flights to Manchester, which resumed on October 25 after a five-year hiatus.

The Manchester service initially started with two weekly flights before being increased to three, operating on Saturdays and Tuesdays, the national flag carrier announced on Saturday.

The airline's return to UK operations follows formal approval from the UK's Department for Transport in September, allowing PIA to operate as a Third Country Operator for both passenger and cargo flights.

The department issued PIA a five-year ACC3 certification covering flight security and cargo operations, renewing confidence in the airline's safety protocols and operational standards.

The ban was initially enforced in July 2020 by both UK and European aviation authorities after a major scandal revealed that dozens of Pakistani pilots were operating with fake licences.

The then-aviation minister, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, admitted the issue following the tragic crash of a PIA Airbus A-320 in Karachi, which claimed nearly 100 lives.

The fallout from the scandal resulted in bans across the UK, European Union, and United States, costing the loss-making airline approximately Rs40 billion (\$144 million) annually in lost revenue.

The successful bid marks a turnaround from last year's failed sale attempt and a breakthrough for the government's long-delayed privatisation of the national carrier.

## In meeting with interior minister, KP governor says Centre's cooperation vital for eliminating terrorism in province

**NEWS DESK:** In a meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi said that the Centre's cooperation was vital for eliminating terrorism in the province.

In a statement released on the social media platform X, the interior ministry said that Kundi called on the interior minister in Islamabad.

He added that the two discussed security measures in KP's border areas and ongoing operations against khawariji.

According to the statement, the interior minister gave assurances of the government's full cooperation for peace and security in KP. "Establishing peace in KP is the top priority," he was quoted as saying.



He said that the federal government was "prepared to provide support in this regard in every possible way". "We appreciate the sacrifices made by the people of KP in the war against terrorism," Naqvi said.

"Firmal Khawariji and their facilitators are being eliminated through joint efforts," he added. "No leniency of any kind will be shown toward the

khawariji," he said. Meanwhile, Kundi said that the Centre's cooperation was essential for establishing peace and security in the province.

"Joint and coordinated action is needed to eliminate terrorism," he said. On Sunday, Kundi had asked the KP government to support the military operations in the province as the security situation had significantly deteriorated

due to militancy. Speaking at the National Press Club, he said the KP government should support security operations, "without stability, development projects could not move forward". Insecurity has a negative impact on the social and economic conditions of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he said, adding that "sustained

peace was essential for businesses and investment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa".

According to statistics released by the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), Pakistan's counterterrorism scenario saw a marked escalation in 2025 — combat-related deaths rising by 73 per cent against the previous one — with violence intensifying and pushing several indicators to their highest levels in over a decade.

The year not only witnessed a steep rise in overall combat-related deaths, but also became the deadliest one for militants since 2015, the most lethal for security forces since 2011, and the worst for civilian casualties since 2015.

## Azma Bokhari stages walkout from Punjab Assembly in solidarity with journalists over 'ill-treatment' during Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister (CM) visit

**NEWS DESK:** Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari on Tuesday staged a walkout during a Punjab Assembly session in solidarity with journalists who have been boycotting the provincial legislature over alleged "ill-treatment" during Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi's visit to the assembly.

During his three-day visit to Lahore over the weekend, the KP chief minister had given an address at the Punjab Assembly to opposition MPAs last week.

However, the visit was marred by allegations by opposition members of ill-treatment of journalists, while heated exchanges between PTI leaders and journalists were also witnessed.

Speaking during the session today, Bokhari staged a walkout to show solidarity with journalists from the Punjab Assembly's press gallery, who she said were "beaten and pushed around" by people accompanying the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister



Minister.

During yesterday's assembly session, a statement by opposition member Col. (ret'd) Shoab Amir about the press gallery, calling them "sellouts", also sparked outrage.

"The whole world witnessed the spectacle in the assembly on the arrival of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister," she said, adding that preparations had been made for the chief minister's arrival.

However, she claimed that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister

(CM), "brought unauthorised persons with him."

She further said that rather than apologising, the opposition doubled down on their conduct.

"The footage is available in the assembly's records," she added.

"In solidarity with what happened with Punjab's journalists and with the members of the press gallery, I'm staging a walkout," the minister said. On Monday, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad

(CM) visit," she said, questioning if it was wrong to ask the KP CM "how he was finding his Lahore visit".

"I was told that I had paid my employees to pose as journalists," she said, vowing that she intended to send a defamation notice.

"In solidarity with what happened with Punjab's journalists and with the members of the press gallery, I'm staging a walkout," the minister said. On Monday, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad

Khan had announced that an inquiry conducted into the chaos that marred the arrival of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister (CM) Afridi to the provincial legislature's building would be sent to the law enforcement agencies.

Same day, chief minister Afridi, in a letter to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, expressed "deep concern" at the treatment meted out to him during his Lahore visit, stating it was marked by "discourtesy and unnecessary hostility".

## Abbasi announces Rs100,000 reward for Railway Police constable's exemplary honesty

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi has announced a cash reward of Rs100,000 for Railway

Police Constable Rao Sharif in recognition of his exemplary honesty and sense of duty. The minister said that the reward amount would be paid

from his personal funds as a gesture of appreciation for the constable's integrity, said a news release. Praising Rao Sharif's conduct, Hanif Abbasi said that

officers like him represent the true and positive image of Pakistan Railways. He emphasized that honesty and devotion to duty are the real strength of state

institutions, adding that such actions help build and reinforce public trust in government departments. Constable Rao Sharif earned widespread

appreciation after he returned a bag containing Rs3.8 million that he found on a train. Demonstrating exceptional responsibility, he traced the

rightful owner and handed over the cash to Karachi-based trader Mohsin at Rohri Railway Station. The minister lauded the constable's act as a shining ex-

ample for others to follow and expressed hope that such instances would inspire greater professionalism and integrity across public service institutions.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khatun, presents a shield to Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, in the presence of Secretary BISP Amir Anwar Ali at BISP HQ.

## Construction work on 'Data Bhat to Bihal' link road project in full swing

GUJAR KHAN (INP): Jubilant celebrations erupted among the residents of "Data Bhat" and neighboring villages in Union Council

Devi, Tehsil Gujar Khan, as construction work commenced on a much-anticipated new carpeted road linking the historic village of Data Bhat to Bihal as direct linked to main Chak Beli Khan- Rawat Highway. The project, which has been long awaited by the local community, is seen as a major development boost for the rural area. Local representatives credited ex-MNA Raja Javed Ikhlas, MPA Shoukat Aziz Bhatti, and area notables Raja Arif and

Chaudhary Shabbir for their pivotal role in securing and advancing the initiative.

Speaking to the community, Raja Arif provided key details of the project. The road spans approximately 7 kilometers with a width of 22 to 24 feet, carrying an estimated cost of Rs355 million. He confirmed that construction is progressing at full pace and is expected to be completed within the stipulated timeframe.

"This road will transform daily life in our villages," Raja Arif said. "It will significantly improve transportation, stimulate local economic activities, and provide much-needed relief to

residents who have depended on underdeveloped pathways for years."

