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Balochistan Introduces 30% Subsidy Electric Bike Program for Students

Syed Ali Shah:

QUETTA: Electric bikes will be provided to students in Balochistan under a newly approved provincial government initiative aimed at easing transportation challenges and promoting affordable mobility.

The decision was taken during a meeting of the Balochistan provincial cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Under the scheme, students will be eligible to receive electric bikes with a 30 percent government subsidy, while the program will be implemented through bank financing to ensure access on easy installment plans.

The scheme will also cover working women and gov-

ernment employees, with provisions allowing members of the general public to benefit as well. Officials said the initiative is designed to reduce travel costs, support education continuity, and encourage the use of environmentally friendly transport.

During the meeting, the cabinet emphasized that public funds would be utilized transparently and in a manner that benefits a broad segment of society. The provincial government reaffirmed its commitment to public welfare, youth facilitation, and sustainable development through practical policy measures.

Health Insurance for Government Employees

The cabinet was informed that annual medical expenses for approximately 250,000 government employees amount to billions of rupees.

To address this, it approved the introduction of a comprehensive health insurance scheme aimed at ensuring transparent, efficient, and sustainable healthcare coverage.

The cabinet also approved the audit of advance medical payments and the public endowment fund to strengthen financial accountability.

Youth Empowerment and Merit-Based Governance

To promote economic independence among young

people, the cabinet approved the expansion of the Enterprises Development Programme, extending its reach to Gwadar, Kech, and Awaran districts.

Emphasizing good governance, the cabinet reaffirmed its commitment to merit-based appointments, declaring that no compromise would be made on transparency and merit.

Addressing the meeting, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that public funds are a trust and must be utilized fairly and responsibly.

He stressed that development resources should benefit the wider population rather than a select few, adding that youth empowerment and public welfare remain top priorities of the provincial government.

Balochistan Food Authority Intensifies Action Against Unsafe Food

In a separate development, the Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) intensified its crackdown against substandard and unsafe food items across the province.

According to a BFA spokesperson, inspection teams carried out a comprehensive food safety operation in Quetta.

Kuchlak, and Sibi, inspecting a total of 79 food establishments.

Serious violations were identified at several locations, leading to immediate action against 33 food outlets.

No hostility with Kabul, terror sole concern: FO

NEWS DESK:

Pakistan has reiterated that it does not seek hostility with Afghanistan but made clear that any meaningful improvement in bilateral relations hinges on Kabul providing concrete, verifiable and written assurances that its territory will not be used for terrorism against Pakistan.

The position was articulated on Thursday during the weekly press briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where spokesperson Tahir Andrabi underscored that Islamabad's concerns with Afghanistan are narrowly focused on security and not rooted in political or ideological differences.

"Pakistan does not wish to be hostile to Afghanistan," the spokesperson said, stressing that the sole demand from Kabul is the fulfilment of its basic responsibility as a state: preventing terrorist groups and individuals from using Afghan soil to carry out attacks in Pakistan.

He said Pakistan had no bilateral disputes with Afghanistan comparable to those it faces with India, adding that once the terrorism issue is addressed through credible assurances and demonstrable action, there exists "tremendous potential" for cooperation in trade, connectivity and regional integration.

Andrabi said that Pakistan welcomed recent positive statements from Kabul but could not rely on rhetoric alone. "Statements must be backed by concrete, verifiable and written assurances," he said, adding that the absence of such commitments explained Islamabad's continued

caution despite its willingness to engage bilaterally and through trilateral mechanisms, involving China. He confirmed that diplomatic channels with Kabul remain open, with embassies and consulates functioning normally, and said Pakistan continued to engage Afghanistan positively in regional forums, including the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral dialogue. Turning to defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia, the spokesperson downplayed reports suggesting that Pakistan was in talks to convert Saudi loans into a deal involving JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a robust, multifaceted relationship, including in defence," Andrabi said, but added that he was not aware of any specific agreement regarding the sale of aircraft or the adjustment of financial obligations.

Punjab schools and colleges will open from Jan 12, says education minister

NEWS DESK:

Punjab Education Minister Rana Sikandar Hayat on Friday clarified that all schools and colleges across the province will reopen on January 12.

The clarification comes after a reportedly fake notification circulated on social media claiming that winter vacations in Punjab had been extended from January 10 to 17. However, the education minister rebuffed claims of extending winter holidays, urging the public to "avoid fake news."

Earlier this week, he had also denied any extension of the winter holidays.

The Punjab government had announced winter vacations for all public and private schools and colleges from December 22 to January 10.

According to the official notification, schools and colleges were scheduled to reopen on January 12.

A day ago, a fake notification claiming to have been issued by Punjab's School Education Department went viral on social media, spreading confusion among parents and students.

Achakzai faults PTI discipline for imran's jailing

NEWS DESK:

Mahmood Khan Achakzai, head of Tehreek-e-Tahafuz-e-Ain Pakistan (TTAP), strongly criticised state conduct, saying that while Pakistan was described as a "fortress of Islam," Islam itself appeared to have been imprisoned within it.

Addressing the Awan-e-Adl gathering in Lahore on Friday, he condemned violence against women and children and denounced the use of live ammunition against protesters at D-Chowk.

He also rebuked police actions, alleging mistreatment of detainees, and questioned claims of Pakistan being an Islamic state under such circumstances.

Speaking about political unity, Achakzai says he has not come to Lahore to abuse other political parties but to stand with the oppressed. He stated that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) enjoyed unprecedented public support, yet its founding leader remains behind bars due to a lack of discipline within the party. Political movements required organisation and discipline to succeed.



Referring to recent protests, he noted that despite the presence of MNAs and MPAs, no loudspeakers were used, highlighting organisational weaknesses.

Addressing the youth, he

appealed for roads to remain empty on February 8 as a form of peaceful protest, stressing that their movement would remain non-violent and free from abuse or hate speech.

Addressing the gathering,

Allama Raja Nasir said Allah had granted human beings the right to freedom, which was also guaranteed in the Constitution of Pakistan, but an oppressive regime had undermined the justice system, people's right to defence and

public mandate through constitutional amendments.

He urged the public to stand against those who snatched freedom and voting rights, stressing that "Hussainiyat" was not a slogan but a principled stand against oppression, adding that the country could not survive without protecting people's rights.

Calling on authorities to acknowledge their mistakes, Achakzai urged them to come forward to protect the Constitution. Addressing the lawyer's community at Awan-e-Adl, Achakzai warned that anyone who violated or opposed the Constitution deserved rejection, declaring that every individual acting against it is what he called "murda baad."

He concluded by saying that while institutions such as the army and intelligence agencies were necessary, they must remain within constitutional boundaries, warning that any violation of the Constitution would be openly opposed.

He also announced his support for Irfan Hayat Bajwa, the presidential candidate of the Hamid Khan group, in the Lahore Bar Association elections scheduled to be held on January 10.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

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

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

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

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

Long queues, procedural delays, and administrative hurdles made the process difficult, especially for people from remote districts of the province. With digital communication now formally integrated, citizens, litigants, and counsel will be able



to request and access judgment copies far more easily.

This single step reduces barriers that have existed for years and ensures that justice is not only done — but also seen to be done.

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

Many people lacked the courage, resources, or channels to raise such concerns.

This mechanism now provides them a safe and accessible option, reinforcing the idea that justice is a right, not a privilege.

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

Forced Marriage in Islam:
A Clear Violation of Women's
Rights and Human Dignity

By Musavir Durrani

Forced marriage remains one of the most damaging cultural practices in parts of the Muslim world today. Despite being justified in the name of honor, tradition, or family unity, Islam itself strictly forbids forcing any woman, or man, into a marriage they do not want. Islamic teachings make consent the

core of marriage, while coercion makes a marriage batil (invalid). The Qur'an clearly forbids Forced Marriages. Allah states in Surah An-Nisa:

"O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will."

(Qur'an 4:19)

This verse was revealed to abolish the jahiliyyah practice of controlling or forcing women into marriages.

Islam replaced oppression with dignity, choice, and responsibility. Prophetic Example: Forced Marriages Declared Invalid

A woman once came to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) complaining that her father had married her without her permission. The Prophet (PBUH) gave her the full right to reject or accept the marriage, proving that consent is mandatory.

Hadith Reference:

Statements such as: "If you don't marry this one, who will marry you?" "You have no choice." "Do it for family honor." "You must obey your parents." These are pure emotional manipulation, and Islam does not allow it. Emotional or Psychological Pressure is Also Haram. Forced marriage is not only when

someone is physically pressured. Even emotional, mental, or family pressure counts as force. Any Nikkah done under fear, pressure, or threats

is invalid (Batil) in Islam. This ruling is based on multiple hadith in which the Prophet (PBUH) annulled

marriages done without consent. Modern Forced Marriages, A New Way of Burying Women Alive. Before Islam, Arabs used to bury baby

girls alive. Today, many scholars say: "We no longer bury women in the ground, but we bury their dreams on the day of their Nikkah."

