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Pink Bus Service Launched to Support Women's Transportation in Balochistan

Syed Muhammad Qaseem:

Balochistan has launched a dedicated Pink Bus Service aimed at providing safe and dignified transportation for women and female students

across the province.

Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti said the initiative is designed to make daily commuting easier while ensuring protection and respect for women travelers.

He added that the provin-

cial government intends to keep the service running on a permanent basis.

According to the Chief Minister, the program will be expanded to additional districts in the next phase so more women

can benefit from it.

Officials say the Pink Bus Service is expected to improve women's access to education, employment and healthcare facilities.

and forms a key part of the government's broader reform

agenda focused on safe public transport.

Bugti noted that efforts to empower women in Balochistan are continuing, and shared the announcement in a message posted on social platform X.

Woman shot dead in Wah Cantt in suspected honour killing

NEWS DESK:

A married woman was shot dead at her father's home in Rawalpindi on Friday in what police described as an honour killing allegedly orchestrated by her husband and uncle through phone and video calls from Qatar.

Samira Aziz, who had been residing in Qatar with her husband, was brought to Pakistan a week earlier by two uncles under what her sister later alleged was a pretext. On the night of the incident, relatives arrived at the family home in the Lalazar area of Wah Cantt and, acting on instructions delivered via video call from Qatar, allegedly shot her multiple times.

According to the first information report lodged by Sub-Inspector Asif Iqbal Khan, the attackers, identified as Waleed and Asrar, who are close relatives of Aziz's father, entered the house after her aunt was instructed by phone to open the door. The FIR states that Aziz's husband, Suleman, then made a video call and directed the aunt to remove Aziz's sister from the room and "let them finish Samira off".

The two men allegedly drew pistols and opened fire, hitting Aziz in various parts of her body. She died at the scene.

The motive, as cited in the police report, stemmed from suspicions by Aziz's husband, who had allegedly found her speaking on the phone with another man while in Qatar. Aziz's sister, Sana Khan, who was present during the attack, provided a detailed statement to the police. She said that earlier in the evening several male relatives, including her father, Aziz Muhammad, and the two uncles who had accompanied Aziz from Qatar, had met at the house before leaving. The women were alone when the assailants arrived.

Rawalpindi City Police Officer Khalid Hamdani has taken notice of the case, and police have registered charges of murder, honour killing and abetment.

The case has been filed on behalf of the state. Aziz's uncle, Imtiaz, and her husband, Suleman, remain in Qatar. Police are conducting raids to arrest Waleed, Asrar and Sabir, who was reportedly standing guard at the door during the incident. Authorities said arrests are expected soon.

The case has drawn parallels with recent honour killing incidents in the region, including the Perodhay jirga murder case, and indicates that such crimes continue to occur in Pakistan despite existing legal prohibitions.

FIAASI shifted to airport sanitation

NEWS DESK:

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) immigration wing has been assigned to an administrative post at Karachi airport, with duties related to cleanliness, pest control and sewerage maintenance.

ASI Munawar Mehdi has been placed in charge of administrative oversight of washroom cleanliness, pest-control measures and sewerage upkeep at the airport, in coordination with airport management authorities.

Under the order, Mehdi has been instructed to submit hourly reports on the condition of airport washrooms and to supervise pest-control activity in sewerage areas within the premises.

Sources at Karachi airport said the posting followed the outcome of an internal inquiry against the officer. They added that the inquiry officer had recommended that Mehdi not be posted at any immigration check-post in future.

Under the inquiry outcome, the FIA posted Mehdi to the Deputy Director's Office and shifted him to an administrative assignment, which officials said was consistent with the inquiry's recommendations.

NEWS DESK:

The polio vaccination campaign in Pakistan's merged districts was affected by security concerns and population displacement, officials said. More than 935,000 children under five were targeted for vaccination in 2025, but authorities said full coverage could not be achieved.

Officials said thousands of families from North and South Waziristan, Bajaur and other merged districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have migrated to different parts of the country, which has made monitoring and vaccination efforts more difficult.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 19 polio cases were reported among children in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in 2025. These included four cases each in North Waziristan, Lakki Marwat and Tank; one each in Dera Ismail Khan and Lower Kohistan; two in



Torshar; and three in Bannu. Officials said staffing and operational levels for WHO and UNICEF programmes in the merged districts were re-

duced last year, while WHO funding was also curtailed, which they said affected campaign coverage.

Health authorities warned

that without coordinated vaccination during phases of displacement and resettlement, children in these areas remain at heightened risk. In Sindh,

officials said more than 12,000 children under five were recorded as missed during the final polio campaign of 2025 in Hyderabad and adjoining areas. Most refusals were reported in Cantonment localities and municipal towns including Hussainabad, Preetabad, Qasimabad and Tando Jam, with absent households and parental refusals cited as key reasons.

According to campaign data, the final nationwide anti-polio drive of 2025 vaccinated more than 44.6 million children across Pakistan. Punjab reported 22.9 million children vaccinated, followed by Sindh with 10.6 million, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa with 7.15 million and Balochistan with 2.58 million.

Officials said coverage in Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir also contributed to the national tally. They added that challenges in the merged districts reflected localised disruptions within specific high-risk areas.

THE TALK VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan Government Abolishes Levies Force After 142 Years: Historic Merger with Police Sparks Debate

Editorial: In a landmark administrative reform, the Government of Balochistan has abolished the historic Levies Force after 142 years, merging it into the Balochistan Police. The decision, approved by the Balochistan Cabinet, aims to modernize the province's law enforcement system and enhance its law and order capacity — but it has also sparked reservations among Levies personnel and opposition from several political parties.

A Force Rooted in History

The Levies Force of Balochistan was established in 1883 by Sir Robert Sandeman, the British political agent and administrator of the region. The force's core responsibilities included maintaining law and order, protecting vital installations, and collecting taxes and livestock revenue in tribal areas.

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Previous Reforms and Political Reversals
The merger of the Levies Force into the police is not unprecedented. During the tenure of General Pervez Musharraf, the force was initially merged with the police under then-Chief Minister Jam Muhammad Yousof. However, the move was reversed in 2008 by

Nawab Aslam Raisani of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), restoring the Levies to their traditional structure.

Now, more than a decade later, the Balochistan Assembly has again legislated to merge the Levies with the police, signaling the government's intent to build a unified, modern, and well-equipped law enforcement system in the province.

Government's Stance: Modernization and Uniformity

The provincial government describes the decision as part of a larger strategy to ensure professional policing, better coordination, and modern security management.

Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti stated that integrating the Levies with the police will help enhance counterterrorism capacity, digital monitoring, and operational effectiveness.

"This merger will help establish one uniform policing system in Balochistan. The government will provide modern equipment and training to all personnel to effectively deal with terrorism and extremism," the Chief Minister said. Officials emphasize that the reform will strengthen institutional structure, reduce duplication, and ensure better governance in remote and conflict-prone districts.

Reservations and Political Opposition

However, the decision has not been met with universal approval. Levies personnel across several districts have expressed strong reservations, arguing

that the merger undermines their historical role, tribal identity, and trust-based relationship with local communities.

A number of political parties in Balochistan have also opposed the move, describing it as a "hasty and non-consultative decision." They claim that the Levies Force has historically played a crucial role in maintaining peace in tribal areas where the police system remains ineffective.

Critics argue that merging a tribal community-based security structure into a centralized police institution could disrupt local dynamics and alienate the public. Some parties have demanded a parliamentary review of the cabinet's decision before full implementation.

A Divisive but Defining Reform

Despite the opposition, the Balochistan Government remains firm on its stance, describing the merger as a step toward institutional modernization, national integration, and professional law enforcement.

Supporters of the decision believe it will bring uniformity, transparency, and accountability across all districts, enabling the province to better combat militancy and improve coordination with federal security agencies such as the Frontier Corps (FC) and Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD).

The coming months

will reveal whether this bold reform strengthens Balochistan's security apparatus or fuels administrative and political friction within the province. Without a collective

Addressing Poverty and Inequality: A Call for Sincere Leadership and Perpetual Reforms



By Amjad Rashid:

Poverty and inequality, much like natural disasters, afflict societies worldwide, including Pakistan. These are not natural phenomena but rather systemic issues rooted in human actions and policies. To eradicate this disease, national governments must craft comprehensive strategies aimed at safeguarding future generations from its scourge.

In Pakistan, the onus lies heavily on our political elite, spanning all parties, to recognize the gravity of the situation and redirect their efforts towards combating this man-made affliction. Without a collective

awakening and a shift in approach, the cure will remain elusive. Moreover, at the international level, institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and the UN must prioritize social and cultural rights over neoliberal agendas, especially as the global order undergoes significant decay.

The challenges of poverty alleviation, malnutrition, stunted growth, inadequate sanitation, and unemployment are pervasive across South Asia and Africa. Collaborative efforts between these regions, bolstered by partnerships with nations like China, hold promise in addressing these issues.

However, reliance on the failing neoliberal order is futile; instead, a paradigm shift towards sustainable solutions is imperative. In Pakistan, the establishment of robust local governance structures with financial decentralization is paramount.

Political elites possess a window of opportunity to empower local bodies and enact pro-poor policies. The Chinese model serves as a beacon of inspiration, demonstrating the efficacy of such strategies when implemented effectively.

Regional connectivity, underpinned by a long-term vision,

emerges as a viable solution. It necessitates moving beyond the romanticized notions of democracy and socialism towards pragmatic approaches that address our unique challenges. Special economic zones,

coupled with initiatives for youth development and the expansion of remittances, offer short-term relief while perpetuating reforms to broaden the tax base and reduce dependency on electoral politics.

South Asia, in particular, requires a concerted effort towards regional connectivity, harnessing youth po-

tential, and fostering transparent governance free from corruption. The path forward does not demand extraordinary intellect but rather sincere leadership committed to implementing existing solutions.

The concept of Basic Democracy warrants reevaluation, with a focus on strengthening local bodies to eradicate poverty and pursue enduring prosperity through perpetual reforms.