The new link is projected to slash the travel distance from Data Bhat to Rawalpindi by nearly 40 kilometers, offering a more direct and efficient route for commuters, farmers, and traders.

Villages set to benefit include Data Bhat, Pari Laki, Mohra Pari, Dhoke Budhal, Dhoke Awan, Dhoke Ghazi, Chappar, and up Jatti, among others in the region.

Community members expressed high optimism about the project's timely completion, describing it as a shining example

of unity and strong local leadership.

One resident highlighted the broader potential: "If our representatives also focus on developing another connecting road from Data Bhat to Chak Beli Khan, our village could emerge as an important junction linking multiple towns and enhancing connectivity across the area."

As work continues, the road project has already become a symbol of progress and hope for the people of Union Council Devi and Tehsil Gujar Khan, promising better access, economic growth, and an improved quality of life for thousands of residents.

## APHC-AJK pays glowing tributes to Professor Shawl on his death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (INP): A prayer session was organized in Islamabad under the auspices of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) chapter on the occasion of the death anniversary of the renowned leader of the Kashmir freedom movement, educationist and intellectual Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl.

The prayer session, organized under the leadership of APHC-AJK Convenor Ghulam Muhammad Safi, was attended by Hurriyat leadership, workers and people belonging to different schools of thought. Ghulam Muhammad Safi and other speakers, addressing on the occasion, paid glowing tributes to the late leader's invaluable services and unwavering struggle for the Kashmir freedom movement.

The speakers said that Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl was not only a thoughtful political leader but also a high-level educationist and scholar who gave a new dimension to the Kashmir freedom movement on intellectual, academic and diplomatic levels. They said that he effectively highlighted the Kashmiri cause at the global level, especially in the UK, through his pen, wisdom and argument, and played an important role in bringing the Kashmir dispute to the international conscience.

The speakers said that even in the most difficult circumstances, the late leader never compromised on truth, principles and the legitimate demands of the Kashmiri people, the right to self-determination. His entire political and intellectual struggle was dedicated to becoming the voice of the oppressed

Kashmiri people, awakening the world public opinion and making the world aware of the true nature of the Kashmir issue, which is still a beacon of light for the Kashmir leadership and the young generation, they added.

The speakers reiterated the resolve that the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, in the light of the legacy of its senior leaders and the sacrifices of the martyrs, will continue its principled, peaceful and democratic struggle with full perseverance and unity until the Kashmiri people achieve their right to self-determination. The intellectual insight, ideological perseverance and struggle of Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl will be carried forward at every forum, they maintained. Senior Hurriyat leaders Muhammad Farooq Rahmani, Mahmood

Ahmed Saghar, Pervaiz Ahmed Shah, Syed Yousuf Naseem, Mir Tahir Masood, Syed Faiz Naqshbandi, Altaf Hussain Wani, Hassan Ali Bana, Sheikh Muhammad Yaqub, Haji Muhammad Sultan, Dawood Khan, Javed Jahangir, Zahid Safi, Zahid Ashraf, Imtiaz Wani, Muhammad Shah Dar, Adeel Mushtaq, Sheikh Abdul Majid, Abdul Majeed Lone, Syed Gulshan, Zahid Mujtaba, Nazir Karmali, Manzoor Ahmad Dar, Abdul Majeed Mir, Qazi Imran, Imtiaz Ahmed Butt, Raies Mir, Shaikat Abuzar, Muhammad Ashraf Dar and Mushtaq Ahmed Butt attended the prayer session.

At the end of the meeting, special prayers were offered for the repose of the departed leader and the elevation of his ranks.

## DDWP approves Rs2.8b development scheme for 9km expansion of Multan Avenue

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29 (INP): The Multan Divisional Development Working Party (DDWP) has approved a Rs2.8 billion development scheme for a nine-kilometre expansion of Multan Avenue, stretching from Saidaanwala Chowk to Sahu Chowk. Officials said the project, part of the Annual Development Programme, is targeted for completion within four months.

According to officials, the initiative has been divided into multiple sections to enhance planning efficiency, ensure optimal resource use, and accelerate execution. The stressed that the segmentation was not intended to circumvent any approval requirements.

The first round of tenders had been cancelled due to a temporary funding shortfall. In the second attempt, tenders were issued following what officials described as "careful financial and technical planning," resulting in savings of approximately Rs900 million compared with the earlier process.

All work packages were vetted and approved under standard procedures, they added.

The project is being executed under the supervision of NESPAK, with the Divisional Commissioner and senior officers conducting regular inspections. Construction is being carried out in line with approved designs and engineering specifications.

Under the plan, the existing dual carriageway will be widened from two to three lanes in each direction. Tuff pavers will be installed to reduce dust, while 260 LED streetlights — the corridor's first — will be erected along the route. Gateways and monuments are also planned as aesthetic elements.

To ease congestion, the scheme includes off-street parking for 1,890 vehicles, along with 16-foot-wide service roads on both sides of the avenue — a new feature for this route. Paved medians will help streamline traffic, and landscaped green corridors are intended to improve the avenue's visual appeal.

Pedestrian walkways, safe crossing points, and repositioned electricity poles — shifted to the extreme edge of the Right of Way to minimize safety hazards

and future relocation costs — are also part of the design improvements. Environmental enhancement forms a major component of the scheme. Fourteen-foot-wide green parkways will be created along both service roads, forming 18 kilometres of continuous landscaped space. Additional green belts with iron grills will be developed near parking zones.

The avenue will also feature benches, walking tracks, open-air gyms, decorative lighting, gazebos, fountains, and artistic installations. Officials said the green parkways are designed as multi-use zones integrating parking, recreation, and landscaping to improve traffic flow and discourage encroachments along the corridor.

The project is being executed under the supervision of NESPAK, with the Divisional Commissioner and senior officers conducting regular inspections. Construction is being carried out in line with approved designs and engineering specifications.

Under the plan, the existing dual carriageway will be widened from two to three lanes in each direction. Tuff pavers will be installed to reduce dust, while 260 LED streetlights — the corridor's first — will be erected along the route. Gateways and monuments are also planned as aesthetic elements.

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## Wifaq ul Madaris bans seminars from collecting funds from students for convocations

LAHORE (INP): Wifaq ul Madaris al-Arabia Pakistan, the federation of Islamic seminaries, has banned both boys and girls madaris from collecting money from students for annual convocation ceremonies.

In a letter issued to the administrations of seminaries across the country, the federation noted that annual events are usually held under the titles Khatm-e-Bukhari and Takmeel-e-Hifz-ul-Quran.

However, it was observed that over the years these ceremonies have increasingly become plagued with irregularities and un-Islamic practices.

The federation stated that students—many of whom come from poor or middle-class backgrounds—are often asked to pay thousands of rupees to fund these events, placing an unacceptable financial burden on them.

Wifaq ul Madaris also highlighted the misuse of collected funds, noting that in some seminaries, the money is spent on expensive attire for administrators and teachers, while in certain cases, gold jewelry is purchased and gifted to female administrators.

It emphasised that madaris are founded on principles of sincerity and simplicity, and such practices are wholly inappropriate when funded by students' contributions.

The letter further pointed out that in some institutions, identical expensive outfits are purchased for students.