When a girl is forced into a marriage, pressured emotionally, or told she has no other choice, we destroy

her life while she is still alive. This is the new form of burying women alive, and Islam came to end this injustice completely.

Forced marriage has no place in Islam. It is against the Qur'an, against the Sunnah, and against the dignity that Islam gives to every woman and man. Parents must love, support, and guide, but never control or force marriage decisions.

"Allah gave women this right, and no one can take it away".

The village named Jacob in 1952 Jacobabad is famous for Victoria Clock Tower in remembrance of John Jacob situated in the heart of the city.

Geographical Conditions Jacobabad is noted for its consistently high temperature recorded in Pakistan, 126 degrees Fahrenheit (52 degrees centigrade).

The region is rich in rice and grain cultivation. The flora of Jacobabad consists of shrubs (cono, carpus) small plants not many trees, and fauna cows, hens, buffalos, camels.

The traditional functions arranged every year in February in which camel fighting and cattle show is the most favorites for the visitor.

Economic Contribution Endowed with coastal access, Sindh is a major center of economic activity in Pakistan and has a highly diversified economy ranging from heavy industry and finance centered in and around Karachi to a substantial agricultural base along the Indus.

Manufacturing includes machine products, cement, plastics, and various other goods. Sindh is Pakistan's most natural gas-producing province.

Agriculture is very important in Sindh with cotton, rice, wheat, sugar cane, bananas, and mangoes as the most important crops.

Sindh is the richest province in natural resource production. Weather Conditions Weather is a bit dusty because of polluted air, open drainage, and garbage system on roads which have a direct impact on the environment after all contributing largely to water and air pollution open garbage on roads adversely impacting the environment and health of people.

Polluted water near canals to open roads giving breed to mosquitoes due to which malaria cases recorded a lot every year in Jacobabad. The village is now well organized having Shahheed Benazir Bhutto park which is

a famous picnic point. Conclusion Summing up over all the exploring the city Jacobabad the Government should take step towards environmental issues by banning rice and other various factories open in main city region which is contributing a lot to air pollution.

The District head should plant more trees in the city so that to overcome such environmental issues Jacobabad will be an attractive place for visitors.

The author is studying at the Department of Environmental Sciences at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University Quetta. She can be contacted at aqsa1367@gmail.com

Withering Public Institutions

Asghar Harifal: The beleaguered public offices have come under a new wave of employee associations broadening the turf war. The new rallying point is to assert the right for the coveted packages in wages given to the provincial secretariat. Guided by the tools employed by secretariat employees to secure bloated wages in comparison with the attached department, the number of associations has multiplied and the pre-existing ones have coalesced into a broader alliance.

They have further asserted to arrogate the positions of head of attached departments claimed by provincial secretariat employees.

A few days back Balochistan Secretariat Employees Association announced its withdrawal from a grand alliance of other employees' associations. The alliance was formed to put pressure on the government for demands they all shared, which included the rise in pay and allowances and to address the discrepancies.

A growing number of employees adding public grievances. The growing number of employee associations, in the name of their welfare, underscores the growing utility of forming pressure groups to protect

spheres of influence. Taking a cue from the past, the growing trend will bring serious pressure on the frail institutional framework adding to public grievances.

One of the phenomena, engendered by growing pressure groups in the public, is written writ large that institutions have exponentially grown in size, while at the same time turned into pathetically ossified entities, foretelling their imminent fall. The eventuality will not only bring about suffering for all employees associated with these institutions but it will also add to the flight of the public



at large. The bloated oversize of public departments in association with their age-old calcified nature has turned them into a self-serving superstructure and lost relevance to the common man.

A department created for the general public turned into a service provider for their employees only.

A department created for the service of the general public has turned into a service provider for their respective employees. All the offices at district, divisional or provincial levels have more affairs related to employees than that of the ones for whose

welfare the same are created. The resources placed at the disposal of these institutions with the aim to alleviate the issues of citizens, are arrogated to themselves and have turned into a bone of contention for members of the institutions. Speaking of personal experience of a department, with district and divisional level offices, it was noted that more than 90% of the correspondence made with that office was related to the personal affairs of the employees working in that department. It is the case with every public sector institution. Their raison d'être is service unto self.

Element of powers keep their opponents at bay.

The element of powers among employees' associations also include larger size, the larger the size, the more nuisance value to keep the opponent at bay.

At the provincial secretariat with the aim to enlarge its own size, decades-old clerical staff positions are exponentially expanded leading to a 'one size fits all' structure. Despite specialization in every field turning into a norm, the public sector is stuck in an age-old management model. The information technology development has turned the

public sector structure into an obsolete entity. The manpower and the machine have found no compatibility. The only change in the last 75 years is that number of positions has shifted from one service group to another. Mutual bargaining among the service groups is termed reform in the system. A third-body assessment guided only by the public interest has never taken place.

The resistance to change has not only left the public sector unworkable, the private sector has overtaken it in the market. When private sector services are required from the market, the public sector functionaries are found totally clueless about the trend in the market. Resultantly, the public sector is uniformly characterized by sub-standard quality.

The public sector has still not parted from the role, long performed by it but is now overtaken by the private sector with better performance. A role swap from a player to a regulator has still not taken place. The role of regulator, which should have been taken by the public sector, is distasteful for it.

The author is a former Secretary of Tourism Balochistan Government.

Jacobabad, One of the hottest cities on earth



Aqsa Arshad Jacobabad District is a district in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. It is located in the north of Sindh, by the provincial boundary with Balochistan. Its headquarters is the town of Jacobabad which was founded by General John Jacob in 1847. The population of Jacobabad District is 1,006,297 according to the 2017 census. Density consumed 370/km2(970/sq) with four numbers of Tehsils. 98% of the population speak Sindh while 3% are native Balochi speakers.

Historical Background The old name of Jacobabad was Khanghar in 1847 by General John Jacob later on when he died

the village named Jacob in 1952 Jacobabad is famous for Victoria Clock Tower in remembrance of John Jacob situated in the heart of the city.

Geographical Conditions Jacobabad is noted for its consistently high temperature recorded in Pakistan, 126 degrees Fahrenheit (52 degrees centigrade).

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The District head should plant more trees in the city so that to overcome such environmental issues Jacobabad will be an attractive place for visitors.

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5.8-magnitude earthquake jolts parts of Pakistan

NEWS DESK: A 5.8-magnitude earthquake jolted parts of the country early on Friday.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), the 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck at a depth of 159km in the Tajikistan-Xinjiang border region at 2am. The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC), which reports magnitude using the Moment Magnitude scale, said the

earthquake had a magnitude of 5.3 and struck Tajikistan at a depth of 140km. The United States Geological Survey said Pakistan, Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan were among the affected countries.

According to media reports, the tremors were felt in Islamabad and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There were no immediate reports of any casualties. Pakistan falls on

three major tectonic plates — the Arabian, Euro-Asian and Indian — which create five seismic zones solely the country.

The intersection of multiple fault lines means that tectonic movements remain a frequent occurrence in the region.

In October 2025, a 3.2-magnitude earthquake was recorded in Karachi. A month earlier, a 5.5-magnitude earthquake was felt in areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Law minister defends 27th Amendment as 'historic step'

NEWS DESK: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Thursday defended the 27th Constitutional Amendment as a historic step that fortifies Pakistan's federal structure, countering criticism that it undermines judicial independence.

Speaking at the book launching of Tea Talk, a compilation of columns by Advocate Talat Abbas Khan, here at the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), the law minister emphasised that the amendment's cornerstone achievement was establishment of a Federal Constitutional Court (FCC).

"This is a monumental contribution of the Parliament to strengthen the federation," the minister said, adding that by ensuring equal provincial representation in the FCC, the government has addressed a longstanding national demand.

The minister's remarks come in response to an Amnesty International report that described the amendment as a "historic step" towards strengthening the independence of the judiciary, the right to a fair trial, and the rule of law in Pakistan.



scendo of a concerted and sustained attack on the independence of the judiciary, the right to a fair trial, and the rule of law in Pakistan."

Mr Tarar urged critics to understand the amendment's intent before dismissing it, noting that the FCC was originally envisioned in the 2006 Charter of Democracy, a document endorsed and signed by all major political parties, including the founder of the PTI, PPP, PML-N, and JUI-F's Maulana

Fazlur Rehman. Establishment of the FCC termed 'cornerstone achievement'.

He said the demand for such a court gained momentum after the widespread concern over the Supreme Court's expansive use of suo motu powers under the now-defunct Article 184(3). "When such judicial actions led to the disqualification of law-makers and even elected prime ministers, the call for a dedicated constitutional court grew

louder," the minister said, adding that the FCC termed 'cornerstone achievement' power to choose representatives rests solely with the people, not the judiciary, which must not engage in political engineering.

The idea behind setting up of the FCC was to strengthen the federation by giving equal representation to all federating units of the country and since federal capital was also part of the federation, therefore, it should also be given a representa-

tion in the FCC.

The minister outlined the structural imbalance the FCC seeks to correct. Previously, the Supreme Court's composition was linked to the size of provincial high courts, leading to a pre-eminence of judges from Punjab, which has the largest high court. Smaller provinces like Balochistan had minimal representation.