It is incumbent upon all stakeholders responsible for the nation's development to prioritize this agenda and steer Pakistan towards a brighter future.

Energy shortage in Balochistan

Ajmal Khan
Poverty is not a static or fixed phenomenon. It is a multi-dimensional idea that encompasses quality in almost every sphere of life, ranging from calorie intake, life expectancy, living standards, literacy, and access to modern energy services. This type of poverty is always expressed from an income perspective. Sticking with the non-income dimensions of poverty, such as health, education and living standards, are as important as employment.

The two energy indicators of non-income dimensions, including electricity (no access to electricity) and cooking fuels (wood, dung and charcoal), constitute poverty. Goal no. 7 of SDGs contains universal access to modern energy services, increasing energy efficiency, and increasing renewable energy share. As we know, energy plays a vital role in the development process of a country, but in case of Pakistan, energy poverty is the largest single drain on Pakistan's economy.

When we talk about Balochistan, it is the direct and major victim of energy crisis, and has slowed down the growth of the province. Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, having an area of 347,190 km square and a population of 12,344,408 people. The major portion of the population live in rural areas, constituting 72.45%.

Only 36 Percent of Balochistan has access to energy. Balochistan is fac-

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

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

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

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

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

the province.

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

tiative to reduce load-shedding will not positively impact the province because the existing transmission lines are not that much capable of supplying any load beyond 600 MW. There is not a single 500 kV grid station in the province.

No doubt, it is impossible to power and extend transmission lines to the far-flung areas because it will cost too much. The electricity demand in rural areas of Balochistan is very low and the houses in rural areas need only lighting for roomed huts built of mud. Furthermore, investors feel hesi-

tant to invest in the province due to lack of infrastructure, revenue generation and security.

Considering all these factors, solar energy remains the best source because Balochistan receives the largest solar radiance in its area.

According to a World Bank assessment, Balochistan receives the highest average sunlight in the world, which makes it rich in solar energy. Keeping in view these factors and in spite of extending the transmission lines to the far-flung and remote areas, the government should

provide a solar panel to each house that is more economical and cost efficient. It will empower the socio-economic conditions of the population living in rural areas.

The Wind Corridor of Balochistan and Government's efforts: Besides solar energy, the wind energy is another essential source and Balochistan has been blessed with a high rate of wind speeds. The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), in their shared data, suggested that the wind speed in the coastal area of the province is

enough to generate electricity. In this line, Pakistan Council of Renewable Energy Technologies (PCRET) has electrified 1600 villages along the coastal side of Sindh and Balochistan.

A study suggested that the coastal belt of Pakistan can produce 50,000 MW through wind resources. To minimize the cost of these projects, the government should encourage local manufacturers of wind turbines.

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

The author is a research officer, member of Balochistan Think Tank Network.



Karachi sees spate of road accidents as New Year begins

NEWS DESK: Multiple traffic incidents have been reported on Karachi's roads since the start of the new year, including one near Landhi. A Hospital Chowangi where a 26-year-old woman riding a motorcycle was killed after being hit by a trailer carrying containers. In a separate incident in Orangi Town's Sector 11/1, Hawagathi, a man was killed after being hit by an unidentified vehicle. Meanwhile, on Mehran Highway near a rice warehouse, a truck carrying logs overturned and disrupted traffic, though no casualties were reported. Landhi Hospital accident: The accused, who took place on Friday morning near Landhi Hospital Chowangi in the Quaidabad Police limits, when a trailer struck a motorcycle, killing a 26-year-old woman identified as Bushra.

Witnesses said some bystanders threw stones at the trailer, breaking its windshield, after which the driver fled the scene. Police later arrived at the site and shifted the body to Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre for medico-legal formalities, while the motorcycle and trailer were impounded. SHO Quaidabad Muhammad Ali Shah said Bushra worked at a factory in the Landhi Export Processing Zone and belonged to Okara, Punjab, where her burial is planned. He added that family members have requested that the trailer remain in police custody until after the funeral. In another incident in Orangi Town's Sector 11/1 near Zaitoon

Madrasa, a 40-year-old unidentified man was killed in a traffic incident. The body was shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, while police and the crime scene unit carried out an inspection. Officials said preliminary information suggested the incident may have occurred at night in a collision with a heavy vehicle. As the victim could not be identified due to lack of fingerprint records, the body was later moved to the Fdi morgue after post-mortem. Meanwhile, on Mehran Highway near a rice warehouse, a truck carrying logs overturned and disrupted traffic. The police said the accident occurred due to potholes on the road. No injuries were reported and the vehicle was later removed to restore traffic flow.

K-PCM rolls out online open courts beginning from Bajaur

NEWS DESK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi has launched a series of online open courts, beginning from Bajaur district, to hear public complaints and issue directions to the relevant authorities. During the inaugural session, Afridi directed officials to resolve public complaints within 14 days and submit detailed reports. "We are moving forward on the pattern of our leader Imran Khan's vision. Your Prime Minister with you," he said. He ordered immediate action on complaints related to a lack of basic facilities in schools and staff absenteeism, and directed that issues faced by second-shift teachers be resolved on a priority basis. Afridi also directed the implementation of the minimum monthly wage policy and instructed that salaries be transferred directly into teachers' accounts. He said the provincial standard of one teacher per 40 students must be enforced. The chief minister further ordered strict enforcement of passenger limits and fare lists in public transport across the province, warning that licences of operators found violating

rules would be cancelled. Afridi also instructed health authorities to ensure doctors' attendance in hospitals and take prompt action on public complaints during the Haripur by-elections last year, sources said. The chief minister announced the restoration of the former FAIA Games, saying the initiative would provide sports opportunities for tribal youth. He also directed officials to address complaints related to link-road rehabilitation, water supply and other basic services in Bajaur.

Adil Raja, six others handed double life sentences for 'digital terrorism'

NEWS DESK: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Islamabad has handed down double life sentences to YouTuber Adil Raja, former army official Syed Akbar Hussain, and journalists Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir, Moazz Pirzada, Shaheen Sebbai, and Haider Mehdi. The sentences were announced by ATC Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra in cases regarding "digital terrorism" against state institutions during May 9, 2023.

The prosecution, represented by Raja Naveed Hussain Kiani, presented 24 witnesses before the court. On request of the prosecution, the trial was concluded in the absence of the accused, who were represented by court-appointed counsel, Advocate Gulfaam Ashraf Goraya. According to the court orders, each accused was sentenced to rigorous life imprisonment under Section 121 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) which pertains to waging, attempting to wage war or abetting waging of war against Pakistan. Another rigorous life imprisonment was ordered under Section 120-B of the PPC for criminal conspiracy. In addition to the life terms, the court awarded each convict an additional 35 years' rigorous imprisonment across five counts, along with a total fine of Rs1.5 million.

These include 10-year sentences under Section 121-A of the PPC for conspiracy to commit offences, punishable by Section 121, and Section 131 of the PPC for abetting mutiny or attempting to seduce a soldier, sailor, or airman from duty. Under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997, they were further sentenced to three separate 5-year rigorous imprisonment terms: Section 11-W for printing, publishing, or disseminating material to incite hatred or giving projection to any person convicted for a terrorist act, Section 21(i) for harboring of the offense, and Section 7(i) for acts of terrorism. The court ordered that all sentences run concurrently. While the proceedings were concluded in absence, the convicts retain the right to file an appeal in the Islamabad High Court within seven days. All sentences remain subject to final confirmation by the High Court. Further, the court extended the benefit of Section 382-B of the Code of Criminal Procedure which allows for a period of detention to be considered while awarding a sentence of imprisonment. The relevant SHOs have been directed to take the convicts, currently considered absconders, into custody.

Ex-Imran aide Shahzad Akbar says UK residence subjected to 'deliberate, targeted' attack

NEWS DESK: Former special assistant to the prime minister (SAFM) Mirza Shahzad Akbar has said that his house in the United Kingdom (UK) where he has been living in self-imposed exile — was subjected to a "deliberate and targeted criminal attack with the intent to cause serious harm".

The development comes a little over a week after Akbar said he suffered a fractured nose and other facial injuries after being attacked at his home.

In a post on X on Thursday, Akbar said that his home in Cambridgeshire, England came under attack on December 31, 2025, in a "deliberate and targeted criminal attack with the intent to cause serious harm".

He said that the perpetrators "criminally damaged the property and attempted to set it on fire, placing lives at immediate risk".



Akbar maintained it was the second such attack "within one week against my home, myself, and my family, each carried out with clear malicious intent". He held that the incidents were not isolated. "I was physically assaulted in a targeted attack on Dec 24, leaving me with substantial injuries," Akbar recalled. He added that UK authorities were actively investigating both events, which are

being treated as targeted attacks". "The UK has a legal and moral obligation to exhaust all available powers and resources to ensure that it remains a safe country for all, particularly for political dissidents and individuals at risk of persecution," he further said. Dawn has approached Metropolitan police for further details. Akbar, who was the accountability czar in the PTI government, said last week

that an unknown assailant dressed in "construction or waste-collection attire" attacked him in Cambridge. "The individual asked, 'Are you Shahzad Akbar?' and immediately began assaulting me," Akbar posted on X. "I sustained facial injuries, including bruising and a fractured nose." The former accountability adviser counted the assault "cowardly" and urged the British government

to ensure the safety of dissidents.

"Violence will not intimidate me or deter me from speaking out," he wrote, vowing to continue exposing "corruption, human rights violations, and the erosion of democratic norms in Pakistan".

This is the third such incident Akbar has reported since November 2023, when a masked individual threw acidic liquid at Akbar's home in Hertfordshire. While Akbar had initiated legal action alleging Pakistani state involvement, Pakistan's Foreign Office has "categorically rejected" those claims as "preposterous".

Recently declared a proclaimed offender by an Islamabad court, Akbar also faces extradition efforts. Last month, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had met United Kingdom High Commissioner Jatin Marriot and handed over extradition papers for Akbar.

ECP sends notice to Shafiqullah Jan, seeks explanation over Haripur by-poll allegations

NEWS DESK: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday sent a notice to the Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Shafiqullah Jan, seeking an explanation for his statement blaming the electoral body for irregularities during the Haripur by-elections last year, sources said.