Lavish feasts are arranged for guests, Umrah pilgrimages are performed using the collected funds, motorcycles are bought for administrators or Quran teachers, and costly cakes—described as a Western custom—are prepared for the events.

According to the federation, these practices have eroded the seriousness, dignity, spirituality, and blessings of religious gatherings. It warned that if such trends continue, further moral and administrative problems could arise.

Warning of strict action, Wifaq ul Madaris stated that any future evidence of funds being collected from students for annual ceremonies could lead to disciplinary action against the concerned seminary.

Wifaq ul Madaris directed seminary administrators and officials to immediately put an end to these practices and ensure that convocations are kept simple, dignified, and spiritually focused.

The federation also suggested that instead of using the title Khatm-e-Bukhari Sharif for these gatherings, seminaries should adopt alternative titles such as Annual Dastar Bandi or Chadar Pushi ceremonies.

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SINDH: The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan, along with the Chief Justice of the High Court of Sindh, in a group photo with the legal fraternity during their visit to Nanangarpark, Sindh.

## Notification, allowing celebration of Basant, challenged in LHC

LAHORE (INP): Judicial Activism Panel on Tuesday challenged in the Lahore High Court (LHC) the notification, greenlighting the celebration of Basant.

Making the government of Punjab and others respondents in the petition, the plaintiff said that through the notification, Lahore deputy commissioner (DC) had allowed three-day Basant celebrations.

The petitioner reminded the high court that in the past too, several people lost their lives after kite strings slit their throats.

Only two days ago, a two-year-old baby girl had been injured after she came into contact with a string; therefore, it is prayed to the court to order the deputy commissioner to withdraw the notification, permitting kite flying, read the petition.

The deputy commissioner (DC) on Monday gave the formal go-ahead for celebrating Basant in the district from February 6-8, explaining the terms and conditions, as well as restrictions for the festival and consequent order with a string; therefore, it is prayed to the court to order the deputy commissioner to withdraw the notification, permitting kite flying, read the petition.

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In pursuance of approval of the government, it is hereby notified that kite-flying is allowed within the territorial limits of District Lahore on the occasion of Basant 2026," subject to conditions. The way for the revival of Basant in Lahore after 18 years was paved by the passing of the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Bill, 2025 by the Punjab Assembly on December 24.

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ISLAMABAD: Secretary Economic Affairs Division, Muhammad Humair Karim, and Country Director of Asian Development Bank, Emma Fan, signing agreement between Pakistan and ADB.



## Balochistan Braces for Rain, Stormy Winds and Possible Mountain Snow

**Syed Muhammad Qaseem:**

The Regional Meteorological Center has cautioned that a new weather system moving across Balochistan from December 29 to December 31 is expected to trigger spots of rain, gusty winds and thunderstorms in several districts. Snowfall has already been reported at Kan Mehrtarai, Toba Kakari and Kozak Top between late Sunday night and early Monday morning.

The advisory adds that the system could extend to multiple districts, including Quetta, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Nozki, Harnai, Zhoib, Kalat, Barkhan, Sibi, Loralai, Musakhel, Turbat, Gwadar, Jiwani, Lasbela, Kech, Awaran, Chagai, Panjgur, Khuzdar, Washuk and



Kharan.

While Monday is likely to remain largely cold and dry, the northern belt may see harsher temperatures. Overnight, some areas could experience short bursts of rain with thunder and strong

winds, along with light snowfall over nearby hills.

By Wednesday, cold and partly cloudy weather is expected across much of the province, with another round of rain, thunder-

storms and snowfall over higher elevations likely in several districts.

Several parts of the province recorded rainfall during the past 24 hours, while Kalat registered the lowest temperature at minus

2°C, indicating that the cold wave remains intact. Officials have urged residents to remain cautious, warning of slippery roads, limited visibility and possible disruptions, especially in regions vulnerable to snowfall.

## Balochistan Women's Commission Chairperson Visits FPAP, Pledges Support for Women's Health Initiatives

**QUETTA:** Kiran Baloch, Chairperson of the Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women, visited the Regional Office of the Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) to review ongoing programs and discuss potential collaboration.

Baloch highlighted the importance of FPAP's Life Skills-Based Education program, emphasizing its

role in promoting awareness and confidence among young girls.

She praised FPAP's efforts in providing family planning, maternal care, and reproductive health services, urging expansion to remote districts.

The Commission aims to support organizations working for women's rights and socio-economic empowerment.

Baloch stressed the need for effective collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations to ensure women's health, education, and economic independence.

Future plans include expanding FPAP services, establishing safe motherhood centers, and creating livelihood opportunities for women.



## Nasirabad Development Projects Under Scrutiny: SE Ensures Quality and Timeliness

**NASIRABAD:** Superintending Engineer Communications and Construction Nasirabad Circle, Engineer Fida Hussain Khosa, conducted a comprehensive review of ongoing development projects under the

Roads and Buildings Department. He inspected sites, assessed progress, and emphasized transparency, quality, and timely completion.

Khosa stressed



that government resources are public trust and instructed officials to ensure daily monitoring, halt substandard material use, and adhere to construction standards.

He toured

projects in Babakot, reviewing work pace, quality, and safety measures.

SDO B&R

Zulfikar Ali Lehri briefed Khosa on project details, assuring standard-conforming construction and daily oversight. Khosa reiterated prioritizing people-welfare projects, warning against negligence or delays, and threatened action against responsible officers.

Completion of these projects will enhance Nasirabad's infrastructure, improving transportation and basic facilities.

## Balochistan Aims for Fair Share in NFC Award, Says Finance Minister



**QUETTA:** Provincial Finance Minister Mir Shouab Noshirwan, chaired a consultative meeting with officials and consultants to prepare for the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award.

The meeting focused

on economic needs, expenditures, and revenue, aiming to protect provincial interests and ensure constitutional rights.

Noshirwan emphasized Balochistan's socio-economic rights, stating

“We will strive for a fair share in NFC Award, considering our province's backwardness.”

A comprehensive strategy has been prepared, factoring in population, backwardness, and area. The government

is committed to securing just rights from the federal government, ensuring Balochistan's representation in NFC Award negotiations. The meeting highlighted the importance of equitable resource distribution among provinces.

## Commissioner Naseerabad Reviews Progress on Allotment Township in Dera Murad Jamali

**NASERABAD:** Commissioner Naseerabad Division, Salahuddin Noorzaai, chaired a key

meeting of the Allotment Township Implementation Committee. The meeting re-

viewed progress on providing ownership rights to Dera Murad Jamali residents.

Noorzaai directed prioritizing housing, ensuring accurate data on private residences, commercial plots, shops, government colonies, and public spaces.

He emphasized completing the process swiftly, adhering to higher authorities' policies.

The Commissioner instructed compiling lists of graveyards, playgrounds, parks, mosques, and other public and religious sites, and computerizing the data for effective monitoring.

Revenue teams were told to submit daily progress reports.