Since the Lahore High Court has the biggest number of judges to the tune of 60, therefore, the Supreme Court always enjoyed the majority of judges from the Punjab, he explained. Likewise, he said, the Balochistan High Court was less and, therefore, the number of judges from that province was also less, adding that the same was the case with Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to provinces. The FCC creates a new forum to address grievances of deprivation and rift among smaller provinces, Mr Tarar said.

Radio Pakistan challenges K-P Assembly May 9 inquiry

NEWS DESK: The administration of Radio Pakistan has challenged before the Peshawar High Court the provincial government's notification forming an inquiry commission into the May 9 and 10 incidents, arguing that it unlawfully interferes with an ongoing criminal trial.

In a writ petition filed through Advocate Shabbir Hussain Gigyani, Radio Pakistan contended that its Peshawar building was attacked during the violent events of May 9, 2023, causing extensive damage to public and private property. Cases were subsequently registered under anti-terrorism provisions, with several members of the provincial assembly named as accused.

The inquiry commission was constituted after the Khyber

approved a motion in December 2025 to form a special committee under Rule 237 to probe the vandalism at Radio Pakistan's Peshawar during the May 9 and 10, 2023 unrest. Headed by Provincial Law Minister Afshar Alam, the committee was tasked with examining the causes of the incident, including any alleged conspiracy, and reviewing the role of law enforcement agencies before submitting recommendations to the provincial assembly and cabinet.

The petition challenged a notification issued by the Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly constituting an inquiry commission that includes members of the assembly. It argued that lawmakers already nominated as accused in the case could not sit in judge-

which they were defendants.

According to the petition, the trial commenced before an Anti-Terrorism court during the prosecution submitted the challan. However, during the pendency of the proceedings, the Speaker issued the notification to probe the Radio Pakistan attack, which the petitioner said lacked legal basis.

The petition maintained that while the Speaker has constitutional powers to constitute committees for legislative or public welfare matters, there was no authority to interfere in judicial proceedings. It further argued that although a legal framework exists for the establishment of inquiry commissions, the prescribed procedure had not been followed. It was submitted that once a case is sub-

NEWS DESK: PTI leader

Barrister Ali Zafar on Thursday said that no dialogue could be held with the government until it allowed meetings with incarcerated party founder Imran Khan.

He made the remarks while speaking alongside a delegation of the opposition alliance Tehreek-e-Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) in Lahore, which is on a three-day visit to the city as part of opposition's "street movement" to hold political and social gatherings.

The alliance posted on X that TTAP chief Muzaffar Ali Khan, Achakzai and Aillama Raja Nasir Abbas arrived on Friday at a gathering held at the residence of Advocate Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas, where a large number of journalists, political leaders and PTI workers were



present. Speaking during the gathering, PTI leader Muzaffar Ali Khan, Achakzai and Aillama Raja Nasir Abbas arrived on Friday at a gathering held at the residence of Advocate Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas, where a large number of journalists, political leaders and PTI workers were

meetings are allowed with Imran," he said. Zafar assured the TTAP that the party would support from PTI's leaders and workers in Lahore. He stressed that the top priority at the moment was the protection of Pakistan's sovereignty in this region, he said that Imran's release was "the need of the

time." "The government cannot take any such step that will harm Pakistan's future or is against Pakistan's sovereignty," he said. Zafar expressed gratitude to the TTAP leadership for their visit, stating, "The difficulties you faced in reaching here, I would like to say that we face it every day

Sindh minister welcomes KP CM Afridi upon arrival at Karachi airport

NEWS DESK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi reached Karachi on Friday, beginning his three-day visit to Sindh as part of mobilisation efforts for PTI's street movement.

Sindh Labour Minister Saeed Ghani welcomed him at the airport. A video released from the minister's office showed Ghani receiving Afridi and the two hugging at the airport. Ghani was also seen presenting Afridi a Sindh cap and Ajrak.

The party's secretary general Salman Akram Raja also reached Karachi.

Videos shared by the PTI on X showed a large crowd gathered at the airport to welcome Afridi.

Afridi boarded the flight for Karachi from the Islamabad airport, where he faced flight delays.

KP Minister for Local Government Meena Khan Afridi, who is accompanying the chief minister, said in a post on X prior to their departure that the party would be delayed.

Meanwhile, PTI spokesman PML-N Mohammed Ali Bozdar alleged while speaking to Dawn that police had removed the tents put up outside the party's head office near the nursery area for the KP CM's reception.

He, however, clarified that the office had not been sealed by police.

Previously, the PTI had alleged in a post on social media platform X that Sindh police had



sealed the Insaf Secretariat in Karachi and dismantled a camp installed there for Afridi's welcome. Bozdar said CM Afridi was expected to address party workers and leaders at the head office, where he would be taken from the airport.

He also said he had spoken to police and Sindh government officials, who have assured that the tents would be returned. He added that the officials also assured that the party would be allowed to hold a gathering but was asked not to block roads.

Dawn reached out to police for a comment but there was no response from their side.

Before departing for Karachi, the KP chief minister said in a post on X that he was bringing party founder Imran Khan's "message" to the province.

"My visit is for three days and during this time we have planned various activities," the chief minister

said, urging people to support the street movement. KP CM announced that he would be holding a gathering at Mazar-i-Quaid on Sunday at 4:30pm, calling on people to participate in the gathering.

"We will hold the biggest gathering in Karachi's history," CM Afridi said. For its part, the authorities in Sindh initially said Afridi would not be allowed to hold a public gathering at Mazar-i-Quaid but later a provincial minister announced a change in the decision.

A notification issued by the Korangi deputy commissioner's office initially cited "great traffic congestion" and consequent "public inconvenience" as the reasons to deny permission to hold the gathering at Mazar-i-Quaid and asked the PTI to propose an alternative venue. However, later Sindh Local Government Nasir Hussain Shah said in a statement issued by

his office that the authorities had decided to allow the rally at Mazar-i-Quaid. "We will fully welcome KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi in the province," he said, adding that the peaceful struggle of any political party, including the PTI, could not be stopped.

But, he also warned that "difficulties could arise in the law is violated." "There is no restriction on the rally. They have sought permission for holding rallies in South and Korangi districts. They have sought permission for a rally at Jinnah Ground and they are being given permission for that," he said. "We are in talks with the PTI leadership and they can definitely be given permission for holding the rally in accordance with the law."

The KP CM, during his three-day visit, will meet with the party leadership, as well as lawyers and business leaders, and hold a meeting with Sindh Chief Minister

Murad Ali Shah.

The visit is aimed at energising the party's newly launched street movement in Karachi and other cities seeking the release of the incarcerated former prime minister.

On Monday, PTI Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh, during a press conference at party headquarters, Islamabad, shared the CM Afridi's schedule for the visit. He detailed that CM Afridi will depart from Islamabad on January 9 and arrive in Karachi, where he will be received by party workers and supporters.

A rally will then accompany him to Insaf House, followed by a series of meetings with party leaders and delegations. His Karachi engagements include interactions with traders at the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, a meeting with the Press at the Karachi Press Club (KPC).



Fawad calls on Prime Minister (PM) President to lead talks

NEWS DESK: Former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry has reiterated the need for dialogue, emphasising that negotiations are essential for the country's stability. He called on the prime minister and the president to take ownership of the negotiation process.

Speaking to the media after attending court proceedings, Chaudhry said the entire PTI leadership, including Shah Mahmood Qureshi, supported talks.

Criticising the government, he claimed it relied on "daily spectacles" to remain in power and questioned how the country could function while people faced sentences totalling "thousands of years." He also expressed disappointment at what he described as the opposition's lack of seriousness and urged party leaders to show courage if they had accepted responsibility.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reportedly given the go-ahead to National Assembly Speaker Sardar

Ayaz Sadiq to proceed with negotiations between the government and PTI sources said on Wednesday, a significant development in efforts to cool political temperatures.

Parliamentary sources said that the government side has agreed to take part in the talks at the speaker's request. However, discussions will only be held with PTI's elected representatives, while no engagement is planned with unelected party figures. Despite the government's readiness, the sources said, no PTI leader has yet formally approached the Office of the Speaker to begin the negotiation process, and no vest even remains pending from the opposition's side.

Chaudhry praised the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi for demonstrating responsibility, but described a recent statement attributed to Afridi as unfortunate. He said the political struggle will be determined by the government and the opposition,

while ordinary Pakistanis were bearing the cost.

He added that the party's real stakeholders were in jail, while what he called "guest actors" continued to travel abroad. Reiterating that the PTI leadership had already called for talks, he said the government would need to reduce political tensions to make negotiations possible. Highlighting the economic situation, he said household survey data indicated that nearly 30 per cent of Pakistanis were unable to afford three meals a day.

He also said the PTI was currently willing to negotiate, but was hindered by the government's lack of willingness to engage. He added that the PTI was currently willing to negotiate, but was hindered by the government's lack of willingness to engage. He added that the PTI was currently willing to negotiate, but was hindered by the government's lack of willingness to engage.