During a press conference on December 19, Jan blamed the ECP for electoral irregularities, and claimed Form 47 was issued from Islamabad instead of the returning officer's office.

"This was a singular yet bizarre event in the country's history, when a Form-47 was issued from Islamabad," adding that "ECP didn't upload all Form-45s from 602 polling stations in the constituency, nor could the PML-N produce all Form-45s

from 602 polling stations." Sources said the ECP, in its notice, said "baseless" allegations were made against the commission concerning the conduct of the Haripur by-elections, including the issuance of Form-47 from Islamabad, the non-uploading of Form-45 on its website, and other claims of irregularities. They further added that the electoral body had re-

viewed the matter and "is of the considered view that allegations made in the said statement are incorrect, misleading, and not supported by any evidence". Sources said that such statements, when made publicly without any verifiable evidence, create "unnecessary confusion and adversely affect public confidence" in the electoral process. "It appears to be an attempt to malign

the institution." Jan has been directed to explain his position regarding the statements he made and provide "concrete and verifiable" evidence to support his claim within the next seven days.

Appropriate action, in accordance with the law, will be taken against Jan if he fails to provide evidence during the stipulated time period, said sources. In November, by-

elections were held for six national and seven provincial assembly seats, in which PML-N secured almost all the seats except one. However, the opposition party PTI alleged rigging and rejected the results.

For the NA-18 (Haripur) seat, PTI-backed independent candidate Shehraz Omar Ayub, wife of former opposition leader Omar Ayub, was defeated by PML-N's Babar Nawaz.

The seat was vacated by Omar Ayub Khan upon his disqualification by the ECP over convictions in various cases.

The Free and Fair Election Network (Faen), an electoral monitoring body, also reported that by-elections were marred by "recurring violations" of campaigning restrictions and "gaps" in results transparency.



'Spectrum-starved country': IT minister says govt to auction 600 MHz spectrum next month

NEWS DESK: Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunications Shazia Fatima Khawaja announced on Friday that Pakistan would auction the 600 megahertz (MHz) spectrum next month to provide better internet speeds and roll out 5G in the country.

In a meeting last week, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) approved the process of auctioning the 600 MHz spectrum within two months.

"The spectrum available for our telecom industry is extremely limited," said the minister while addressing the media in Islamabad, and added that telcos "provide services in the country using just the 24MHz".

"We are a spectrum-starved country," she said. "We are a country of 240 million people with only 274 MHz of spectrum," she stated, adding that "Bangladesh, with about two-thirds of Pakistan's population, provides 600 MHz".

The spectrum is the range of radio frequencies that carries wireless signals for mobile phones, the internet, TV, and radio. Mobile networks like 3G, 4G, and 5G operate by sending data over specific frequency bands within this spec-

trum. In South Asia, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka have launched 5G networks nationwide, while Pakistan, Nepal, and Afghanistan have yet to do so.

The federal minister maintained that spectrum availability in Pakistan was the lowest in the region due to the absence of any major spectrum auction for many years.

"It will not only improve our 3G and 4G services, but also introduce 5G in Pakistan for the first time," she elaborated. The federal minister

emphasised that the internet was "critical infrastructure," like roads used to be in the past.

"The internet plays a crucial role in the development of the social sector, large-scale economic policies, and national security. Without this [600MHz] level of connectivity, we cannot move forward," she maintained.

The IT minister said that it is vital to perceive the internet and connectivity as an "enabling tool" that will unlock the country's "economic potential and create employment". Last week, during a

press conference alongside the finance minister, Khawaja said that the government was trying to ensure that the auction is completed by the end of January or early February.

The federal minister said that in the auction, additional bands were being offered in Pakistan for the first time, which would not only improve 3G and 4G quality but also ensure the rollout of 5G services.

She stressed that the internet was integral to the government's "digitalisation efforts as part of the Digital Nation Pakistan Act, 2025". In November, the

consultant for the 5G spectrum auction presented its report to the government, which had remained stalled due to the PTCI and Telenor and litigation over the 2600 MHz band.

The report, prepared by US-based consultancy firm National Economic Research Associates (NERA), noted that Pakistan was offering 606MHz of new spectrum across six major bands: 700MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz, 2300MHz, 2600MHz and 3500MHz.

The 2600MHz band was considered the most suitable for 5G.

First-ever Thalassemia mobile van inaugurated in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan inaugurated its first-ever Thalassemia mobile van in Karachi, aimed at providing accessible screening and care for patients suffering from the genetic

blood disorder.

Speaking at the launch, Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal described the rising number of thalassemia patients as alarming and attributed it to negli-

gence by both the government and the public. He stressed the need for mandatory premarital testing, particularly for males, explaining that when two carriers of thalassemia minor marry,

there is a risk of having a child with thalassemia major. "Everyone is aware of this, yet very few get tested before marriage," he said. The minister high-

lighted the importance of blood transfusions and bone marrow transplant as the primary treatment for thalassemia. He noted that only one in 50,000 patients finds a compatible

bone marrow donor. He also announced that the government has simplified pre-transplant approval processes to facilitate timely treatment. Mustafa Kamal urged authorities to

make thalassemia screening mandatory before marriage, aiming to prevent the birth of children with the severe form of the disease. Addressing broader public health

challenges, the minister referenced the difficulties of vaccination campaigns, including polio, where vaccines are sometimes misrepresented as foreign conspiracies.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs the Federal Cabinet Meeting.

Three of family die in cars' collision in Nawabshah

N A W A B S H A H (INP): Three people, including a woman, were killed and two others received serious injuries in a tragic road accident in Nawabshah on Friday morning.

According to details, the accident occurred near Bachri Chowrang area of Nawabshah where two cars collided head-on, killing three people on the spot and critically injuring two children.

The dead people were later identified as Kashif Arian, Tahir Arian and Anum Arian and the injured children are Ahmad and Azlan.

Police and rescue teams reached the spot after being in-

formed and shifted the dead and injured to People's Medical Hospital.

According to police, the deceased were residents of the Bandhi area and were coming to Nawabshah.

Earlier on December 31, 2025, one Palestinian student died, and three became critically injured on Wednesday when a speedy bus collided with a motorcycle in Nawabshah.

Police said that the motorcyclists were students of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro, and they were en route to Quid-e-Awan University after meeting a

friend in Nawabshah. Police further said that these students were returning to Hyderabad on heavy bikes when the accident occurred. According to police, the accident occurred as the driver lost control of the passenger bus. In Quetta, the price of a 20 kg flour bag has increased from Rs2,400 to between Rs2,450 and Rs 2,500.

Meanwhile, the price of a 50 kg bag has shot up from Rs 6,000 to Rs6,500, while a 100 kg bag has now crossed Rs12,000.

The soaring prices have put a heavy burden on household budgets, leaving the public worried and flour

mill owners under pressure.

Badruddin, Central Chairman of Pakistan Flour Mills Association,

while speaking to media, said that wheat and flour supply chains have been practically restricted. As a result, flour shortages have intensified across various regions of the country, especially in Balochistan and K h y b e r Pakhtunkhwa.

He added that unless the supply system is restored, the crisis may go from bad to worse.

The public fears that if the issue is not addressed promptly, getting basic food items will soon feel like chasing a shadow.

Illegal mountain cutting banned under Section 144

ABBOTTABAD (INP): Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad, Sarmad Saleem Akram on Friday imposed a complete ban under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code on illegal cutting of mountains, excavation, and the extraction of soil, stones, and rocks across the district.

According to the notification, the ban has been enforced in view of the serious environmental damage caused by unchecked mountain cutting. The deputy commissioner said such activities increase the risks of landslides, soil erosion, disruption of natural drainage systems, and pose serious threats to life and property, particularly during the monsoon season.

He added that these practices are against public interest and government policies. The notification strictly prohibits unauthorized excavation of mountains, use of heavy machinery, and the transportation and disposal of extracted soil and stones.

That verdict, announced by ATC Judge Manzoor Ali Gul at Kot Lakhpat Jail, also saw PTI leaders Aaliya Hamza and Sanam Javed sentenced to five years each. Several other accused were convicted or acquitted in separate arson and vandalism cases linked to the unrest.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani in a group photograph with participants of the National Workshop Balochistan at Awan-e-Sadr.

Winter's thickest fog swallows Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) cities

PESHAWAR (INP): What it seemed to be this winter season's thickest fog engulfed a number of cities in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday morning, reducing visibility to almost zero and shutting down major motorways.

The fog was dense in Lahore, the thickest of the season, disrupting early morning commuters' movements as it blurred their wind shields and helmet glasses. Vehicles moved at a crawling pace, motorists relied heavily on fog lights, and traffic congestion was reported on several arterial roads.

Commuters said the fog was the worst during the current win-

ter season as it swallowed the whole city of Lahore. Severe cold coupled with hazardous air quality combined to disrupt normal life across the region, severely impacting road, rail and air travel.

A sharp drop in temperatures, extremely low visibility and poor pollution levels caused widespread delays and inconvenience for thousands of commuters and passengers.

Minimum temperatures across cities intensified the cold wave conditions.

Different sections of the motorways had again closed for traffic after dense fog engulfed large parts of the Punjab and K h y b e r

Pakhtunkhwa. The following motorways were closed for all kinds of traffic:

M-1 from Peshawar to Rikhsai and from Swabi to Burhan, M-2 from Lahore to Kot Momin, M-4 from Abdul Hakeem to Multan, M-5 from Multan to Zahir Pir, and M-11 from Lahore to Sialkot. Motorway

Police Central Region spokesperson Syed Imran Ahmed said the primary objective of the closures was to ensure the safety of motorists and passengers during hazardous fog conditions.

According to the motorway police, the sources, safe travel times during fog are

from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm. The Motorway police have appealed the drivers to use the Grand Trunk (GT) Road for travelling. They have also urged the drivers to drive slowly and switch on fog lights while driving. The motorway police have also requested people to stay home and avoid unnecessary travelling.