Noorzaai vowed to implement CM Balochistan's directives on ownership rights, stating comprehensive data will aid future challenges and administrative decisions.

| WALK IN INTERVIEW   |                      |     |  |                          |       |     |          |         |       |
|---|----------------------|-----|--|--------------------------|-------|-----|----------|---------|-------|
| Application are invited from suitable and qualified candidates for the post of Medical Officer, Lady Medical Officer, Dental Surgeon, Head Nurse and Staff Nurses, in various Hospital / Health units of Loralai Division, on contractual basis with following credentials and terms and condition. |                      |     |  |                          |       |     |          |         |       |
| Age Limit As per Govt rule for each position  |                      |     |  |                          |       |     |          |         |       |
| S.No.   | Positions            | BPS | Qualification  | Number and Place of post | Local | Dak | Musakhel | Barkhan | Total |
| 1   | Medical Officer      | 17  | MBBS from recognized institution permanent MDC registration  | 01                       | 01    | 01  | 01       | 01      | 04    |
| 2   | Lady Medical Officer | 17  | MBBS from recognized institution permanent MDC registration  | 01                       | 01    | 01  | 01       | 01      | 04    |
| 3   | Dental Surgeon       | 17  | BDS from recognized institution permanent MDC registration   | 01                       | 01    | 01  | 01       | 01      | 04    |
| 4   | Head Nurse           | 17  | BSc nursing from institute recognized by Pakistan Nursing Council, General Nursing (3-year) diploma and 1 year midwifery diploma are 1 year specialization diploma | 01                       | 01    | 01  | 01       | 01      | 04    |
| 5   | Staff Nurse          | 16  | BSc nursing from institute recognized by Pakistan Nursing Council, General Nursing (3-year) diploma and 1 year midwifery diploma are 1 year specialization diploma | 01                       | 01    | 01  | 01       | 01      | 04    |

**TERMS AND CONDITION WITH ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT AND INFORMATION:**  
Interested and eligible candidates from all over province can apply for the said positions.  
Eligible candidates must submit two sets of attested copies of all educational credentials, professional experience, local domicile certificate, CNIC, a passport-size photo along with updated CVs.  
Candidate working in government, semi-government and autonomous organizations should apply through proper channel with NCC issued from the employer/parent department.  
Only shortlist candidates will be called for interview by the Selection Committee. No TADA is admissible for the interview.  
Nature of appointment shall be contractual for a period of 1-year with the first year as a probationary period.  
The contractual tenure is extendable on the basis of excellent performance certificate issued by the concerned head.  
Selection shall be purely on merit basis and canvassing in any manner may lead to disqualification of the candidate.  
The candidates nominated / dismissed prematurely from any government or non-government posts / positions of ground of discipline, moral turpitude, financial embezzlement or criminal offences are ineligible to apply.  
Consentment of facts or submission of any counterfeit document shall lead to disqualification from the position followed by legal disciplinary action.  
The competent authority i.e. Commissioner Loralai reserves the right of canceling the position without any reason.  
Application can be delivered personally or by post / courier to the Divisional Director Health Services, Loralai Division at Loralai during the working hours. The last date to apply is 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2026.  
Interview of the short listed candidates will be conducted on 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026.  
Incomplete applications may regard as application received after due date and not for the consideration.

PRD NO-2025/30-12-2025  
Divisional Director Health Services, Loralai Division  
NCC-2025/30-12-2025

## Quetta Shia Council Meets to Address Zaireen Challenges

**QUETTA:** The Shia Council held a crucial meeting chaired by Commissioner Quetta Division, Shahzeb Khan

Kakar to discuss challenges faced by Zaireen (pilgrims) visiting

Karbala. The delegation highlighted issues including travel difficulties, accommodation, security concerns, border

closure, and rising air travel costs. The council emphasized the need for government support to ease travel hardships for pilgrims.

Commissioner Kakar acknowledged the problems, noting that

around 60,000 pilgrims travel annually and past incidents have raised security concerns. He assured that the government is serious about addressing these issues under the Z-Geo policy.

prioritizing Zaireen safety and facilities. The administration will coordinate with relevant

departments to find immediate and long-term

solutions. “Zaireen's security and well-being are top priorities.”

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## (SBP) State Bank of Pakistan rolls out 'shock covering' measures for banks

**NEWS DESK:** The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has introduced a set of shocks covering climate-related risk measures to protect the financial institutions as the threat has been increasing with climate change.

"In pursuance of its goal to further strengthen the risk management capacity of regulated financial institutions (banks, DFIs and MFIs), it has decided to introduce an additional set of shocks covering climate-related risks," said a circular of the State Bank. Consequently, Guidelines on Climate Stress Testing are being rolled out. Climate change has emerged as a significant challenge for the domestic economy and the financial system, said the SBP.

Another related circular issued by the SBP said Pakistan is among the most climate-vulnerable countries. "Consequently, its financial sector faces increasing exposure to physical and transition risks," said the circular. According to the SBP circular, the



guidelines provide scenarios for climate-related single-factor shocks across physical and transition risks for SBP-regulated financial institutions (FIs). "The sample Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs), as identified under D-SIBs

Framework 2018, are now required to incorporate climate-related risks into their annual scenario analysis i.e., Macro Stress Testing (MST) exercise," said the SBP. The guidance will enable FIs to gauge the impact of climate-re-

lated risks on their lending portfolios and financial positions. The circular said that the regulated FIs will conduct climate stress tests in addition to the exercises being carried out under FSD Circular No. 01 dated Sept 1, 2020.

The regulated FIs will conduct climate stress testing (single-factor) based on end-of-December data by the second quarter of the following year. However, the first iteration may be conducted by end of Q3CY26, based on the relevant section and

data. The sample D-SIBs will conduct an annual MST exercise based on data as of December 31 (audited annual financials) and will also incorporate climate-related risks in the scenarios. The results will be included in the relevant section and

submitted to SBP by June 30 of the following year. The SBP, as part of its supervisory process, will regularly conduct its own in-house climate stress testing exercises and, if required, may engage with the regulated FIs

for any risk mitigation measures/contingency plans based on the outcome of these exercises.

The SBP supervisory teams may also review the climate stress testing framework and processes of the regulated FIs.

Regulatory Framework Recognising the potential impact of climate change on the financial sector's resilience and soundness, the SBP has also issued the Regulatory Framework for Effective Management of Climate-Related Financial Risks.

The framework aims to ensure that FIs effectively identify the climate risk drivers and integrate climate-related financial risk considerations into their governance, business strategy, and risk management frameworks.

All FIs will ensure compliance with the framework by June 30, 2029. For the purpose, FIs are required to submit board-approved, time-bound implementation plans and targets to SBP by Sept 30, 2026," said the circular.

### Businessmen asked to invest in maritime zone



**NEWS DESK:** Highlighting Pakistan's vast untapped maritime potential, Commander Logistics and Director General Naval Research & Development Institute (NRDI) Rear Admiral Muhammad Sohail Muhammad has urged the business community to proactively seize opportunities across shipping, shipbuilding, and shore exploration, maritime technology, logistics and coastal infrastructure. Exchanging views at a meeting with the Karachi Chamber of

Commerce and Industry (KCCI), the NRDI DG stated that the maritime sector represents one of the most promising frontiers for economic growth, investment and technological advancement in the country. With an expansive coastline, an enlarged Exclusive Economic Zone, emerging shipbuilding capacities and policy-level support under active consideration, there is a need for public-private collaboration, indigenous innovation and private-sector leadership to unlock the full economic value of Pakistan's mari-

time domain, he added. Arshad stated that Pakistan's coastal boundary is based on the continental shelf, which was successfully extended several years ago. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, Pakistan's maritime economic boundaries initially extended up to 200 nautical miles. However, any coastal state that demonstrates its capability to explore and exploit seabed resources beyond this limit is entitled to claim an extended continental shelf.