Punjab freezes 680 TLP leaders' assets, IDs; blocks 740 vehicles

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab Excise Department has blocked more than 740 vehicles belonging to 680 leaders placed on the Fourth Schedule of the banned organisation, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), following directives issued by the Punjab Home Department.

The Excise Department's officials confirmed that the measures are part of a broader crackdown aimed at restricting both movable and

immovable assets of individuals deemed a security risk. Home Department had shared detailed lists seeking the blocking of properties associated with Fourth Schedule leaders.

In response, the Excise Department blocked all identified vehicles linked with the provided 680 national identity card numbers of the TLP leaders. Excise Department officers said the affected vehicles can neither be transferred

nor used to register any new ownership under the same National ID cards.

Excise sources added that vetting lists of the blocked vehicles had been dispatched back to the Home Department, while all Excise and Taxation Officers across the province were also notified to ensure implementation on the ground. Officials further noted that details of immovable properties connected to the same individuals had been sent to the relevant authorities so that they may also be frozen in the system. The development follows a request of individuals listed under the Fourth Schedule for their alleged involvement.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets Sajwani Business delegation of UAE and holds a luncheon in his honor.

KPCMA Afridi announces PTI rally at Mazar-e-Quaid on Sunday

PESHAWAR, Jan 09 (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Sohail Afridi has announced that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) will hold a massive public rally at Mazar-e-Quaid in Karachi on Sunday (January 11). The rally is part of the party's street movement ahead of the protest call scheduled for February 8.

In a statement issued on Friday, CM Sohail Afridi said the rally would begin at 4:30pm.

He added that his visit to Sindh aims to take the message of jailed PTI founder Imran Khan to every part of the province. He also called on the people of Sindh to rally

support PTI's street movement, claiming the gathering would be the biggest rally Karachi has ever seen.

CM Afridi who was due to depart for Karachi from Islamabad Airport at 9:00 am on Friday, got his flight delayed which will now be expected to land at Karachi Airport after 2:00 pm.

Meanwhile, CM Afridi's side on information, Shafi Jan, said the chief minister will meet Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Monday, January 12.

During his stay in Sindh, Afridi is also expected to meet party leaders at the Insaf House, visit the

press club, and travel to Hyderabad. According to Shafi Jan, CM Afridi will also visit prison facilities in Karachi's District South,

Korangi, and Malir to meet inmates. In Hyderabad, he will address the bar association and press club, attend an Insaf Students Federation convention, and hold meetings with the party's local leadership.

PTI has formally requested permission to hold a public gathering near Mazar-e-Quaid, Karachi Region PTI President Raja Azhar wrote to the deputy commissioner of District East, seeking approval for a peaceful rally at Bagh-e-Jinnah and assuring that all rules and codes of conduct would be followed.

Speaking on a private TV channel, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon said the provincial government would ensure free movement, security, and protocol for the KP chief minister.

Memon said Afridi would be free to carry out political and official activities as long as they remain within the law.

He added that the Sindh government is willing to facilitate public gatherings if informed in advance, but warned against any activities that may disturb public order or cause inconvenience to citizens.

LHC hints at action against officers who cut trees near Doctors Hospital

LAHORE (INP): Lahore High Court (LHC) has expressed strong anger over tree cutting in the city hinting registration of a case against Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) officials who cut trees near Doctors Hospital.

Conducting the smog case proceedings on Friday, the court summoned the concerned PHA officials on Monday.

Justice Shahid Karim remarked that a case will be registered against the responsible officers and they will be arrested by the court itself. The hearing of the case has been adjourned until January 17, Lahore.

Azhar Siddique Advocate told the court that trees have been cut between the canal and the road in front of the doctor's hospital and a separate petition has also been filed regarding this.

The court inquired the member of the Environment Commission Syed Kamal Haider have you visited the site.

He replied that yes, I have visited but only branches of the trees have been cut.

Syed Kamal Haider replied that these have been cut by the PHA people. You should investigate this immediately, Justice Shahid Karim directed.

Remember, whoever is responsible, I will register a case against him, Justice Shahid Karim remarked.

Sindh govt allows Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) rally at Jinnah ground

KARACHI (INP): The Sindh government has decided to allow Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to hold a political rally at Jinnah Ground in Karachi, provincial minister Nasir Hussain Shah said on Saturday.

Talking to media, Nasir Shah stated that Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sohail Afridi would be warmly welcomed in Sindh and is free to carry out political activities anywhere in the province.

He said that the peaceful struggle of any political party, including PTI, cannot be stopped.

However, he warned that problems could arise if the law is violated.

The provincial minister clarified that there is no ban on PTI's rally. He added that the party has also

applied for permission to hold rallies in Korangi and the South district.

PTI has formally sought permission for a rally at Jinnah Garden, which is being granted in accordance with the law. He said talks are ongoing with PTI leadership and permission for a Karachi rally can be given as per legal requirements.

Meanwhile, PTI Karachi President Raja Azhar said that the Sindh government has verbally informed the party that permission for the rally is being granted, but the Assistant Commissioner has not yet issued the formal No Objection Certificate (NOC).

He said that once the NOC is issued, PTI will submit the required challan to the Quaid-e-Azam ad-

ministration.

Raja Azhar expressed concern that the NOC must be submitted by 3 pm on Saturday, but the district administration, including the Assistant Commissioner, is no longer responding to PTI's calls.

On the other hand, before departing for Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi claimed that PTI would hold the biggest rally in Karachi's history.

Separately, PTI Secretary General Barrister Salman Akram Raja has arrived in Karachi on a visit to Sindh. In his message upon reaching the city, he termed the visit an important milestone.

President Haleem Adil Sheikh and the party organization.

He urged the people of Sindh to actively participate in all programs and fully support the street movement.

Sohail Afridi said that during his visit, he would convey the message of PTI founder and Chairman Imran Khan to every corner of Sindh.

He further announced that on Sunday at 4:30 pm, what he termed the largest rally in the city's history would be held at the Quaid-e-Azam shrine in Karachi.

According to him, the schedule has been released by PTI Sindh.

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Naqvi orders crackdown on begging and immigration mafias

ISLAMABAD (INP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Friday directed the FIA Immigration Wing to launch an effective crackdown against professional begging networks and the people facilitating them, stressing that no leniency would be shown toward those tarnishing Pakistan's reputation.

Chairing a high-level meeting in Islamabad, Mohsin Naqvi reviewed the performance of the FIA's Immigration Wing and assessed ongoing efforts to curb illegal immigration and human trafficking.

Mohsin Naqvi directed to continue strict and indiscriminate action against mafias involved in illegal immigration.

He said those involved in human smuggling deserve no leniency.

Mohsin Naqvi instructed the FIA to ensure strict enforcement of immigration laws and stressed that the airport immigration checking system should be further strengthened.

The interior minister said that those involved in trafficking "deserve no concession" and emphasised that Pakistan's name "cannot be allowed to be disgraced under any circumstances."

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During his visit to the Saudi Embassy last August, he told the ambassador that the mafia sending beggars abroad was damaging Pakistan's international image.

The interior minister said the FIA had already been instructed to launch a nationwide crackdown against these organised groups.

In a second visit to the Saudi Embassy in the same month, Naqvi held follow-up discussions on the issue and informed the ambassador that a full-scale operation was underway against the begging mafia, adding that a zero-tolerance policy had been adopted.

Naqvi's directives came months after he assured Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmed Al-Maliki of decisive action against professional Pakistani beggars travelling to Saudi Arabia.

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Motorways across Pakistan closed due to dense fog

LAHORE (INP): Dense fog continues to blanket most parts of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces, prompting the closure of several motorway sections as a precautionary measure to ensure public safety. According to details, Motorway M-1 is closed for all kinds of traffic from Swabi to Burhan, M-4 from Sher Shah to Sham Kot, M-5 from Sher Shah to Sukkur, and M-14 from Fategh Jang to Kot Badian. Thick fog also engulfed different sections of Islamabad and its adjacent areas. Thick fog was also reported from Jaffarabad, Sohbatpur, Shikarpur, and Bolan due to low visibility. Motorway Police spokesperson Syed Imran Ahmed said the closures were necessary to protect lives and property amid hazardous weather conditions. Fog has also been reported in several cities along the National Highway,

where visibility remains extremely poor.

Authorities have warned that lane violations during fog can lead to serious accidents, urging drivers to strictly follow lane discipline. Motorists have been advised to use fog lights, reduce speed, and maintain a safe distance from vehicles ahead. Citizens planning to travel have been instructed to prefer daytime journeys. The Motorway Police has defined safe travel timings between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm, when visibility is relatively better.

The police further advised the public to avoid unnecessary travel and contact the Motorway helpline 130 for guidance or assistance during fog-related disruptions.

Motorway Police said that monitoring teams are deployed on major routes to ensure safety and manage traffic flow as weather conditions evolve.



LONDON: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan meets Chester King CEO British Sports Association 9th January 2026.