Dense fog has also disrupted traffic at several places in the province on the National Highways, with visibility ranging from zero to 100 meters. The Motorway police have also informed that for assistance or guidance, motorists can contact the NHMP Helpline at 130.

Minister commends FBR for achieving highest tax collection

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator M u h a m m a d Aurangzeb has lauded the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) field formations for achieving the highest tax collection ever recorded in the month of December. Senator Aurangzeb said this while addressing Team FBR and field formations via a video link conference in Islamabad on Friday.

The Federal Board of Revenue collected 1,427.1 billion rupees in December 2025, achieving 99 percent of its monthly target of 1,446 billion rupees. The finance minister described the December 2025 performance as a strong validation of the government's fiscal reform agenda and sustained focus on compliance, enforcement, and digitization. Aurangzeb urged the FBR field formations to further intensify their efforts and double down on initiatives aimed at deepening and widening the tax net. The minister emphasized that better tax compliance and enforcement measures are the only sustainable way to ease the tax burden on the formal sector. He said the government's strategy of digitizing the economy, promoting cashless transactions, and strengthening enforcement while maintaining business momentum has begun to deliver tangible and sustainable results.

CM Maryam Nawaz launches major initiative to promote aquaculture, shrimp farming

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has taken a major step toward promoting aquaculture in the province, particularly shrimp farming.

Under the new plan, shrimp estates will be developed over a total area of 5,600 acres in Sargodha and Alipur. The project seeks to transform barren and saline lands into productive assets through modern shrimp farming practices, marking a significant milestone in Punjab's agricultural and economic development.

According to official updates, the 15th daily progress report of the Sargodha shrimp farming project has been released.

So far, nine shrimp ponds have been completed on 20 acres, while

5,320 metres of drainage work has been finalized. Surveys for an additional 10 acres have also been completed as part of the next phase. Meanwhile, a quality control laboratory being established in Lahore at a cost of Rs4.5 billion is nearly complete, with 99% of construction finished. A separate laboratory in saline lands into productive assets through modern shrimp farming research and provide a favorable environment for aquaculture, has also reached 98% completion.

To support capacity building, Pakistani experts have completed training visits to Saudi Arabia and Mexico, while international specialists Jeffrey and Jamie Dominguez have visited Pakistan to provide technical guidance.



ISLAMABAD: The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mr. Justice Yahya Afridi, being presented with a souvenir by Mr. Farhan Aiza Khawaja, Director General, Civil Service Academy, while leading the delegation of the 53rd Common Training Program, at the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Fisheries reforms key to boost exports, sustainable revenue: Junaid Anwar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry has called for urgent reforms in the fisheries sector, saying reliable energy supply and lower input costs were critical to boosting exports and generating sustainable revenue.

Speaking at a meeting Junaid Chaudhry said persistent electricity shortages and high energy prices were constraining production and eroding the global competitiveness of

Pakistani seafood exporters. The remarks came after Assistant Fisheries Commissioner Farhan Khan briefed participants on structural gaps and operational challenges facing the sector. The minister said uninterrupted power supply, affordable feed and efficient power generation were essential to unlock growth and help the fisheries sector gain recognition as a full-fledged industry.

"Pakistan has abundant raw material, including fish, shrimp, crabs, lob-

sters, squid, cuttlefish and bivalves, which could support value-added processing", he added.

Officials told the meeting that more than 100 fish processing plants, ranging from small units to large commercial facilities, were operating across the country, backed by about 400 registered exporters. "Most facilities were concentrated in Karachi, with limited infrastructure in Balochistan, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab lagged significantly in sectoral

development", they added. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2022 report, fish and fish preparations ranked 10th among Pakistan's top export commodities in the 2024-25 fiscal year, accounting for 1.34% of total exports valued at \$32.04 billion.

The sector outperformed exports of fruits and vegetables, pharmaceuticals, sports goods and surgical instruments.

Balochistan Chief Secretary Orders Transparent Hiring, Digital Reforms



Syed Muhammad Qasem: QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan, Syed Muhammad Qasem, chaired a high-level meeting of the Secretaries Committee, calling for stronger oversight, fair recruitment and faster completion of public welfare projects. He said that strengthening the

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system would boost transparency and improve performance in development schemes. The Chief Secretary also stressed that vacant posts across departments must be filled strictly on merit. Officials briefed the meeting that more than 16,000 vacancies in Grades 1-15 and

4,000 positions above Grade 16 have already been advertised. To encourage a cashless economy, the Chief Secretary directed that all government payments and transactions be shifted to digital platforms. He further instructed employees to ensure presence at their assigned duty

stations. Khan added that using social media to highlight development projects helps build public confidence and ensures timely, transparent execution. He said these measures represent a significant step toward strengthening good governance and public service in Balochistan.

Bodies of Four Unidentified Individuals Found in Harnai Mountains

News Desk: Four unidentified bodies were recovered from a mountainous area of Harnai, officials confirmed on Friday. According to local sources, residents spotted the bodies in the remote hills and immediately informed the district administration. Authorities said the bodies have been shifted to Harnai District Hospital for identification and medico-legal procedures. Further investigation is under way to determine the cause of death and the identity of the deceased, officials added.



Revenue Department Meeting Held in Barkan

BARKAN: Deputy Commissioner Khadim Abdullah Khosa chaired a detailed meeting with revenue staff to review the district's revenue performance. Assistant Commissioner Khadim Hussain Bhanger, Naib Tehsildar, accountant, and patwaris attended the meeting. Key Decisions: Ensure timely, transparent, and complete collection of Ushr, mutations, and agricultural income tax. Maintain accuracy of revenue records and timely completion of mutations. Address public issues on a priority basis with courtesy and in accordance with the law. DC's Statement: "Responsibilities should be fulfilled with honesty, integrity, and a sense of national service. Improving the revenue system will increase government revenue and restore public trust. The revenue staff resolved to implement the DC's directives effectively."



Allotment Process to Begin in Dera Murad Jamali Township



NASEERABAD: Deputy Commissioner Zulfiqar Ali Karrar chaired a meeting to review allotment in Dera Murad Jamali Township [1]. The process will

be inaugurated by Provincial Minister Mir Muhammad Sadiq Umrani, providing citizens with ownership rights. The administration assures transparency and fairness.

MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rahman Baloch Inspects RHC Jiwani, Police Station



GWADAR: MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rahman Baloch visited RHC Jiwani, inaugurating the solarization system and reviewing healthcare services. MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rahman

Baloch, He inspected various departments, discussing challenges and directing improvements. Rahman also visited Jiwani Police Station, discussing security and policing with DSP.

Commissioner Barchi Honors Retiring Federal levies Risaldar Haji Rozuddin



LORALAI: A farewell ceremony was held for Haji Rozuddin, Federal levies Risaldar, marking his retirement after 45 years of service. Commissioner Wali Mohammad

Barchi praised Rozuddin's dedication, presenting him with a certificate and cash award. Rozuddin thanked Monday that water supply to Gwadar city is currently being sustained through multiple sources despite

Provincial Minister Condemns Terrorist Attack in Ziarat



QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Food Haji Noor Mohammad Khan Domar has strongly condemned the terrorist attack on innocent civilians at Tur Khan Sur Bridge, Harnai-Sanjawi Road. The minister expressed condolences to the family of the martyred Samatullah and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

He emphasized that Ziarat and Harnai are peaceful districts, and terrorists will not be allowed to disrupt the peace. Security forces have launched a search operation in the area, and the government assures citizens of their safety and security.

Water situation eases in Gwadar as pipeline projects advance

GWADAR (INP): As the government of Balochistan continues to prioritize reliable drinking water for communities across Gwadar district, another milestone has been achieved with the restoration of potable water

drinking water. The project was completed in about two and a half months. The scheme was formally inaugurated by Member of the Provincial Assembly Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rahman Baloch, who praised the departments

statement released Monday that water supply to Gwadar city is currently being sustained through multiple sources despite problems with local domicile issuance, paperwork, and government services. Baloch assured prompt resolution, directing officials to ensure transparency and efficiency.



supply to Chorr Bandan near Pasin after 15 years. Gwadar Pro reported quoting a statement issued Wednesday by the Directorate General Public Relations. The relief comes through the rehabilitation of a key water supply scheme, including the laying of an approximately 15-kilometer pipeline from Pasin town to Chorr Bandan to ensure the delivery of clean

involved for helping resolve the long-standing shortage. He said the project reflects the provincial government's commitment to serving public needs through practical and sustained initiatives. Residents of Chorr Bandan welcomed the restoration of water supply and expressed hope that development and welfare projects across Gwadar district

Commissioner Kalat Holds Khuli Kachari in Hub

HUB: Commissioner Kalat Division Tufail Ahmed Baloch held a Khuli Kachari, addressing citizens' issues and complaints. Baloch assured prompt resolution, directing officials to ensure transparency and efficiency.