### CPEC 2 brings Chinese textile units, and a new rival for local mills

**NEWS DESK:** It seems like Pakistan's so-called 'Vibrant' textile sector is on its way towards a modest improvement in terms of earning export revenues for calendar year 2025; however, for 2026, a majority of textile pundits are sensing a declining trend due to tariff reshufflings and strategic shifts by global players, particularly the United States under Trump 2.0 and the People's Republic of China, as both seek to protect their domestic industries.

demand in the early part of the year, relative stability in domestic production, and improved order inflows from traditional markets helped textile exporters recover from the slowdown witnessed in previous years. However, industry stakeholders argue that the growth remained largely value-driven rather than volume-led, reflecting higher prices and cost pass-throughs instead of a fundamental structural turn-

around. Industry representatives point out that the absence of a comprehensive and inclusive textile policy was among the biggest missed opportunities of 2025. Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Readymade Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PRGMEA), Ijaz Khokhar, said the sector entered the year with expectations of policy clarity, but those expectations were not met. De-

spite repeated assurances, he said, the government failed to announce a textile policy capable of addressing long-standing structural issues, particularly those affecting small and medium enterprises. Khokhar said drafting policy without taking major SME-based associations on board undermines the very purpose of industrial planning.

Beyond domestic challenges, global developments have added new layers of uncertainty. Khokhar warned that the revival of protectionist trade policies under the Trump administration in the US has reshaped global textile trade flows. China, facing higher tariffs in the US market, has started diverting textile products to European markets as a precautionary measure. He noted that the European Union is one of Pakistan's most important export destinations, where Pakistani exporters enjoy a GSP Plus status, but the growing presence of Chinese textile goods in European warehouses is changing buyer preferences.



### Govt prioritises critical power projects

**NEWS DESK:** Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal on Monday directed relevant ministries to finalise a prioritised list of the most critical power projects for the next three years.

Of this amount, Rs1.1tr had been spent up to June 30, while the throw-forward stood at Rs492.4 billion.

The allocation for 2025-26 is Rs104.7bn, with an additional demand of around Rs175bn indicated during the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

While reviewing Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects in the power and hydel energy sectors,

the minister also asked ministries to work out the minimum annual PSDP allocations required to complete these schemes within stipulated timelines.

Chairing a meeting, Mr Iqbal was briefed on the overall portfolio and financial position of major power and hydel

projects. A total of 37 critical power sector schemes, with a combined approved cost of Rs1.7 trillion, were reviewed.

The minister said periodic portfolio reviews were essential to ensure scarce public resources were aligned with national priorities, cost overruns and implementation delays were identified early,

and projects with the highest economic and social returns were completed without slippages.

He asked the secretaries of the planning, finance,



economic affairs, power and water resources ministries to jointly identify financial, technical and administrative bottlenecks and resolve

them on a fast-track basis through coordinated action and stakeholder engagement. A disciplined three-year rolling plan, Mr Iqbal said, would help avoid the accumulation of incomplete projects, contain fiscal pressures and translate public investment into tangible gains in energy security and economic growth.

The minister in-

structed the Power Division to prioritise near-completion projects, rationalise future financing and put in place a realistic three-year execution framework.

along with PSDP funding requirements, to ensure timely delivery of strategically important schemes.

He also directed the division to submit a project-wise break-up of critical schemes, along with annual financing and execution plans for the next three years.

Near-completion projects, he said, must be prioritised so that sunk investments could be converted into operational assets at the earliest.

"The objective is to reduce the throw-forward and complete priority projects within defined timelines,"

Mr Iqbal said, noting that delays escalated costs and deferred economic benefits such as improved energy availability, industrial productivity and investor confidence.

### CCP reviews competition in insurance, gold sectors

**NEWS DESK:** The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) expanded its market research activity in 2025, releasing competition assessment studies covering key sectors, including insurance, power, gold, pesticides, steel, LNG, road infrastructure, sugar and fertiliser.

According to a statement issued on Monday, the Commission also established a Centre of Excellence in Competition Law (CECL) to support evidence-based policymaking and legal and regulatory reforms.

The centre is conducting studies on the automobile industry, civil aviation market, solar energy market, cement sector and the impact of mergers in the telecom sector.

A detailed CCP report on the state of competition in Pakistan's insurance industry identified delays in claims processing, limited out-of-network coverage and a fragmented legal and regulatory framework as major challenges.

The report noted

that insurance penetration in Pakistan stands at 0.87%, compared to a global average of 6.7%, and highlighted the need for reforms to improve competition and consumer welfare.

The Commission also released its first Competition Assessment Study of the gold market. The report provided an evidence-based analysis of a sector characterised by informality and pricing opacity.

It found that more than 90% of gold trading takes place outside formal channels. The study examined the potential impact of the Reko Diq copper-gold project on domestic supply chains and recommended the creation of a Gemstone and Gold Regulatory Authority.

In addition, CCP issued competition studies on the pesticide, steel and LNG sectors. The pesticide sector report highlighted Pakistan's reliance on imported agricultural chemicals, the prevalence of counterfeit substandard products, regulatory bottlenecks

and weak enforcement affecting farmers and crop yields.

The LNG study identified dominant positions held by state-owned enterprises, limited private sector participation, restricted access to infrastructure and the impact of circular debt exceeding Rs2.8 trillion on market competition.

The steel sector assessment outlined competition challenges and policy gaps affecting efficiency and market outcomes. The Commission also issued a Competition Assessment Study of the fertiliser industry, identifying barriers to competition across production, distribution and retail segments in a sector critical to agricultural productivity.

To strengthen inter-agency coordination, the CCP signed several memoranda of understanding during 2025. These included an MoU with the Federal Antimonopoly Service of the Russian Federation covering cooperation on security enforcement, merger control and competition policy research.



## Archer in England squad for T20 World Cup

**NEWS DESK:** England named fast bowler Jofa Archer in their provisional squad for the Twenty20 World Cup on Tuesday despite a side strain that prematurely ended his Ashes campaign in Australia earlier this month.

The 15-member squad for the World Cup to be held in India and Sri Lanka from February 7 also includes Nottinghamshire seamer Josh Tongue, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement.

Beginning on January 22, England will play three one-day internationals and an equal number of T20s in Sri Lanka before heading into the World Cup.

"Sussex fast bowler Jofa Archer is included in the provisional T20 World Cup squad but will miss the tour of Sri Lanka as he



continues his rehabilitation with the England medical team following the left-side strain sustained during the third Ashes test in Adelaide earlier this month," the ECB said.

Batters Jamie Smith and Jordan Cox have been axed while

seamer Sagib Mahmood could not retain his place either. Ben Duckett in both the T20 and ODI squads despite the opener's ongoing run drought in the Ashes series.