ISLAMABAD: His Excellency Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmed Al-Maliki, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musaddik Malik.

Campaign to eradicate pollen allergy in Islamabad launched

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Ministry of Health has launched a comprehensive and historic campaign to eradicate pollen allergy in the federal capital, on the directions of the prime minister.

According to ministry of Health on Wednesday, under the chairmanship of Minister of State for Health Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Malik,

a detailed roadmap was prepared, followed by coordinated action between the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Ministry of National Health Services.

As part of the initiative, a three-phase, science-based operation targeting pollen-causing trees and plants have been successfully completed.

A total of around 29,115 such trees—identified as the primary source of pollen allergy—have been removed from various areas of Islamabad, including F-9 Park, Shakarparian and several major sectors of the city, it further stated.

Authorities clarified that only pollen-allergy-causing trees

were removed, while local and non-allergenic trees remain fully protected. It was also announced that three new indigenous trees will be planted to replace each uprooted tree.

So far, more than 40,000 eco-friendly trees have already been planted in the affected areas.

In addition, tenders have been issued for plantation of more tree with the support of private sector and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), it noted.

Rehabilitation work is currently underway across 81 acres land in Shakarparian, with the project scheduled for completion by April 2026, it underscored.

The initiative has yielded encouraging health outcomes, with a report of around 23 percent reduction in pollen vaccination cases over the past two years.

Comparing to 2023, the allergy cases dropped to less than half in 2025. While pollen-related cases in November and December 2025 were recorded at historic lows, it added.

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Governor Balochistan Jafar Khan Mandokhail Stresses Public-Centric Politics and National Unity



QUETTA: Governor of Balochistan, Jafar Khan Mandokhail, has said that he views politics as an important social responsibility aimed at improving the lives of ordinary people, raising their intellectual capacity, and freeing society from superstition and misconceptions.

He expressed these views while speaking to delegations from various districts at the Governor House Quetta.

The Governor stated that even today, national unity can be strengthened through people-friendly policies by ensuring public rights and empowerment. He emphasized that it is the national duty of all elected representatives to unite people instead of dividing them, and to become the voice and support of the voiceless and marginalized segments of society.

Governor Mandokhail further said that human dignity and honor are directly linked to the provision of basic needs and essential facilities. In this regard, he noted that concrete efforts are underway to ensure the timely completion of ongoing development projects so that their benefits reach the common man. He added that serving suffering humanity is the greatest form of service, and embodying the spirit of public service marks the beginning of a healthy and progressive society.

Reflecting on his long political career, the Governor said that he has always believed in cooperation without discrimination, stressing that fostering awareness of rights and responsibilities in society is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development.

Ziarat DC Chairs District Education Group Meeting, Announces Teacher Appointments This Month



ZIARAT: A meeting of the District Education Group was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Ziarat, Muhammad Riaz Khan Dawar, to review educational affairs and ongoing development in the district.

The meeting was attended by District Education Officer Latifullah Chashin, DEO Female Mainmora, DDO Sanjawi Ghulam Rasool Kakar, DDO Female

Farzana Arbab, Accounts Officer Abdul Nageebullah Kakar, All DDOs presented their performance reports and briefed the Deputy Commissioner on current progress and challenges. Addressing the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Riaz Khan Dawar announced that the process of recruiting temporary teachers will be completed within this month.

which will help overcome the shortage of teachers in government schools across the district. He further directed education officers to conduct daily visits to the education department schemes included under the Balochistan Special Development Initiative (BSDI) to ensure that all projects are completed on merit and within the given timelines.

Emphasizing the importance of education, the Deputy Commissioner stated that no compromise will be made on quality or merit, and all decisions will be taken strictly in accordance with established rules. He reaffirmed the district administration's commitment to promoting education through Ziarat and warned that any negligence in this regard will not be tolerated.

Quetta DC Chairs Review Meeting on Non-Functional Schools, Orders Immediate Restoration

QUETTA: A review meeting of the District Education Group was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Quetta, Mehruallah Badini, to assess the status of non-functional schools in the district.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner (General), Dis-

trict Education Officer, District Treasury Officer, and other concerned officials. During the meeting, a detailed briefing was presented on the number and condition of non-functional schools in Quetta.

The Deputy Commissioner directed that all necessary work at these schools be com-

pleted during the ongoing holidays so that they can become fully operational immediately after the vacations.

Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini further stated that district administration officers will extend full cooperation to the Education Department in resolving the issues

faced by non-functional schools. He reaffirmed the district administration's commitment that all non-functional schools in Quetta will be completely restored and made operational in the coming days, ensuring better educational facilities for students across the district.

Balochistan Food Authority Crackdown on Unsafe Food Practices in Quetta, Kuchlak, and Sibi 79 Food Outlets Inspected; 33 Issued Violations for Health and Safety Lapses

QUETTA: The Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) continues its rigorous inspections to eliminate substandard and unsafe food practices across the province. In a comprehensive food safety inspection drive in various areas of Quetta, Kuchlak, and Sibi, a total of 79 food outlets were thoroughly examined. During the inspections, multiple violations of food safety regulations were uncovered.

According to a spokesperson for the

BFA, action was taken against 33 food outlets found in severe violation of food safety laws. Among the infractions, poor hygiene, unsafe food storage practices, and non-compliance with standard operating procedures (SOPs) were the most prominent. Consequently, 25 hotels, 4 fast food corners, and 4 cooking centers, and 4 food outlets were found to be in violation.

The inspection team also discovered large quantities of re-

used, contaminated cooking oil, substandard spices, and unsafe food coloring agents. These items were promptly seized and destroyed on-site. The team further found several food outlets operating without a valid food business license, triggering legal actions against the offenders.

In addition, 24 establishments with minor deficiencies were issued corrective notices, urging them to comply with BFA's SOPs and rectify their practices within the

stipulated time. The Balochistan Food Authority emphasized that ensuring the public's access to safe and quality food is their top priority. They reiterated their commitment to zero-tolerance for violations and vowed to continue the crackdown on unsafe food practices.

The authority has called on all food businesses to adhere to the established safety standards and regulations for the well-being of consumers.

DC Kech Chairs Meeting on Arrangements for Turbat Marathon Race



TURBAT: An important meeting of councillors of the Municipal Corporation Turbat was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Kech, Bashir Ahmed Baloch, to review arrangements for the upcoming marathon race.

The meeting focused on civic and administrative preparations for the marathon race scheduled to be held on January 10 as part of the Kech Sports and Fitness

Festival. Detailed discussions were held on ensuring smooth coordination between the district administration and the municipal authorities for the successful conduct of the event.

Secretary of the Kech Sports and Fitness Festival, Altaf Sakhi, along with Municipal Corporation councillors including Tariq Babul, Captain Chakar Khan, Nasir Ismail, Ijaz Mallai, Aslam Baloch, Sham Bashir, and Nadeem

Hasrat, attended the meeting.

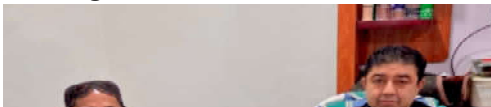
The councillors assured full cooperation with the district administration to ensure the marathon's success.

Key issues discussed included cleaning and preparation of race routes, road repairs, installation of water points at various locations, and provision of facilities for spectators. Emphasis was also placed on maintaining smooth traffic flow and en-

suring effective coordination with security agencies.

Deputy Commissioner Kech directed the Municipal Corporation to make special sanitation arrangements prior to the race. He further instructed that fire brigade services, rescue teams, and medical staff remain on high alert to effectively respond to any emergency situation and to provide a safe and secure environment for the athletes.

SE Irrigation Circle Vows Timely Supply of Agricultural Water to Balochistan



NASIRABAD: Sub-Divisional Officer Mumtaz Ali Soomro called on Superintending Engineer Irrigation Circle, Mudassar Zafar Khoso, and congratulated him on assuming charge.

During the meeting, SDO Mumtaz Ali Soomro briefed the Superintending Engineer on the supply of

agricultural water to Balochistan from Guddu Barrage. The briefing covered the current situation, challenges being faced, and matters related to the fair distribution of water among agricultural areas.

Speaking on the occasion, SE Irrigation Circle Mudassar

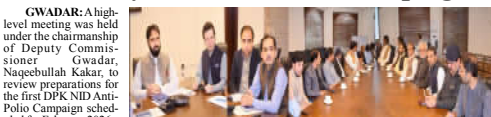
Zafar Khoso said that all available resources would be utilized to ensure the timely and rightful supply of agricultural water to Balochistan, adding that no negligence in this regard would be tolerated.

He appreciated the efforts of SDO Mumtaz Ali Soomro for consistently keeping

the authorities informed about the situation of agricultural water supply.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both officers reaffirmed their commitment to work in close coordination to improve water delivery systems and safeguard the interests of farmers across the region.

Gwadar DC Chairs Key Meeting to Finalize Preparations for February 2026 Anti-Polio Campaign



GWADAR: A high-level meeting was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Gwadar, Nageebullah Kakar, to review preparations for the first DPK NID Anti-Polio Campaign scheduled for February 2026.