S. No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost (Rs.)	Bid Security 2% for S.No 1 and 2% S.No 2&3 in (Rs.)	Tender Fee (Rs.)	Time of Completion
1	UPGRADATION OF 50 MIDDLE SCHOOLS TO HIGH LEVEL IN BALUCHISTAN PSEEP No. 532, 2.205.231 GWADAR WAPDA PAKISTAN DISTRICT JAL MAGSI BENS CODE 1224 TSE-2520103843	74,405,000/-	(2%) 2,232,000/-	2,000/-	24 Month
2	UPGRADATION OF 100 PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO MIDDLE LEVEL IN BALUCHISTAN PSEEP No. 5374 2.205.2320 GWPS SHAH KAKRAZ CHAN DISTRICT JAL MAGSI BENS CODE 11640 TSE-2520103843	25,480,000/-	(2%) 510,000/-	1,500/-	24 Month
3	UPGRADATION OF 100 PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO MIDDLE LEVEL IN BALUCHISTAN PSEEP No. 5374 2.205.2330 GWPS BUEWANA DISTRICT JAL MAGSI BENS CODE 10215 TSE-2520103843	25,480,000/-	(2%) 510,000/-	1,500/-	24 Month

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (E-TENDER FOR S.NO 1)

The Executive Engineer, CWP/PAH Building Department District Jhal Magsi, invites sealed tender forms (as per schedule B) based on composite schedule of rates 2023 Government of Balochistan from interested contractors/firms for the PSEEP 2025-26 works listed below:

S.No 1 ONLY ELECTRONICALLY BID WILL BE SUBMITTED. NO PHYSICAL BID IS REQUIRED

Eligibility of Bidders: Procurers must be made under B-PRA Rules 2014, amended up-to-date. Bid is open to all bidders who meet the following Basic Eligibility Criteria: An individual bidder having valid PEC registration with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) C-4 and above (up to 200 million) in Relevant Category and Specialized Code is CE100; General Civil Engineering (Minor), (EC200) (generalized buildings). Or above, b. Has completed Two (02) Contract of similar nature as a Contractor during last Five (05) years with completion certificate. c. Has an engineering turnover of 10% of Project Cost during last Five years. d. Active registration certificates from Income Tax Authority (FBR (NTN)) and Balochistan Revenue Authority (BRA) e. for S.No 1, The bidder provide an Authority Letter/Power of Attorney or a Self-Authority Letter on a No. 100-Judicial Stamp Paper for this NTN, clearly mentioning the name of work and TSE No. with CNIC copy of the owner, duly attested by 1st class magistrate. f. Under taking on judicial stamp paper (duly attested by First Class Magistrate) that the firm was never black listed by any Government / Bank Government Organization g. For S.No 1, Available Credit limit of 70% of estimated cost Account statement by concerned Bank of last 5 years provided as latest. h. Certified Audit Reports Prepared by Chartered Accountant appearing on the list of firm on CAP directory as per international standard on Auditing, (Last Three Years). i. FBR Return Last three years for S.No 2&3. j. Bid Security: The bid must accompany Bid Security in the form of Bank Guarantee, Deposit at Call of 2% for S.No 1 and 2% S.No 2 & 3 specified above in the name of the under signed from a scheduled bank. **Method of Procurement:** Single Stage Two Envelope Procedure. a. The document fee through Green Chalan in the NBP under Head of account C-02718 The NTN & Bidding Document can be obtained electronically from www.eppr.gov.pk & duly filed attached with copies of supporting/required documents, must be delivered in sealed envelopes by hand or through registered mail before 18th January-2026 at 12:00 PM at Office The Executive Engineer, CWP/PAH Building Department District Jhal Magsi of Quetta. **Tender opening:** envelopes containing technical bid will be opened on 18th January-2026 at 1:00 PM on EPPS System for S.No 1 and Manual S.No 2&3. 7 envelope containing financial bid of technically qualified bidder will be opened later. Financial proposal of technically qualified bidder will be opened and thus will be unopened. **Bids Validity:** Thirty (30) days. Address: at Office of The Sub Divisional Officer, CWP/PAH Building Department District Jhal Magsi. Email: info@eppr18@gmail.com Phone Number 0837-430184

PRO No.3080/02-01-2025

CONSULTING ARCHITECT, CWP/PAH BUILDING DEPARTMENT QUETTA

PRO No.3080/02-01-2025

Families see relief from falling food prices, but urban cost pressures persist

NEWS DESK: The inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 5.6% year-on-year in December 2025, down from 6.1% in the previous month but higher than 4.1% in December 2024, indicating price pressure on households despite the month-on-month decline.

On a month-on-month basis, the CPI decreased by 0.5% in December 2025, against an increase of 0.4% in November and a rise of 0.1% in December last year.

CPI inflation in urban areas rose by 5.8% year-on-year in December 2025, easing from 6.1% in the previous month and higher than 4.4% recorded in December 2024.

On a month-on-month basis, urban inflation fell by 0.4%, compared with a 0.5% increase in November, while it had declined by 0.1% in December 2024.

The latest inflation data underscores a deceleration in price pressures towards the end of 2025, largely in line with market expectations. According to brokerage house assessment, the moderation was fuelled mainly by a sharp correction in food prices, particularly perishable items, amid improved supply conditions and a favourable base effect.



"The drop was largely driven by a favourable base effect, easing food prices, and a decline in petroleum product prices, collectively anchoring headline inflation at multi-year lows," noted Arif Habib Limited (AHL).

The headline inflation for December was lower, with food inflation declining by 2.2% month-on-month.

Prices of key kitchen staples such as vegetables posted double-digit declines, easing pressure on household budgets after a prolonged period of elevated food costs.

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Pakistan proposes 5% levy on mobile imports to fund local manufacturing effort

NEWS DESK: The government is likely to impose up to 5% levy on the import of mobile phones and electronic devices in the new proposed policy for the period 2026-33.

During the entire period, the government expects to collect \$368 million through the levy, which will be spent on the localisation of mobile phone manufacturing.

Already high tax rates are being charged on the import of mobile phones to give a push to the localisation drive.

The Mobile and Electronic Device Manufacturing Policy has been finalised and is awaiting presentation to the prime minister.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) Haroon Akhtar Khan chaired a meeting on the proposed policy, which was attended by Secretary Industries and Production Saif Anjum, Engineering Development Board (EDB) CEO Hammad Mansoor and representatives of mobile phone manufacturers.

During the meeting, a detailed briefing was given on the new policy.

SAPM stated that the policy had been designed after extensive consultations with all stakeholders and covered mobile phones, laptops and other electronic devices, making it a comprehensive and broad-based policy.

He added that the policy represented a major shift from simple assembly to full-scale manufacturing and was essential for the promotion of local production and exports.

Under the policy, international brands will be encouraged by manufacturing electronic devices in Pakistan, while local brands will be empowered to expand their manufacturing capabilities.

He stated that the policy clearly defined phase-wise manufacturing targets and timelines, and the transition from assembly to manufacturing was on Pakistan's doorstep, with the country's economic progress closely linked to that shift.

EDB, the policy aims to achieve 50% localisation in mobile phones by 2033.

It sets a target of 70% e-waste recovery through organised systems, which will have a positive impact on the environment.

Additionally, 50,000 skilled workers will be trained, including 15,000 specialised professionals. SAPM informed the meeting that the new proposed policy would be presented to the prime minister in the near future.

Under the previous policy, 37 licences were issued by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for local assembly.

As a result, production grew from 0.1 million units in 2019 to 30.1 million units.

According to the PTA's projections for 2025, 93% of market demand was met domestically while imports dropped from 16 million units (2019) to 2.04 million units in 2025.

Apart from those, Pakistan exported 230,000 mobile phones.

Former Indus Water Commissioner Jamaat Ali Shah told The Express Tribune that India cannot take unilateral actions under the treaty and must share all relevant data with Pakistan.

He said India is currently building a run-of-the-river dam on the Chenab River. A panel under India's environment ministry has recently approved the 260-megawatt Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project in the Kishtwar district of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

India is bound to share information with Pakistan relating to any project, including run-of-the-river schemes, under the Indus Waters Treaty," he said, adding that India should not take the issue to international arbitration.

While such projects may not immediately affect water inflows, he said the obligation to share information remains mandatory.

He noted that although India announced suspension of the treaty, both a neutral expert and the court of arbitration ruled in Pakistan's favour and confirmed that hearings on water disputes would continue.

"Pakistan should now approach India," he said, adding that if the court rules in Pakistan's favour, India could face sanctions similar to those imposed on Iran.

Urban inflation trends are particularly noteworthy, as cities account for a large share of consumption and services demand.

Despite the month-on-month decline, the urban core inflation remains elevated, indicating that price stickiness in services is persisting even as commodity-linked components soften.

Rural headline inflation, while slightly lower, also reflects limited pass-through of easing food prices into non-food categories.

"Performance of other segments arrived in a muted form as anticipated, including some of the core segments."

Utilities were up slightly for the month, while clothing, education, restaurants, hotels and miscellaneous segments were the main contributors to the increase in core inflation," noted Taurus Securities.

Energy prices remain under critical risk factor.

Although declining global oil prices and recent fuel price adjustments have supported the disinflationary trend, Pakistan's energy sector continues to face structural imbalances.

Any upward revision in electricity tariffs, gas prices, or petroleum levies, often required to meet fiscal and IMF-related commitments, could quickly feed back into inflation.

Fiscal consolidation pressures add to the challenge. With limited space for subsidies and little movement.

Economic data including US payrolls and jobs figures are due next week, providing clues on the health of the labour market and where the Fed's policy rate may end up this year.

Much of the focus at the start of the year will be on who US President Donald Trump picks to be the next Fed chair as the term of current head Jerome Powell ends in May.

Investors are bracing for Trump's pick to be more dovish and cut rates after the president repeatedly criticised Powell and the Fed for not cutting rates more swiftly or deeply.

Traders are pricing in two cuts this year compared to one projected by a currently divided Fed board.

"We expect that concerns around central bank independence will extend into 2026, and see the upcoming change in Fed leadership as one of several reasons why risks around our Fed funds rate forecast skew dovish," Goldman strategists said.

The yen JPY = was at 156.85 per US dollar after rising less than 1% against the greenback in 2025. It hovered close to the 10-month low of 157.90 touched in November that drew policymaker attention and raised the prospect of intervention.

The Bank of Japan hiked interest rates twice in last year but that did little to improve yen performance as the cautious pace frustrated investors, with speculators reversing significant long yen positions held in April.

There has also been growing investor unease about fiscal expansion under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, though she has sought to ease some of that concern.

Traders are pricing the next BOJ rate hike as being toward the end of 2026. Min Joo Kang, senior economist at IBQ, expects the most likely time to be October.

"A further fiscal push could backfire on the economy, but the current government is expected to maintain its expansionary policy stance, posing a significant risk to the economy in 2026," Kang said in a client note.

The Australian and New Zealand dollars started the new year on the front foot. The Aussie AUD = was 0.35% higher at \$0.66975 after a nearly 8% rise in 2025, its strongest yearly performance since 2020.

board appointments, shareholder voting patterns, transaction values, tax filings, and confirmation of whether capital gains or withholding taxes were paid in Pakistan.