The Harry Brook-led team will begin their

T20 World Cup campaign against Nepal in Mumbai on February 8. England are 1-3 behind in the ongoing Ashes series against Australia and their performance in the T20 World Cup could determine the future of their leadership.

including coach Brendon McCullum and team director Rob Key.

England T20 squad for Sri Lanka tour and World Cup: Harry Brook (captain), Rehan Ahmed, Jofa Archer (World Cup only).

Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Jos Buttler, Brydon Carse (Sri Lanka tour only), Sam Curran, Liam Dawson.

Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood.

England ODI squad for Sri Lanka tour: Harry Brook (captain), Rehan Ahmed.

Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Jos Buttler, Brydon Carse, Zak Crawley, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Luke Wood.

## Bethell looks to cement place as England number three

**NEWS DESK:** Jacob Bethell was not supposed to be England's headline act in the fourth test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground but he looked like a player who belonged when the tourists made their nervous chase for victory against Australia.

Replacing the dropped Ollie Pope at number three, 22-year-old Bethell had appeared on a hiding to

nothing in Melbourne on a difficult pitch in front of a record crowd of 94,000.

His debut Ashes innings on Boxing Day, the biggest occasion in Australia's cricket calendar, was no fairy tale, producing one run from five balls and a caught-behind dismissal off

Australia's fifth-choice seamer Michael Neser.

His second innings, however, gave a glimpse

of why England have such high hopes for the left-hander. Bethell delivered a composed 40 off 46 balls to help prevent an Ashes whitewash and claim England's first test win in Australia in 15 years.

"I was pretty nervous," he said. "Not so much with the number of people, just the occasion. I've played in India where it feels like there's 160,000 watching."



## FIFA received 150 million World Cup ticket requests, Infantino says

**NEWS DESK:** FIFA President Gianni Infantino defended the ticket prices for next year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, citing heavy demand for them and the revenue generated for the sport around the world.

This month fan groups criticised the cost of tickets, which were several times more expensive than those for similar matches at the 2022 tournament.

FIFA then launched a \$60 ticket tier to make the games more affordable for fans of qualified teams.

"We have six-seven million tickets on sale... in 15 days, we received 150 million ticket requests. So, 10 million ticket requests every single day. It shows how powerful the World Cup is," Infantino said on Monday at the World Sports Summit in Dubai. "In the almost 100 years of history of the World Cup, FIFA has sold 44 million tickets in total. So, in two weeks...



we could've filled 300 years of World Cups. Imagine that. This is absolutely crazy."

Fans from the US have made the highest number of ticket requests, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom, the FIFA President said.

"What's crucial is that the revenues that are generated from this are going back to the game all over the world," he added.

"Without FIFA there'd be no football in

150 countries in the world. There is football because, and thanks to, these revenues we generate with, and from, the World Cup which we reinvest all over the world." DUBAI: TO HOST FIFA BEST AWARDS NEXT YEAR

Dubai will host the global governing body's Best Awards ceremony next year.

The FIFA Best Awards honour the top men's and women's players, as well as coaches and teams, as voted for by fans, media represen-

tatives, captains and national team coaches.

"I can announce here a new partnership we have closed together to honour the best players, coaches and teams, here in Dubai," Infantino said.

"We have enjoyed the sport, and now we will enjoy even more the unity the sport brings to the entire world."

France forward Ousmane Dembele was named men's player of the year and Spain midfielder Aitana Bonmati won

## Own goal hands Sudan fortunate win

**NEWS DESK:** Sudan profited from a late own goal to beat Equatorial Guinea 1-0 at the Africa Cup of Nations finals on Sunday, picking up their first points of the tournament in Morocco.

Mohamed Eisa's free kick in the 74th minute was cleared by Equatorial Guinea's Luis Asue but struck teammate Saul Coco and ricocheted back past the despairing dive of goalkeeper Jesus Owono.

Sudan joined Algeria and Burkina Faso,

playing later on Sunday in Rabat, on three points in Group E while Equatorial Guinea, the surprise packages of the last two Nations Cups, are on the brink of elimination after successive losses.

Sudan had an early opportunity to go ahead as Eisa had a stab at a loose ball close in but the fourth-minute effort went wide.

He had another narrow miss with a shot in the 66th minute that was goalbound and beat Owono, only

to be blocked just short of the goal line by Equatorial Guinea defender Esteban Orozco.

Equatorial Guinea's Pedro Obiang had their two best chances of the first half at Stade Mohamed V but missed an effort in front of goal before,

on the stroke of halftime, heading onto the roof of the net with Sudan goalkeeper Monged Elneel out of position.

There was a lengthy delay in the first half when Elneel

suffered a knock to the head and was checked for suspected concussion but he was able to continue.

Equatorial Guinea substitute Jose Nabil proved a handful for Sudan after coming on at halftime, while veteran striker Emilio Nsue had a late chance to equalise but hit his effort narrowly wide.

The small Spanish-speaking nation could be eliminated later on Sunday if Algeria and Burkina Faso draw in Rabat.



## Injured Archer included in England T20 World Cup squad but no place for Smith

**NEWS DESK:** Fast bowler Jofa Archer was included in England's provisional T20 World Cup squad announced on Tuesday, despite suffering a left side strain that ruled him out of the final two Ashes Tests, but there was no place for wicketkeeper Jamie Smith.

Archer's fellow quick Josh Tongue has been called up to the T20 squad for the first time in a 15-man party to be captained by Harry Brook for the tournament in India and Sri Lanka beginning on February 7.

Archer will sit out the warm-up tour to Sri Lanka next month to continue his rehabilitation following the injury he sustained during the third Ashes Test in Adelaide earlier this month.

Brydon Carse will replace Archer in Sri Lanka for three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals beginning on January 22.

There was no place, however, in the T20 World Cup squad for Smith who has endured a torrid Ashes tour of

Australia, for all that is an unusual starting point in deciding selection for a white-ball tournament in the sub-continent.

The Surrey wicketkeeper-batsman smashed 60 from 26 balls in his last T20 appearance against the West Indies in June, but was rested due to his heavy all-format workload from the subsequent series against South Africa and Ireland.

But following four Tests in Australia where he has averaged a lowly 19.85 with the bat and endured several struggles behind the

stumps, he has been left out entirely, with the experienced Jos Buttler and Phil Salt providing England with keeping options for 2024 T20 World Cup semi-finals in England.

Tongue, by contrast, has never played white-ball cricket but has enhanced his reputation with impressive Ashes displays in Adelaide and Melbourne, where a England's four-wicket win still left them 3-1 down heading into a series finale at Sydney starting Saturday.

And the 28-year-old was the top wicket-taker in last season's

Fundred competition, taking 14 wickets in six games.

Test-match opening batsman Zak Crawley returns to the ODI squad for the first time since December 2023.

Brook will lead his first World Cup campaign as white-ball captain, with England facing Bangladesh, West Indies, Italy and Nepal in Group C, with both managing director Rob Key and coach Brendon McCullum looking for an impressive showing after they came in for criticism following the Test team's tame Ashes series loss.