Officers from all relevant line departments across the district attended the meeting.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner General, Dr. Abdul Shakoor, District Health Officer Dr. Yasir Tahir, DSM PHD Dr. Murshid Dasthi, DSP Police Chakar Baloch, WHO representative Dr. Zafar Iqbal, XEN B&R Akram Rahim, Deputy Director Social Welfare Isa Baloch,

District Surveillance Officer Dr. Farooq Baloch, Assistant Director Local Government Dost Muhammad Baloch, District Livestock Officer Dr. Sabir Ali Baloch, NRSP District Manager Peer Jan Baloch, District Education Officer Wahab

Majeed, along with other concerned officials.

During the session, the WHO representative presented a detailed report on the previous anti-polio campaign, including information on suspected polio cases, environmental samples, and demographic data.

The meeting was informed that a total of 35,364 children have been targeted for vaccination during the upcoming campaign.

Deputy Commissioner Nageebullah Kakar reviewed the challenges faced by field

workers during the campaign and issued immediate and effective instructions to concerned departments for their resolution. He emphasized strong monitoring of the campaign and encouraged frontline workers to ensure the campaign

is conducted in a peaceful, safe, and successful manner.

He reiterated that the complete eradication of polio remains a top priority of the government and requires coordinated efforts from all departments.

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Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) to probe cooking oil industry

NEWS DESK: The government has directed the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) to investigate the allegations of cartelisation in the cooking oil and ghee industry on a fast track.

The National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC), in a recent meeting, directed the CCP to submit its preliminary findings in the next meeting.

The committee said that it had noticed that health issues were increasing due to the sub-standard quality of cooking oil and ghee. Furthermore, it stated that the issue may be taken up seriously by the relevant ministries and provincial departments.

The price control committee also reviewed the cooking oil price trend in compliance with the Economic Coordination Committee's (ECC) decision taken on July 25, 2015.

The CCP informed meeting participants that an investigation into alleged cartelisation in the palm oil and ghee sector had been initiated in November 2015.

The CCP was in the process of collecting requisite information and would complete its preliminary report in a couple of months.

The committee decided that the Ministry

of Industries and Production, in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Technology (Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority), should coordinate with the provincial governments (food control authorities/ departments) to ensure compliance with prescribed standards for the vegetable oil and ghee supplied domestically and submit a report to the NPMC in the next meeting.

The committee agreed that the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and the food and agriculture section of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, under the supervision of the consultant food and agriculture, may prepare a policy paper for the potential agricultural products, such as tea, edible oil, processed products, pulses, juices, etc., which could be incentivised to reduce Pakistan's import bill and save foreign exchange. Additionally, it may include the impact of general sales tax on processed food that was impeding the development of value-added markets.

The committee said that the presentation to be made by the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration



was deferred and the chair had given the directive that the ICT chief commissioner would give a detailed briefing on the movement of commodity prices and the administrative measures planned for Ramadan in the next meeting.

The NPMC decided that the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) would prepare a weekly/monthly report on the ranking of districts in terms of price control and share it with the concerned ministry and provincial governments to enable them to effectively control price movements.

The chief statistician presented an analysis covering the inflation trends, impact of recent floods on food prices, wholesale-retail price differentials and national and international trends for cooking

oil prices. He informed the meeting that prices of key commodities such as wheat, chicken, potatoes, onions, tomatoes and eggs were reviewed, with a particular focus on comparing the current rates with pre-flood levels.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) presented a comprehensive report on loan disbursements to farmers for the sowing of Rabi crops in flood-affected areas along with district-wise details. Meeting participants expressed the de-

sire that the SBP may also provide a complete disaggregated breakdown of farm and non-farm credit and the types of credit disbursed under those categories, so that the NPMC may have a clearer picture of the effective utilisation of agricultural credit.

The committee emphasised the need for stronger coordination between the provincial governments and the Ministry of National Food Security to accurately assess the situation.

It was emphasised that the demand and supply of essential food items, especially ahead of Ramadan and festive seasons, be evaluated for their uninterrupted supply at stable prices. The food ministry apprised the meeting of consultations held with the Ministry of Industries and the provincial governments, and identified the measures to be taken before and during Ramadan to provide essential food items at stable prices.

The provincial departments added that they had asked the district administrations to take all possible measures to ensure the supply of essential food items during Ramadan. In that regard, the Sasta Ramadan Bazaar will also be organised.

Banks engage with 'viable' agri-loan initiative

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Banks Association (PBA) says banks are willingly engaging with the recently launched Zarkhez-e (Asaan Digital Zarqza) initiative because it is structured as a commercially viable incentive scheme.

Referring to a Dawn story titled 'The flaws of coercive sustainability', published in the Business and Finance Weekly on Jan 5, a PBA spokesperson argued that a key distinction of Zarkhez-e is that eligibility of the borrower does not equate to entitlement.

The decision of who to lend to and who not to lend to, rests squarely with banks.

He said banks also remain free to obtain security and collateral in line with their internal risk policies.

He insisted that the banking industry's participation in this scheme was not a result of pressure from the State Bank or the Ministry of Finance.

The PBA, however, acknowledged that a weak recovery framework was indeed a challenge for the banking sector.

But the Zarkhez-e

scheme has been designed to mitigate these legal risks through government-backed incentives: a 10pc first-loss guarantee as a tangible buffer against default and optional crop loan insurance as a tool to de-risk the portfolio, though, he said.

The spokesperson maintained that combined with real-time Nadra ID verification, PMD mobile SIM verification and the Land Information Management System for digital agronomic data, these cogent incentives make participation a logical business decision.

In a two-page letter to Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Secretary Jamil Ahmad Qureshi, the association said foreign and even local investors would be reluctant to commit billions of dollars to high-risk, long-term upstream projects if foundational fiscal terms could be altered unilaterally.

It said investors accepted such risks because petroleum concession agreements (PCAs) provided fiscal stability, and that removing this certainty retrospectively would be "fundamentally unfair" and "economically unviable".

The association's concerns come as the

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Petroleum Exploration and Production Companies Association (PPEPCA) on Thursday warned that the imposition of super tax could affect the financial viability of exploration and production (E&P) companies and undermine Pakistan's decades-long efforts to attract foreign investment in the oil and gas sector.

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The association's concerns come as the

Super tax may trigger arbitration, warn exploration firms

Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) hears appeals arising from judgments of the Sindh, Lahore and Islamabad high courts on the levy of super tax through Sections 4B and 4C of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, through the Finance Act, 2015.

Ask SIFC to intervene, cite fiscal stability clauses in petroleum concession agreements

The super tax was introduced in 2015 through a money bill,

with the stated purpose of financing the rehabilitation of areas affected by Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

The letter, signed by PPEPCA Secretary General Ibrar Khan and also sent to the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) and Additional Attorney General Munawwar Iqbal Diggal, said PCAs contain dispute resolution clauses that allow for international arbitration.

The association with the stated purpose of financing the rehabilitation of areas affected by Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

cited the Reko Diq and Karkey disputes, stressing that Pakistan had faced heavy financial liabilities in cases linked to alleged violations of legal protections and contractual commitments.

"If the federation insists on imposing super tax at rates above those set out in statutorily protected PCAs, then there is a distinct possibility that at least some of the association members may invoke the

dispute resolution clauses," the letter said. As a result, "the potential liability could run into billions of dollars, further straining Pakistan's already precarious fiscal position, damaging the sovereign credit rating, discouraging all future FDI (foreign direct investment) and undermining Pakistan's reputation in international capital markets," it added.

The letter said the government had taken decisions "at the highest level" to encourage foreign and multinational investment in Pakistan's oil and mineral resources, and warned that any perception that statutory and contractual assurances to E&P companies could be disregarded would harm those plans.

The association urged the SIFC to intervene to ensure the government honoured these "legally binding obligations".

Saying each day the matter remained unresolved increased the risk of international arbitration and damaged Pakistan's standing.



Govt fixes dollar rate, shifts to KIBOR for 5G

NEWS DESK: The Ministry of IT and Telecom has acknowledged long-standing demands of the telecom sector by easing payment terms and fixing exchange and interest rates in its policy directive for the upcoming next-generation mobile spectrum auction, a move that clears the way for the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority to issue the Information Memorandum for existing operators and new entrants to participate in the process.

Under the approved framework, the spectrum fee has been denominated in US dollars, but the exchange rate will be calculated at the National Bank of Pakistan's TT selling rate prevailing at the close of business on the day preceding the auction date. At least 50% of the spectrum price will be payable within one year of the licence issuance date, while the remaining 50% will be paid in five equal annual instalments carrying interest at the KIBOR offer rate plus three percentage points.

The directive also revises the benchmark

used for deferred payments.

Unlike the 2021-era policy that linked spectrum licence to the London Interbank Offered Rate, the current framework shifts to a domestic interest rate structure, a change sought by operators amid global rate volatility. Each new spectrum licence will be valid for a period of 15 years.