The notice warned that failure to comply could result in punitive action, including the revocation of petroleum rights. The requirements are part of national security considerations used to evaluate companies operating in the country's oil and gas sector.

Both companies have admitted that the transaction took place without prior approval. However, the DGPC has not initiated enforcement action under Rule 69d).

CCP imposes Rs2.36b penalties in 2025

NEWS DESK: During 2025, the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) imposed penalties of Rs2.363 billion, recovered Rs932.56 million and issued 47 show-cause notices to undertakings involved in cartelisation, price-fixing, prohibited agreements and deceptive marketing practices.

According to an official statement issued on Thursday, the Commission reduced its court case backlog by 70%.

Through early hearing applications, appointment of law-

yers and follow-up, it secured decisions in 434 cases out of a backlog of 567 cases as of August 2023, averaging almost one case every two days.

The CCP issued 11 orders under the Competition Act, 2010, including five related to cartelisation and prohibited agreements and four for deceptive marketing.

One FMCG order set aside a show-cause notice for lack of evidence.

It also granted second-phase merger approval for PTCL's

acquisition of Telenor Pakistan and Orion Towers after assessments across five markets.

Penalties included Rs1.562 billion on Aisha Steel Mills and International Steels for price-fixing, Rs375 million on the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council and members, and Rs155 million on the Pakistan Poultry Association and DOC companies.

Other penalties targeted automakers, schools, pharmaceutical distributors and transporters.



Dollar makes soft start to 2026 after biggest annual drop in eight years

NEWS DESK: The US dollar made a feeble start to 2026 on Friday, making for light trading volume and little movement.

The dollar index =USD, which measures the US currency against six other units, was at 98.186 after registering a 9.4% decline in 2025, its biggest drop in eight years.

"We have seen the peak in dollar supremacy," said Kyle Rodda, senior market analyst at Capital.com. Even so, there has not been two consecutive years of decline in the

Worries about the US fiscal deficit, a global trade war and concern about Federal Reserve independence cast a shadow over the market last year, resulting in most currencies gaining sharply against the dollar, with the Japanese yen an exception.

The euro EUR = was steady at \$1.1752 on the first trading day of the year after surging 13.5% last year, while sterling GBP = last bought \$1.3473 following a 7.7% increase in 2025.

Both clocked their steepest annual increases since 2017.

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Petroleum Division delays action over 'illegal' energy deal

NEWS DESK: Six months after issuing show-cause notices to energy companies for alleged unauthorised changes in ownership and management control, the Petroleum Division has yet to take action, despite the strategic industry classification of the firms involved.

The parent companies of Spud Energy Limited and Frontier Holdings Limited offloaded their interests without formal approval from relevant authorities, a violation of national regulations.

The controversy began on March 6, 2025, when Phoenix Exploration sold its 73.3 per cent stake in Jura Energy to IDL Investments Limited, a firm registered in the British Virgin Islands.

On July 18, 2025, the Director General Petroleum Concession (DGPC), under the Ministry of Energy's Petroleum Division, issued a show-cause notice stating that the transaction was "neither disclosed nor approved prior to examination" as required under Pakistan's petroleum rules.

Under these rules, companies holding petroleum rights are obligated to disclose changes in ownership and management control, the issuance of new capital, board appointments, voting rights, and corporate structure.

The DGPC directed Spud Energy, Frontier Holdings, and Jura Energy to submit comprehensive documentation within 30 days. Required disclosures included detailed financial statements of IDL Investments, Phoenix Exploration, Jura Energy, PetExPro, Frontier Holdings, and Spud Energy, both before and after the transaction.

Regulators also requested details on new board appointments, shareholder voting patterns, transaction values, tax filings, and confirmation of whether capital gains or withholding taxes were paid in Pakistan.

The notice warned that failure to comply could result in punitive action, including the revocation of petroleum rights. The requirements are part of national security considerations used to evaluate companies operating in the country's oil and gas sector.

Both companies have admitted that the transaction took place without prior approval. However, the DGPC has not initiated enforcement action under Rule 69d).

Government urged to sue India over 'water war'

NEWS DESK: Following Pakistan's victory over India in a short-term war, India has launched what experts describe as a "water war" against Pakistan by releasing and storing water in its dams in a manner that has damaged Pakistani crops.

Experts say Pakistan should now take the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to seek sanctions against India for waging a water war in violation of international obligations. India is bound under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) to share information with Pakistan whenever it plans to release or store water, or construct run-of-the-river dams on rivers allocated to Pakistan, including the Chenab.

Pakistan and India have a long history of legal disputes over water. The latest legal battle emerged after India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, prompting international arbitration. International arbitrators later endorsed Pakistan's position, ruling that the treaty cannot be unilaterally suspended and remains fully intact and binding on both countries.

Experts reiterated that India is legally re-



quired to share water-related data with Pakistan, including details of releases, storage and construction of run-of-the-river hydropower projects.

Former Indus Water Commissioner Jamaat Ali Shah told The Express Tribune that India cannot take unilateral actions under the treaty and must share all relevant data with Pakistan.

He said India is currently building a run-of-the-river dam on the Chenab River. A panel under India's environment ministry has recently approved the 260-megawatt Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project in the Kishtwar district of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

India is bound to share information with Pakistan relating to any project, including run-of-the-river schemes, under the Indus Waters Treaty," he said, adding that India should not take the issue to international arbitration.

While such projects may not immediately affect water inflows, he said the obligation to share information remains mandatory.

He noted that although India announced suspension of the treaty, both a neutral expert and the court of arbitration ruled in Pakistan's favour and confirmed that hearings on water disputes would continue.

"Pakistan should now approach India," he said, adding that if the court rules in Pakistan's favour, India could face sanctions similar to those imposed on Iran.

Petroleum Division delays action over 'illegal' energy deal

NEWS DESK: Six months after issuing show-cause notices to energy companies for alleged unauthorised changes in ownership and management control, the Petroleum Division has yet to take action, despite the strategic industry classification of the firms involved.

The parent companies of Spud Energy Limited and Frontier Holdings Limited offloaded their interests without formal approval from relevant authorities, a violation of national regulations.

The controversy began on March 6, 2025, when Phoenix Exploration sold its 73.3 per cent stake in Jura Energy to IDL Investments Limited, a firm registered in the British Virgin Islands.

On July 18, 2025, the Director General Petroleum Concession (DGPC), under the Ministry of Energy's Petroleum Division, issued a show-cause notice stating that the transaction was "neither disclosed nor approved prior to examination" as required under Pakistan's petroleum rules.

Under these rules, companies holding petroleum rights are obligated to disclose changes in ownership and management control, the issuance of new capital, board appointments, voting rights, and corporate structure.

The DGPC directed Spud Energy, Frontier Holdings, and Jura Energy to submit comprehensive documentation within 30 days. Required disclosures included detailed financial statements of IDL Investments, Phoenix Exploration, Jura Energy, PetExPro, Frontier Holdings, and Spud Energy, both before and after the transaction.

Regulators also requested details on new board appointments, shareholder voting patterns, transaction values, tax filings, and confirmation of whether capital gains or withholding taxes were paid in Pakistan.

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Australia's Usman Khawaja to retire after Ashes finale, slams 'racial stereotyping'

NEWS DESK: Usman Khawaja said on Friday he will retire from international cricket after the fifth and final Ashes clash against England, leaving a legacy as Australia's first Muslim Test cricketer while lashing out at perceived "racial stereotyping" during his 15-year career.

The 39-year-old will pad up for the last time, should he be selected, when the Test gets underway in Sydney on Sunday, ending months of speculation about his future.

It would be an 88th Test for the classy left-hander, culminating a career where he began after making his debut at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 2011, also against England. The number one emotion is contentment. "I'm very lucky to have played so many games for Australia the way I have," Khawaja said.

"I hope I have inspired people along the way. I'm a proud Muslim coloured boy from Pakistan who was told that he would never play



for the Australian cricket team. Look at me now, and you can do the same." Khawaja immigrated to Australia from Islamabad as a child, battling the odds to become the country's first

Pakistan-born, and first Muslim, national player. At one point, he was the only Asian first-class player in Australia and is credited as a role

model who opened doors for others.

"Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters since his Test debut 15 years ago, and off field, particularly through the Usman Khawaja Foundation," said Cricket Australia

chief Todd Greenberg. "On behalf of Australian cricket I would like to thank and congratulate Usman for all he has achieved."

Khawaja's foundation helps youths from refugee, immigrant, Indigenous, and poor socioeconomic backgrounds through introductory cricket programs and educational

support. Khawaja, a quitted pilot, has plundered 6,206 runs in Test cricket with 16 centuries, averaging 43.39. He smashed a career-high 232 against Sri Lanka a year ago, but has not made three figures since. The current Ashes series has been a rollercoaster ride, with the veteran batsman coming under scrutiny.

He injured his back in the first Test in Perth and was replaced as opener in the second innings by Travis Head who blasted a match-winning 149. Khawaja did not feature in the next match at Brisbane and was omitted from the team for the third Test in Adelaide, only to get a lifeline when Steve Smith dropped out of it just before the toss.

He came in at number three and scored 82 before making 29 and 0 in the fourth Test at Melbourne.

"I'm glad I get to leave on any own terms, with a little bit of dignity, and go out at the SCG where I love it."

Narvaez, Ruegg to defend Tour Down Under titles

NEWS DESK: Tour Down Under champions Jhonatan Narvaez and Noemi Ruegg will be back to defend their titles at the season-opening UCI World Tour race, officials said Friday, heading a stellar field that also boasts Tour de France queen stage winner Ben O'Connor.

Ecuador's Narvaez (UAE Team Emirates) won a heart-pumping climb up Willunga Hill to help claim the Ochre Jersey in Adelaide in 2025 ahead of Spain's Javier Romo (Movistar Team).

Switzerland's Ruegg took out the women's race from the Dutch rider Silke Smits (Team Sunweb).

UAE Team Emirates are boosted by 2023 winner Jay Vine, with the Australian coming off a stellar season that saw him clinch the mountain classification at the Vuelta a Espana for the second year in a row.