## South Africa beat Zimbabwe to book last-16 berth

**NEWS DESK:** Oswin Appollis converted a late penalty to give South Africa a 3-2 Africa Cup of Nations victory over Zimbabwe in Marrakesh on Monday, and qualification for the knockout stage.

Bafana Bafana waited until Wednesday to know who they will face on Sunday in the round of 16. It is likely to be either defending champions Ivory Coast or five-time winners Cameroon.

Egypt, who rested stars like captain Mohamed Salah with first place already assured, topped Group B with seven points after a 0-0 draw against Angola in Agadir.

South Africa finished with six points, Angola two and Zimbabwe one.

Angola could squeeze into the knockout stage as one of the best fourth-placed teams. "Once again we fell asleep after a good start. We continuously lost possession," said 73-year-old South Africa coach Hugo Broos. The Belgian tactician guided Cameroon to the 2017 AFCON title.

"Our passing was bad at times and we should have concentrated on retaining possession in the closing minutes instead of seeking a fourth goal. We have to work on controlling games."

In Marrakesh, Confederation of African Football (CAF) presi-

dent, South African Patrice Motsepe, was among a small but boisterous crowd that saw Bafana Bafana establish an early foothold. Zimbabwe goalkeeper Washington Muterweli reacted late to a low six-minute shot from Appollis and grasped the ball just before it crossed the line.

A minute later and South Africa were ahead thanks to rising star Tshepo Moremi in the clash of southern Africa neighbours.

The ball was played across the pitch just outside the box to Moremi. He unleashed a goal-bound shot that took a deflection off Divine Lunga and looped over 40-year-old Arubi into the net.



Falling behind motivated Zimbabwe and they deservedly levelled on 19 minutes thanks to the individual brilliance of Tawanda Maswanhise from Scottish Premiership club Motherwell.

Maswanhise gained possession inside the South African half, dribbled past two opponents and fired the ball wide of captain and goalkeeper Ronwen Williams into the far corner.

The equaliser rattled South Africa. Bronze medalists at the 2024 AFCON, they were fortunate not to fall behind as the match reached the half-hour mark.

A Zimbabwe free-kick was floated into the goalmouth and un-

marked Munashe Garamanga should have done better than head over from close range.

South African frustrations at being unable to dominate flared just before half-time.

Already-cautioned Sipho Mbulu argued with the Moroccan referee, risking another yellow card and a red.

As was the case in the first half, South Africa began the second period aggressively. They regained the lead on 50 minutes through Burnley striker Lyle Foster.

The Premier League player raced after a headed back pass to slow-reacting Arubi, then outmuscled the veteran goalkeeper to nod the ball into the net.

## Yemen declares state of emergency as separatist conflict flares

**NEWS DESK:** The leader of Yemen's presidential council declared a state of emergency and cancelled a security pact with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Tuesday after separatists seized swathes of territory.

"The joint defence agreement with the UAE is hereby cancelled," a statement said, while a separate decree announced a 90-day state of emergency, including a 72-hour air, sea and land blockade.

The announcements by Rashad al-Alimi, head of the Presidential Leadership Council, came after the Saudi-led coalition fighting in divided Yemen said it struck a UAE weapons shipment destined for the separatists.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces have swept through the south of Yemen this month, taking most of resource-rich Hadramawt province and swathes of



neighbouring Mahrah. Alimi ordered the SCT to hand over the territory to Saudi-backed forces, calling the separatists' advance an "unacceptable rebellion" in a televised address.

The confrontation risks tearing apart the already fractured Yemeni

government. It also threatens slow-moving peace negotiations with the Houthis, who ousted the government from the capital Sanaa in 2014, triggering a military intervention by the Saudi-led coalition.

Saudi Arabia says

its national security is a 'red line' after strike in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia said on Tuesday its national security was a red line it would defend, hours after a Saudi-led coalition struck what it described as foreign military support to southern separatists at Yemen's Mukalla

port.

The Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement it hoped the UAE will take the necessary steps to preserve bilateral relations.

It also expressed "disappointment" over the actions taken by "brotherly UAE" pressuring the STC's forces to conduct military operations on the southern borders of the kingdom in the governorates of Hadramout and Al-Mahara, which is considered a threat to the kingdom's national security, and the security and stability of the Republic of Yemen and the region.

"The steps taken by the UAE are considered highly dangerous, inconsistent with the principles upon which the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen was established, and do not serve the coalition's purpose of achieving security and stability for Yemen," it said.

Named Kaundinya, after a legendary Indian mariner, its 20-metre (65-foot) long hull is sewn together with coconut coir rope rather than nailed. "This voyage re-connects the past with

## Indian navy sails into history with wooden ship

**NEWS DESK:** India's navy boasts aircraft carriers, submarines, warships, and frontline vessels of steel as it spreads its maritime power worldwide.

But none of its vessels is as unusual as its newest addition, which set sail on its maiden Indian Ocean crossing on Monday — a wooden stitched ship inspired by a fifth-century design, built not to dominate the seas but to remember how India once traversed them.

Steered by giant oars rather than a rudder, with two fixed square sails to catch seasonal monsoon winds, it heads westwards on its first voyage across the seas, a 1,400-kilometre (870-mile) voyage to Oman's capital Muscat.

Named Kaundinya, after a legendary Indian mariner, its 20-metre (65-foot) long hull is sewn together with coconut coir rope rather than nailed. "This voyage re-connects the past with

the present," Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan said, flagging the ship off from Port Blair, in India's western state of Gujarat.

"This voyage is not just symbolic," Swaminathan added.

"It is of deep strategic and cultural significance to our nation as we aim to resurrect and revive ancient Indian maritime concepts and capabilities in all their forms." The journey is daunting. Its builders have refused modern shortcuts, instead relying on traditional shipbuilding methods.

It evokes a time when Indian sailors were regular traders with the Roman Empire, the



## Drone attack' on Putin residence puts peace in peril

**NEWS DESK:** Hopes for a breakthrough in Ukraine's war were dented on Monday after Russia accused Ukraine of attempting to strike President Vladimir Putin's residence in northern Russia, an allegation Kyiv dismissed as baseless and designed to derail peace talks.

The claim, made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, said Ukraine deployed 91 long-range drones on December 28-29 targeting Putin's residence in the Novgorod region west of Moscow. He said all drones were destroyed by Russian air defences and no damage occurred. Lavrov labelled the attack "state terrorism" and warned that Russian forces had already identified targets for retaliatory strikes.

Lavrov offered no evidence for his assertions, and it remained unclear where Putin was at the time.

Kyiv strongly rejected the accusation. President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy said Russia was fabricating the story to create a pretext for attacks on government buildings in Kyiv and to undermine progress in US-Ukrainian talks on ending the war.

"Another round of lies from the Russian Federation," Zelenskyy said via WhatsApp. "If there is no scandal between us and America, and we are making progress,

for them it is a failure." Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybaha called on world leaders to condemn Russia's claims.

Trump reacts The alleged attack coincided with high-level discussions on a potential agreement to end hostilities. On Sunday, US President Donald Trump met Zelenskyy in Florida, describing the talks as "getting a lot closer, maybe very close" to an accord, while acknowledging "unresolved thorny" territorial is-

ssues. Trump, speaking after a phone call with Putin, expressed anger over the reported attack. "It's one thing to be offensive. It's another thing to attack his house."