According to the policy, the PTA will auction multiple frequency

bands, including 15 MHz of paired spectrum in the 700 MHz band, 3.6 MHz paired in the 1800 MHz band, 20 MHz paired in the 2100 MHz band, and unpaired spectrum of 50 MHz in the 2300 MHz band, 190 MHz in the 2600 MHz band, and 280 MHz in the 3500 MHz band. Base prices range from \$6.5 million per MHz for paired 700 MHz spectrum to \$66.5 million per MHz for unpaired 3500 MHz spectrum.

At the same time, the IT ministry has sought federal measures, in consultation with stakeholders, to address industry concerns.

It proposed tax reductions to promote local manufacturing of 5G smartphones and duty-free imports of 5G equipment to accelerate adoption. The ministry also recommended industrial power tariffs for telecom operators through a joint task force.

Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) unhappy over gas tariff freeze, seeks price cuts

NEWS DESK: While the main apex business body is upbeat over economic prosperity, the leadership of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) on Thursday criticised the government's decision to freeze gas tariffs for six months, calling it a projected relief that falls short of the industry's expectations.

In a statement, Business-men Group (BMG) Chair-man Zubair Motiwala and KCCI President Rehan Hanif said the business community had consistently called for a substantial reduction in gas tariffs to bring down the cost of doing business.

They said the actual cost of indigenous gas hovers around Rs1,800 per million British thermal units (mmbtu), yet industries particularly captive power plants — are being charged

approximately Rs4,000 per mmbtu, which is "wholly unjustifiable and economically damaging".

Gas supplied to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for heating and processing purposes is being billed at an "excessively high rate" of around Rs2,300 per mmbtu, forcing many units to shut down and cut jobs, unemployment, they said. They also raised alarm over

the unannounced increase in RLNG mix in gas supply to industries.

While industries were earlier informed of a 10 per cent RLNG mix, recent gas bills reflect that this proportion has been increased to 20pc, significantly raising the cost of gas, they added.

The KCCI leadership urged the government to immediately revisit its gas pricing

policy, rationalise tariffs in line with actual costs, reverse the unjustified increase in RLNG mix and deliver real relief to industry.

Meanwhile, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) President Aftab Ikram Sheikh attributed recent economic stability and improvements in macroeconomic indicators to an improved security environment.



Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) begins hockey club scrutiny before Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) elections

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has formally initiated the process of scrutiny of hockey clubs across the country in coordination with the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) as part of governance reforms aimed at ensuring transparency and credibility in the upcoming PHF elections.

Speaking on the occasion, a spokesperson for the Pakistan Sports Board said that the scrutiny process has been launched under a PSB-approved, jointly agreed mechanism, which will be implemented by PHF under PSB oversight.

"The scrutiny of hockey clubs has formally begun under the umbrella of Pakistan Sports Board.

This is a transparent, uniform and rule-based process being carried out jointly with the Pakistan Hockey



Federation to ensure fair and credible elections," the PSB spokesperson stated.

The spokesperson explained that all hockey clubs seeking eligibility for participation in the PHF electoral process — including legacy and newly formed clubs — will be examined

strictly in accordance with approved criteria. A joint National Committee of Clubs, comprising representatives of PSB and PHF, has been constituted for this purpose.

According to the spokesperson, club data is being collected through an online por-

tal, while PSB has been given full supervisory and audit access to ensure transparency at every stage.

The scrutiny process will primarily be document-based, with provision for a one-time rectification opportunity where required, followed by

publication of provisional and final lists of eligible clubs.

He further stated that a clear objection and adjudication mechanism has also been put in place, allowing affected clubs to file objections within the prescribed timeframe.

Appeals will first be heard by PHF, with final adjudication by a PSB-designated adjudicator, whose decision will be final for election purposes.

The PSB spokesperson added that random physical verification of selected clubs will also be conducted to confirm their physical existence and declared home grounds, terming it an important step to strengthen the credibility of the process. "Any scrutiny or electoral exercise carried out outside this jointly approved framework will not be recognised."

Noor advances to squash quarterfinal after Egyptian opponent gets aggressive with referee, abandons match

NEWS DESK: Tempers flared and expletives were hurled across the squash court faster than the ball as Egyptian squash player Fares Dessouky got into a heated argument with the referee and abandoned the match in the fifth game, which automatically allowed Pakistan's Noor Zaman to advance to the quarterfinal of the Karachi Open.

Home favourite Noor was Pakistan's last hope to make it to the quarterfinals after Ashab Irfan and Nasir from "because this is unbelievable." Spectators had climbed onto chairs and clung to every available surface to see the match, with Dessouky in the second game questioning the score and the referee's decision. Spectators and international athletes alike, as well as squash icon

Jahangir Khan sitting front row to the action, murmured that the score should be 5-4.

Dessouky took the second game as Noor's coach gave him a pep talk that ostensibly helped him win the third game 11-5. Dessouky, currently world number 15 with a career-high of seven, went neck-and-neck with Noor for the fourth game, which Noor ultimately took 11-9.

The Egyptian waited for Noor to exit the court before staring down the referee and asking him where he's from, "because this is unbelievable." Spectators had climbed onto chairs and clung to every available surface to see the match, with Dessouky in the second game questioning the score and the referee's decision. Spectators and international athletes alike, as well as squash icon

waited for Noor to exit the court before staring down the referee and asking him where he's from, "because this is unbelievable." Spectators had climbed onto chairs and clung to every available surface to see the match, with Dessouky in the second game questioning the score and the referee's decision. Spectators and international athletes alike, as well as squash icon

Arsenal miss chance to stretch lead

NEWS DESK: Arsenal wasted the chance to move eight points clear at the top of the Premier League as Liverpool came to life in a 0-0 draw at the Emirates Stadium.

The Reds are one of only two sides to beat Mikel Arteta's men this season and came closest to breaking the deadlock when Conor Bradley hit the crossbar.

Arsenal failed to score for the first time at home all season but did enough to extend their advantage over second-placed Manchester City to six points.

Three consecutive draws for City over the past week had opened the door for Arsenal to close in on their first league title in 22 years.

The Emirates was bouncing before a ball was kicked in anticipation, but the spectacle between the defending champions and apparent champions elect fell flat.

Both sides struggled to deal with the treacherous conditions as Storm Goretti unleashed torrential rain and swirling winds.

Liverpool have long since fallen out of the title race since beating the Gunners at Anfield in August, but are now 10 games unbeaten to consolidate their place in the top four.

The visitors were penned in for much of the first 45 minutes but

still came closest to opening the scoring before the break.

William Saliba's backpass nearly caught out David Raya and, with the Spanish goalkeeper stranded, Conor Bradley's lob came back off the underside of the crossbar.

The roles were reversed in the second period as Liverpool dominated possession and territory.

However, the Reds were short of three of their biggest attacking threats with Alexander Isak and Hugo Ekitike out injured and Mohamed Salah away at the Africa Cup of Nations.

That lack of fire-

power in the final third showed as Arsenal were only ever troubled by the pace of Jeremie Frimpong, who latched the final ball to make his dangerous bursts count.

Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick separated the sides when the last met and nearly repeated the trick with a powerful effort that dipped just too late.

At the other end, Viktor Gyokeres was hauled off by Arteta after another poor performance as his goal drought from open play extended to 10 games.

Arteta had to turn to his wealth of options off the bench to try and

turn the tide as Gabriel Jesus, Noni Madueke, Eberechi Eze and Gabriel Martinelli were all introduced in the hunt for a winner.

But they took until stoppage time to register a shot on goal in the second half as Jesus and Martinelli fired too close to Allison Becker.

A point gives fourth-placed Liverpool three points clear of Newcastle and Manchester United in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League.

Martinelli 'deeply sorry' Arsenal winger Gabriel Martinelli said he had apologised to

Conor Bradley for shoving the Liverpool defender off the pitch when badly injured.

Some pundits felt Martinelli should have been sent off after the Brazilian dropped the ball on Bradley as he lay on the turf at the Emirates and then tried to manhandle him off the pitch so the game could quickly resume.

The 22-year-old Bradley left the stadium on crutches and wearing a supportive brace on his knee.

Martinelli was booked but not dismissed following the incident late in the game on Thursday which provoked an angry reaction from Liverpool's players.



Real Madrid set up Clasico Super Cup final

NEWS DESK: Xabi Alonso's Real Madrid beat Atletico Madrid 2-1 in a night Spanish Super Cup semi-final in Saudi Arabia on Thursday to set up a Clasico final clash against rivals Barcelona.

Fede Valverde's blistering free-kick and a Rodrigo Gores strike helped Madrid claim a fifth consecutive victory across all competitions, with Alexander Sorloth pulling one back for Diego Simeone's Atletico, who came up short in Jeddah.

Alonso was close to the sack after a run of inconsistent form towards the end of 2025, but his team have slowly found their footing in the shape of positive results, even if some performances have not been entirely convincing.

The Spanish coach led Madrid to a win over Barcelona in his first Clasico at the helm in October, before his team began to slump.

With French superstar Kylian Mbappe out as he recovers from a knee sprain, Alonso kept young striker Gonzalo Garcia in the centre of the attack after his but-

hand to the shot but could not keep it out because of the sheer power.