They are joined by British rider Madeline



Romandie and Volta a Catalunya.

The men's field for the five-stage race from January 21 to 25 will feature 140 riders from all 18 UCI World Teams as well as Swiss ProSeries team Tudor Pro Cycling, owned by retired great Fabian Cancellara.

Team Jayco AlUla's hopes for the Ochre Jersey rest with O'Connor, who produced a world-class climb at stage 18 of the Tour de France last year over three Alpine mountains.

He is joined by road captain Luke Durbridge, Grand Tour stage winner Luke Plapp and Paris Olympic team pursuit

gold medalist Kelland O'Brien.

Australian sprint star Sam Welsford, who has won six Tour Down Under stages in the past two years, will make his debut with new team EF Education-Easy

The strongest-ever women's field includes 90 riders who for the first time represent all 14 UCI World Teams.

Ruegg is returning alongside newly crowned world champion and EF Education-Easy teammate Magdelene Vallieres, while Lidl Trek's roster includes three-time Tour Down Under winner Amanda Spratt.

What to look out for in the Premier League transfer window

NEWS DESK: The transfer window for Premier League clubs is open with sides ready to splash out to win the title, secure a place in next season's Champions League or just survive in the lucrative English top flight.

AFP Sport looks at five of the clubs likely to be busiest before the window closes on February 2.

Liverpool to splash out again

The Reds spent more than any Premier League side ever has in one window just a few months ago, splurging nearly £450 million (\$606 million) on six new additions.

However, there has been little return on that investment and managers look set to force the English champions back into the market.

Alexander Isak's British record £125 million move from Newcastle headlined Liverpool's summer spending spree, but the Swede is set for at least two months on the sidelines with a broken leg.

Despite splashing out around £300 million on forwards in the summer window, Arne Slot's attacking options are currently threatened with Mohamed Salah also absent at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Salah's future remains uncertain following his public outburst at being dropped by Slot

and should the Egyptian depart, Liverpool will be in the market for a replacement.

Villa's dreams of maintaining a challenge against the might of Arsenal and Manchester City in the title race will depend on what they can do over the next month to strengthen

Unai Emery's squad. Hampered by financial sustainability rules, Villa were unable to spend freely in the summer.

Yet Emery performed miracles to inspire an 11-game winning run in all competitions prior to Tuesday's 4-1 defeat at Arsenal.

Despite limited headroom, the Villa hierarchy managed to significantly improve the side in the January window. 12 months ago when the loan signings of Marcus Rashford and Marco Asensio nearly fired them into the Champions League.

Semenyo set for Pep Guardiola's men look to have won the first major transfer battle of the month in securing Antoine Semenyo from Bournemouth.

The Ghana forward has also attracted interest from Liverpool, Chelsea and Tottenham after scoring nine times in the Premier League this season.

Semenyo has a reported £65 million buyout clause in his contract, but that must be achieved before January 10.

City are not hanging about as they aim to add extra firepower to what is already the highest scoring side in the Premier League.

However, goals from wide positions have been a problem for Guardiola.

Jeremy Doku, Savinho, Oscar Bobb and Omar Marmoush have just one Premier League goal between them so far this season.

Manchester United's January business is likely to be determined by the future of Kobbie Mainoo.

The England international, who shone in the Three Lions' run to the Euro 2024 final, is yet to start a Premier League game this season.

Ruben Amorim does not appear to see Mainoo as compatible with captain Bruno Fernandes and both have been injured in recent weeks.

Amorim is keen to limit United's midfield options.

Bryan Mbeumo and Amad Diallo are also away at the Africa Cup of Nations, but Amorim

is keen to recruit for the short-term.

"If we are not sure, if everyone is not time-tracking chips — bring anyone and to work with the players that we have," said the Portuguese coach.

"We cannot do the same mistakes that we did in the past."

A sale of Mainoo, who was a product of the United academy, would significantly help United's wiggle room under financial sustainability rules to add another midfielder.

West Ham's rescue mission

West Ham are staring down the barrel of dropping out of the Premier League for the first time in 14 years.

The Hammers are four points adrift of the safety but are also chasing other sides on the up in Nottingham Forest and Leeds.

Runners competing in the full and half-marathon categories will begin before sunrise at 6:30am, while those taking part in the five-kilometre race (commonly referred to as the 5K) will start at 9:00am.

More than 2,000 runners have registered for the marathon event.

Registrations for the 5K, meanwhile, remain open, with over 3,000 participants already signed up.

This will be the third edition of the Karachi Marathon, which is recognised by World Athletics and has its distance professionally

ally certified by the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS).

Shaheer, an 18-year-old student at NED University, first experienced competitive running when he participated in the 5K at last year's event. This year, he is stepping up to the half-marathon. "I love playing sports — I play basketball quite regularly — but running has a different feeling to it, a feeling that is hard to describe in words," he told Dawn, smiling broadly.

"It is about pushing yourself to the limit, to test how far you can go. It is a unique experience."

Long-distance running is a passion shared by many in the sprawling metropolis. Some train alone in neighbourhood parks and streets, while others prefer the motivation of running in groups.

The arrival of the Karachi Marathon three years ago has given the enthusiasts both a platform and a goal.

Suriyami Wong, an Indonesian national who has lived in Karachi for 22 years, discovered her love for running in 2024 and has been training for the half-marathon.

"This is not what I call my city," said Shoaib Nizami, the driving force behind the Karachi Marathon, speaking to Dawn.

Set to boost running culture, Karachi Marathon returns with growing participation

NEWS DESK: As the sun dipped into the waters off Karachi's Seaview on a chilly Thursday evening, a festive air settled over AK Khan Park along the promenade.

Men and women of all ages, with children along, gradually filled the park. Patiently queuing at counters marked in vibrant black and turquoise branding — they collected what would soon become keepsakes: running bibs for the 2026 Karachi Marathon.

On Sunday, with these bibs — fitted with time-tracking chips — pinned to their running gear, participants will line up at the promenade near Nishan-i-Pakistan Park.

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week, that says a lot about the group.

The Sydney Cricket Ground's head curator Adam Lewis is under pressure to produce a pitch that helps both bat and ball after the Melbourne wicket was heavily slanted in favour of the fast bowlers.

Batting on that track, which was labelled "unsatisfactory" by the International Cricket Council, was treacherous.

Lewis told reporters his ground staff were aiming for six millimetres of grass, compared to the 10 in Melbourne.

"The only thing we can't control is the weather," said Lewis, with rain showers expected on Sunday and Monday.

"It just shows a lot about our group and how united we are if we can get a win."

"It might not go our way, but if we can put a good performance this

Bashir and Will Jacks will vie for the final spot.

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El Kaabi becomes AFCON hero

NEWS DESK: With captain Achraf Hakimi hardly featuring during the Africa Cup of Nations group stage as he recovers from injury, Ayoub El Kaabi has emerged as the hero of the tournament so far for the host country.

While Hakimi, the African footballer of the year, has made just one substitute appearance up to now, El Kaabi came off the bench to seal Morocco's 2-0 win over

Comoros in the opening game with a stunning overhead kick.

That moment of magic earned the 32-year-old a place in the starting line-up for the next match, a 1-1 draw with Mali.

While El Kaabi failed to repeat his goalscoring heroics on what was a more frustrating occasion for a much-typed Moroccan team, he was back at it in Monday's 3-0 victory against Zambia which allowed the Atlas Lions to wrap up first place in Group A and a last-16 tie against Tanzania.

The Olympiques hitman headed in the opening goal and later wrapped up the win with another overhead kick.

Cue adulation in

the kingdom for a player who first broke into the national team ahead of the 2018 World Cup but has never really been an established starter.

Videos posted online of fans repeating El Kaabi's bicycle kick move in unlikely situations have become viral, registering millions of views.

Meanwhile, a light show in the sky over Casablanca used drones to recreate El Kaabi scoring in acrobatic fashion.

Another widely

viewed online video is a compilation of all the goals scored by El Kaabi in that way, because the overhead kick has long been his speciality.

He scored four such goals during a breakthrough 2020/21 season with Moroccan giants Wydad Casablanca and had already pulled off the feat a couple of times for his country before the AFCON, including in stunning fashion against Benin last June.

"The most important thing is to score. It doesn't really matter who scores or how they do it," El Kaabi humbly said after the Zambia game.

From carpenter to goalscorer

El Kaabi's story begins in the streets of Casablanca, where he started playing football in an impoverished neighbourhood and worked as a carpenter.

"I grew up in a shanty town in Derb Mila, a neighbourhood that everybody knows," the striker said in an interview with UEFA.com in 2024.

"We were in a bit of a difficult financial situation. I was able to go to school and study, and in the summer I worked in order to help my family."

He helped my Dad who worked in construction.

The work I did at that time made me a man."

Of working as a carpenter, he added: "It is a really great job which embraces art and creativity."

El Kaabi eventually signed his first professional contract with Racing Casablanca in 2014, at the age of 21.

After an impressive season in the Moroccan second division, he moved to the top flight with Renaissance Berkane and then had a stint in China.

Then came a return home to sign for Wydad before a prolific spell in Turkey with Hatayspor ended following the devastating earthquake in early 2023.

A brief stint in Qatar came after that, but the transfer that really elevated him to the next level came when he joined Greek giants Olympiacos.

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Bashir, Potts in England squad for final Ashes Test

NEWS DESK: Seamer Matthew Potts and spinner Shoaib Bashir were included in a 12-man England squad Friday for the fifth Ashes Test against Australia as the tourists look to finish the series on a high.

Potts is the only unused fast bowler from their original 16-man squad and gets his chance after Gus Atkinson limped off with a hamstring issue at the previous Test in Melbourne, which England won inside two days.

Fellow quicks Jofa Archer and Mark Wood have similarly succumbed to injury.

Wood (knee) only played the first Test in Perth while Archer was ruled out after the third Test in Adelaide with a side strain.

Australia have already won the series and retained the urn.

Potts is expected to add to his caps in Sydney on Sunday, having last played a Test in December 2024, as a direct replacement for Atkinson.