It's not the right time to do any of that," he said, but added that the conversation remained productive, with hopes to resolve remaining issues and achieve peace.

Peace negotiations Key sticking points in the 20-point peace proposal include control over Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, currently held by Russian forces, and the fate of the Donbas region, Russia currently occupies about a fifth of Ukraine, including Crimea, annexed in 2014.

Russia also claims Donbas as well as Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, which are internationally recognised as Ukrainian territory. Russia has de-

manded Ukrainian troop withdrawals from parts of Donetsk. Ukraine insists fighting halt along existing frontlines.

Despite the tensions, Putin struck a defiant tone on Monday, instructing his generals to press the offensive in Zaporizhzhia, which Moscow controls around 75% of.

Colonel-General Mikhail Tepinsky, commander of Russia's Dnieper grouping, reported forces were just 15 km from the region's largest city. "In the near future, it is necessary to continue the offensive, together with the East grouping to liberate Zaporizhzhia," Putin said.

PM Shehbaz condemns Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the Russian attack, saying, "Such a heinous act constitutes a grave threat to peace, security, and stability, particularly at a time when efforts aimed at peace are underway."



## Bangladesh's first female prime minister Khaleda Zia passes away at 80

**NEWS DESK:** Khaleda Zia, who dominated Bangladesh's politics for decades, died at 80 on Monday. She was the first female prime minister in 1991 and went on to develop a bitter rivalry with Sheikh Hasina as they spent decades trading power, died on Tuesday after a long illness. She was 80.

Her opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), said that she died after a prolonged illness. She had advanced complications of the liver, arthritis, diabetes, and chest and heart problems, her doctors said.

She went to London for medical treatment in early 2025, staying for four months before returning home.

Though Khaleda had been out of power since 2008 and had spent several years in jail or under house arrest, she continued to command much support.

The BNP is seen as the frontrunner to win the parliamentary election slated to take place in February. Her son and acting chairman of the party, Tarique Rahman, 60, returned to the country last week from nearly 17 years in self-exile and is widely seen as a strong candidate to become prime minister.

Since August 2024, after a student-led uprising led to the ouster of Hasina, Bangladesh has been run by an interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Laureate and microfinance pioneer.

In November, Hasina was sentenced to death in absentia for her deadly crackdown on the student protests.

Known by her first name, Khaleda was described as shy and de-

voted to raising her two sons until her husband, military leader and then-President Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated in an attempted army coup in 1981.

Three years later, she became the head of the BNP, which her husband had founded, and vowed to deliver on his aim of "liberating Bangladesh from poverty and economic backwardness."

She joined hands with Hasina, daughter of Bangladesh's founding father and head of the Awami League party, to lead a popular uprising for democracy that toppled military ruler Ershad in 1990. But their cooperation did not last long.

Supporters saw her as polite and traditional yet quietly stylish, serious and her words carefully. But they also viewed her as a bold, uncompromising leader when it came to defending her party and confronting her rivals.

Hasina, by contrast, was far more outspoken and assertive. Their opposite personalities helped fuel the rivalry

that dominated Bangladesh's politics for decades. In 1991, Bangladesh held what was hailed as its first free election. Khaleda won a surprise victory over Hasina, having gained the support of the country's largest Islamic party, Jamaat-Islami.

In doing so, Khaleda became Bangladesh's first female prime minister and only the second woman to lead a democratic government of a mainly Muslim nation after Benazir Bhutto, elected to lead Pakistan three years earlier. Khaleda replaced the presidential system with a parliamentary one, so that power rested with the prime minister. She also lifted restrictions on foreign investment and made primary education compulsory and free.

She lost to Hasina in the 1996 general election but came back five years later with a surprise landslide win.

Her second term was marred by the rise of Islamist militants and allegations of corruption. In 2004, a rally that Hasina was addressing

was hit by grenades. Hasina survived, but over 20 people were killed and more than 500 were wounded. Khaleda's government and its Islamic allies were widely blamed.

In 2018, after Hasina had reclaimed Bangladesh's highest office, Rahman was tried in absentia and sentenced to life for the attack.

Although Khaleda later clamped down on Islamist radicals groups, her second stint as prime minister ended in 2006 when an army-backed interim government took power amid political instability and street violence.

The interim government jailed both Khaleda and Hasina on charges of corruption and abuse of power for about a year before they were both released ahead of a general election in 2008. Khaleda never regained power. With the BNP boycotting the 2014 and 2024 elections, her vitriolic feud with Hasina continued to dominate Bangladesh politics.

Trump said. Asked if US intelligence agencies had evidence of such an attack, Trump said, "We'll find out."

Russia signals more hardened approach to ending war.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Ukraine had tried to attack Putin's residence in the Novgorod region west of Moscow on December 28-29 with 91 long-range drones which were all destroyed by Russian air defences.

No one was injured and there was no damage, he said in comments reported by Russian media.



## PM Shehbaz condemns reported targeting of Russian President Putin's residence, calls it 'heinous act'

**NEWS DESK:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday condemned reports regarding the targeting of the residence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, calling it a "heinous act".

In a post on X, the prime minister said, "Pakistan condemns the reported targeting of the residence of His Excellency Vladimir Putin, president of the Russian Federation."

He said that such a "heinous act constitutes a grave threat to peace, security and stability, particularly at a time when efforts aimed at peace are underway."

"We reiterate our firm rejection of all forms of violence and acts intended to undermine security and threaten peace,"

he said. While the premier did not mention any names, Russian has accused Ukraine of trying to attack Putin's residence and vowed retaliation, a claim Kyiv dismissed as baseless and aimed at derailing arduous peace talks.

The angry exchanges between the warring neighbours on Monday, including a statement by Russia that it was reviewing its stance in negotiations in response to the attack, dealt a new blow to prospects for peace in Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump said a peace deal may be near. "It's not the right time to do any of that. And I learned about it from President Putin today. I was very angry about it."



He reiterated our firm rejection of all forms of violence and acts intended to undermine security and threaten peace,"

to attack his house. It's not the right time to do any of that. And I learned about it from President Putin today. I was very angry about it."

On Sunday, Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Florida and the US president said they were "get-

ting a lot closer, maybe very close" to an agreement to end the war, although "horrid" territorial issues remained.

On Monday, Putin

struck a defiant tone, telling his army to press on with a campaign to take full control of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region.

The Kremlin repeated demands for Kyiv to pull its forces out of the last part of the Donbas area that they still hold in eastern Ukraine.

Putin told Trump in Monday's phone call that Russia, which invaded Ukraine in February 2022, was reviewing its stance following the reported drone attack, an aide said. Zelenskyy dismissed Russia's allegation as "a complete fabrication" and the Kremlin's own refusal to take necessary steps to end the war.

After the call with Putin, Trump told reporters outside his home in Palm Beach,

Florida, that he had no further information about the alleged attack. "I don't like it, it's not good,"

Trump said. Asked if US intelligence agencies had evidence of such an attack, Trump said,