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England's top spinner when they arrived in Australia but has yet to play with all-rounder Adam Lewis is under pressure to produce a pitch that helps both bat and ball after the Melbourne wicket was heavily slanted in favour of the fast bowlers.

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Swiss authorities begin identifying victims of bar fire that killed 40, injured 115

NEWS DESK: Investigators on Friday set about identifying the burned bodies of a blaze that engulfed a crowded bar, killing around 40 people and injuring 115 at a New Year's Eve party in the upscale Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana.

The severity of the burns suffered by the young crowd of revelers in the Le Constellation bar will cause the identification process to take days, according to Swiss officials.

Parents of missing youths anxiously issued pleas for news of their loved ones as foreign embassies scrambled to work out if their nationals were among those caught up in one of the worst tragedies to befall a nation in Switzerland.

"The first objective is to assign names to all the bodies," Crans-Montana's mayor, Nicolas Feraud, told a press conference on Thursday evening. This, he said, could take days.

Mathias Reynard,



head of government of the canton of Valais, said experts were using dental and DNA samples for the task.

"All this work needs to be done because the information is so terrible and sensitive that nothing can be told to the families unless we are 100% sure," he said.

What caused the blaze was unclear. Swiss

authorities said it appeared to be an accident rather than an attack. Some accounts from survivors and footage broadcast on social media suggested that the ceiling of the bar's basement may have caught fire when sparking candles got too close.

Residents of Crans-Montana, which has the

"You think you're safe here, but this can happen anywhere. They were people like us," said Piermarco Pani, an 18-year-old who, like many others in the town, knew the bar well.

Dozens of people left flowers or lit candles on a makeshift altar at the top of the road leading to the bar, which police had cordoned off. Some cried, others quietly hugged one another.

Behind the cordon, the bodies of some victims still lay in the bar, police said, as they pledged to work around the clock to identify everyone who succumbed to the blaze.

Kean Sarbach, 17, said he had spoken to four people who escaped from the bar, some with burns, and that they had told him the flames had spread very quickly.

Elisa Sousa, 17, said she was meant to be there but ended up spending the evening at a family gathering instead.

Trump says US will intervene if Iran violently suppresses peaceful protests



NEWS DESK: US President Donald Trump on Friday said that if Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, the United States of America will come to their rescue.

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," he said in a Truth Social post.

This follows the deaths of several

people as Iran's biggest protests in three years over economic hardship turned violent across multiple provinces.

The clashes between protesters and security forces mark a significant escalation in the unrest that has spread across the country since shopkeepers began protest-

ing on Sunday over the government's handling of a sharp currency slide and rapidly rising prices.

Iran's economy has struggled for years since the US reimposed sanctions in 2018, after Trump withdrew from an international nuclear agreement during his first term.

Pakistan hopes for diplomatic end to Yemen standoff

NEWS DESK: The Foreign Office said on Thursday that Pakistan was seeking a diplomatic resolution of the dispute between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates over Yemen, underlining Islamabad's push for dialogue as tensions persisted between two of its closest Gulf partners.

The comments, which were the most categorical since the start of the Saudi-UAE row about Pakistan's role in defusing tensions, came during the weekly media briefing by FO spokesperson Tahir Anwar, who said Islamabad was actively engaging both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to encourage restraint and diplomacy.

"We have been advocating peace and diplomacy to reach a resolution. So, this is part of our exchanges that is taking place between our leadership and the leadership in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi," Mr. Andrabi said.

Tensions peaked on Dec 30 when Saudi Arabia carried out air strikes on Yemen's southern port of Mukalla, targeting what it said were weapons and armoured vehicles allegedly supplied to the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

No casualties were reported. Abu Dhabi later announced a voluntary pullout of its remaining counterterrorism units the same day.

Thus far, Pakistan has pursued carefully balanced diplomacy. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Dec 30 in Rahim Yar Khan during

the Emirati leader's private visit, officially focusing on bilateral ties but widely viewed as urging de-escalation.

A day later, PM Shehbaz spoke by phone with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Mr. Andrabi said Pakistan was pursuing the issue through multilateral forums as well, including the UN Security Council.

At the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, he added, Pakistan advocated "for peace, dialogue, role for diplomacy, including peace-ful settlement for a Yemeni-led, Yemeni-owned political process."

"So, this is in that spirit that we take our role as a mediator and a facilitator for bringing peace and prosperity for Yemen and for the brotherly people of Yemen," Mr. Andrabi said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and India on Thursday exchanged lists of

nuclear installations and prisoners, a long-standing confidence-building practice that has endured despite unprecedented strains in bilateral ties, which brought relations close to a virtual breakdown.

Mr. Andrabi confirmed the exchange, saying: "Today, on 1st January, as per our bilateral agreements, Pakistan and India exchange lists of prisoners in each other's custody."

Accordingly, the government of Pakistan today handed over a list of 257 Indian prisoners (58 civilians and 199 fishermen) in Pakistan to the High Commission of India in Islamabad.

He said the move was in line with existing bilateral commitments. "This step is consistent with the provisions of the Consular Access Agreement between Pakistan and India, signed on May 21, 2008, under which both countries are required to exchange lists of prisoners in each other's custody twice a year, on Jan 1 and July 1, respectively," the spokesman added.

India said it shared information about 391 civilian prisoners and 33 fishermen in its custody who are Pakistani or believed to be Pakistani.

The two sides also exchanged lists of nuclear installations and facilities that cannot be attacked in the event of hostilities, under a separate agreement aimed at reducing the risk of escalation between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Also, on Jan 1, Pakistan and India exchange the lists of their respective nuclear installations pursuant to the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India," Mr. Andrabi said.

The Foreign Office also urged India to respond to formal queries raised by its Indus Waters Commissioner.



Trump pulls National Guard from three cities

NEWS DESK: President Donald Trump is withdrawing National Guard troops from Chicago, Los Angeles and Portland, following a series of legal setbacks over his military deployments in US cities.

The Republican had sent troops into several cities run by Democrats during his first year back in power, in what he called a crackdown on illegal immigration and crime.

Local leaders slammed the moves as authoritarian overreach and launched a string of successful legal challenges, with the US Supreme Court last week blocking the Chicago deployment.

"We are removing the National Guard from Chicago, Los Angeles, and Portland, despite the fact that CRIME has been greatly reduced by

having these great Patriots in those cities, and ONLY by that fact," Trump said on his Truth Social network on Wednesday.

In the message on New Year's Eve, Trump said the three cities "were GONE if it weren't for the Federal Government stepping in".

"We will come back, perhaps in a much different and stronger form, when crime begins to soar again — Only a question of time!" Trump added.

Trump's deployments of National Guard troops have been a centerpiece of his headline policies on immigration and crime since returning to the White House in January.

He has also sent the National Guard into the capital Washington and to Memphis, Tennessee, and threatened to send

them to San Francisco. But the Trump administration had already begun to pull some troops from Chicago, Los Angeles and Portland in recent weeks as court judgments went against it.

Los Angeles became the first city to have troops on the streets in June when Trump went over the heads of local Democratic leaders to order 4,000 National Guard reservists to put down protests over immigration raids.

Those local leaders said the relatively minor protests, which affected only a few blocks in America's second largest metropolis, could easily be handled by city, county and state law enforcement.

On December 10, a federal judge ordered Trump's administration to end the Los Angeles

deployment and return control of the soldiers to California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom.

Most had already been demobilised, with the US military saying 100 Guard troops remained deployed at the time. Hours before Trump's announcement, Newsom said the administration had formally stopped opposing the federal court's ruling on the troops. An appellate court made it official, ruling that the lower court's order to return control should move forward.

"This admission by Trump and his occult cabinet members means this illegal intimidation tactic will finally come to an end," Newsom said as a likely Democratic contender for the presidency in 2028, said on X.



New York Mayor Mamdani vows to enact democratic socialist agenda

NEWS DESK: Democrat Zohran Mamdani became New York City's mayor on Thursday, vowing during a public swearing-in ceremony on the steps of City Hall to enact an aggressive agenda aimed at making the nation's largest city more affordable for working people.

Mamdani, a member of his party's left-wing democratic socialist faction, was elected last November in a prominent victory that could influence this year's midterm elections that will determine control of the US Congress. Some Democrats have embraced his style while Republicans portray him as a foil on the national political stage.

The 34-year-old campaigned heavily on cost-of-living issues and was sharply critical of Republican US President Donald Trump, whose

approval rating has fallen over the past year amid economic concerns.

Many of New York's 8 million residents — some with hopes, some with reservations — expect him to be a disruptive political force.

In a speech following his public swearing-in, Mamdani promoted core campaign promises of universal childcare, affordable rents and free bus service.

"We will answer to all New Yorkers, not to any billionaire or oligarch who thinks they can buy our democracy," he said. "I was elected as a democratic socialist and I will govern as a democratic socialist."

The programme for Mamdani's inauguration included remarks by US Senator Bernie Sanders and US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, fellow democratic socialist and at the vanguard of the Democratic Party's liberal wing.



Sanders, whom Mamdani calls his inspiration, defended Mamdani's agenda. "Making sure that people can live in affordable housing is not radical," Sanders said. "It is the right and decent thing to do."

The crowd of several thousand cheered loudly when Sanders called on America's millionaires and billionaires to pay more in taxes, breaking into a chant of "tax the rich".

Even with temperatures well below freezing, the city set up a viewing area along Broadway to allow thousands more to watch a livestream of the ceremony, which included musical performances.

Mae Hardman-Hill, 27, volunteered for Mamdani's campaign and said it felt like his political momentum was growing.

"I'm a native New Yorker. I've watched the city like you just become less and less livable," Hardman-Hill said.

"I'm really excited for ... regular people to get some power back again."

Prior to the public ceremony, Mamdani was privately sworn in as New York City's mayor in the first minutes of the New Year on Thursday at the historic City Hall subway station, which

was decommissioned decades ago and is accessible only a few times a year through guided tours.

Reflecting his Muslim faith, he used the Holy Quran for his swearing-in, a first for a New York City mayor.

Republicans blast Mamdani's campaign and said it felt like his political momentum was growing.

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