Valverde celebrated vehemently, slapping his own head, clearly delighted at breaking his duck in a difficult season to date. By taking the lead, Real Madrid earned the right to sit deeper and force Atletico to try and attack them to pull back level.

Madrid hit the Rojiblancos when they could on the counter, with Oblak saving well

from Rodrigo after he floated inside from the right.

Atletico began to create some chances and could have pulled level before the interval. Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois tipped away Sorloth's header, and then the target man clumsily nodded Conor Gallagher's cross off-target from close range.

Rodrigy extended Madrid's lead in the 55th minute with his third goal in five games, continuing a rich

vein of form across the past few weeks after a run where he failed to score for 32 games straight.

The Brazilian found a gap to burst through in the middle of Atletico's defence and kept his cool to sweep the ball past Oblak.

Three minutes later, Atletico hit back, with Sorloth finally finding the net with a header from Luciano Simoes's cross. The striker gave defender Raul Asencio just enough of a shove to put him off without being penalised for it before nodding in.

The Atletico coach goaded Madrid winger Vinicius Junior when he was substituted, with the Brazilian failing to score for a 16th consecutive game.

Real Madrid face Barcelona on Sunday in the final at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium after the Catalans thrashed Athletic Bilbao 5-0 on Wednesday.

Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said Thursday that superstar French striker Kylian Mbappe is fit to play in the Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona after a knee sprain.



Hamza Khan wins Mr Rawalpindi title at district bodybuilding championship

NEWS DESK: Hamza Khan clinched the Mr Rawalpindi title as district-level bodybuilding championships were held at the Rawalpindi Arts Council auditorium, organisers said on Tuesday.

The event, organised by the Rawalpindi District Bodybuilding Association, also featured competitions for Junior Mr Rawalpindi, Mr Physique and Junior Mr Physique, drawing athletes, gym owners and bodybuilding enthusiasts from across the city.

According to the results, Muneeb-ur-Rehman won the Junior Mr Rawalpindi title, Samiullah Niazi secured the Mr Physique crown, while Raja Muhammad Ali claimed

the Junior Mr Physique title.

Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Chaudhry Usama Tanveer attended the event as chief guest and praised the standard of competition.

"All the athletes who took part in these competitions deserve congratulations, and their efforts serve as a guiding light for other young people," Tanveer said.

He stressed the importance of sports alongside education, saying, "For managing life's challenges effectively, it is essential to have a healthy body along with a healthy mind."

Tanveer also lauded the organisers for successfully staging the event and as-

sured his full support for the promotion of sports.

President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry Usman Shaikat, along with officials of the Rawalpindi District Bodybuilding Association, also attended the ceremony.

Judging duties were performed by former Mr Pakistan and former Mr Olympia Jabar Ali, former Mr Rawalpindi Bilal Malik and former Mr Rawalpindi Jameel Ahmed Qureshi.

At the conclusion of the competitions, cash prizes and trophies were distributed among the winners, while all participating athletes also received awards, organisers said.



Historic Rs1.85bn bid buys Sialkot as new PSL franchise, Hyderabad snapped up for Rs1.75bn

NEWS DESK: Two new franchises were added to the Pakistan Super League (PSL) as OZ Developers put forward a massive Rs1.85bn bid to win Sialkot, moments after the FKS Group secured Hyderabad for Rs1.75bn at the league's auction on Thursday.

OZ Developers were in a bidding war with software company i2c as they went head-to-head in the second round of the auction taking place at the Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad. i2c's final bid was Rs1.82bn before OZ Developers upped the ante and ended the night at Rs1.85bn, the highest ever bid for a PSL franchise.

The first round of the auction was won by FKS, which was also in a bidding war with i2c, whose final bid was Rs1.7bn.

The base price for the new teams were FKS, OZ Developers, Aim Next inc, Dehark Sugar Mills, Inverex Solar, i2c Jazz, Prism Developers, VGO TEL, and Wale Pakistan.

Commentator and former Pakistan cricketer title was also awarded a team captain Wasim



this year's league set for March 26-May 3.

The cities up for potential franchise allocation included Faisalabad, Gilgit, Hyderabad, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Sialkot.

The current PSL teams include Lahore Qalandars, Islamabad United, Peshawar Zalmi, Karachi Kings and Multan Sultans.

Bidders for the two new teams were FKS, OZ Developers, Aim Next inc, Dehark Sugar Mills, Inverex Solar, i2c Jazz, Prism Developers, VGO TEL, and Wale Pakistan.

Commentator and former Pakistan cricketer title was also awarded a team captain Wasim

Akram hosted the auction as PSL CEO Salman Naseer joined him on stage. "Ten years of PSL have led us to this moment," Naseer said at the start of the auction.

Akram coaxed the bidders by reminding them that winning a bid was more than just ownership; it was the ability to design new logos, kits, interact with players and much more.

Ahead of the bidding process, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi awarded a cash prize of Rs 90 million to the team that won the Rising Star Asia Cup.

The team that won the Hong Kong Sixes title was also awarded a cash prize of Rs 18.5m.

Visa sections of 3 Bangladesh missions in India closed on security grounds

NEWS DESK: The visa sections of three Bangladesh missions in India have been closed temporarily on security grounds, Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain said on Friday.

"What I have done is that I have asked our three missions to keep their visa sections closed for the time being. It's a security issue," he told reporters at the foreign ministry, responding to a question on whether Bangladesh missions in India had restricted tourist visas for Indians.

He did not name the missions. However, diplomatic sources said the visa sections of the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi, the Deputy High Commission in Kolkata, and the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Mumbai, however, remain operational.



The visa sections at Bangladesh missions in Chennai and Mumbai, however, remain operational.

Following the

security concerns.

Touhid was also asked about the dropping of Bangladesh cricket

dian Premier League amid anti-Bangladesh protests in India, and Bangladesh's decision not to send the national

Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul's stance on not sending the team to India for safety reasons and demanding that Bangladesh's matches be relocated to co-host Sri Lanka.

"We will certainly play outside India," Touhid said.

He added that both players and supporters would have to travel to India and said the government must consider their security.

Asked about the impact on bilateral relations, Touhid said such issues arise from time to time and each has some impact.

He said Bangladesh would take decisions based on its national interest. "We have an interest in our players' safety in not sending them to India. If we have interest in buying rice from India, we will buy it," he added.

Cambodia extradites alleged 'scam centre' don to China

NEWS DESK: Accused scam boss Chen Zhi has been extradited to China from Cambodia, Beijing confirmed on Thursday, after he was indicted by the United States over alleged multibillion-dollar fraud.

Cambodia said earlier on Thursday that the bank founded by Chen, Prince Bank, had also been placed under liquidation.

The bank is a subsidiary of Chen's Prince Holding Group, one of Cambodia's biggest conglomerates, which Washington alleges has served as a front for "one of Asia's largest transnational criminal organisations".

China's Ministry of Public Security said Chen had been "escorted" back to China from Phnom Penh and lauded the "major achievement in China-Cambodia law enforcement cooperation".

Chinese authorities will soon issue arrest warrants for "the first

Chen Zhi's criminal group, and will resolutely apprehend the fugitives", it said in a statement.

Phnom Penh to liquidate bank founded by Chen Zhi

The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), the Southeast Asian country's central bank, said Prince Bank had been placed under liquidation and "suspended from providing new banking services, including accepting deposits and providing credit".

It said in a statement that auditor Morisonkak MKA has been appointed as liquidator. Prince Bank has about a billion dollars in assets under management, according to its website. Customers "can withdraw money normally" and borrowers "must continue to fulfill their obligations", the NBC said. "Building pressure" Chinese-born Chen was sanctioned by Washington and Lon-

don in October for directing an alleged cyberfraud run by hundreds of scammers who trafficked into compounds in Cambodia.

Cambodian authorities said they arrested Chen and two other Chinese nationals and extradited them on Tuesday at China's request. Chinese courts have sentenced people to death over involvement in scams, including more than a dozen people last year for their involvement in criminal groups with operations in Myanmar's Kokang border region.

The US Justice Department declined to comment on Wednesday. However, Amnesty International said last year that rights abuses in scam hubs were happening on a "mass scale" and the government's poor response suggested its complicity. That step pushed Chen would face up to 40 years in prison if convicted in the United

States on wire fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges involving approximately 127,271 bitcoin seized by the United States, worth more than \$11 billion at current prices.

Prince Group has denied the allegations. A law firm that stated on the group's behalf in November did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

Former adviser US prosecutors accused Chen of presiding over compounds in Cambodia where trafficked workers carried out cryptocurrency fraud schemes that netted billions. Victims were targeted through "pig butchering" scams — investment schemes that build trust over time before stealing funds. The operations have caused billions in global losses. Scam centres across Cambodia, Myanmar, and the region lure foreign nationals — many



India-US trade deal stalled after Modi did not call Trump, says US commerce secretary

NEWS DESK: India's trade pact with the United States was delayed because Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not make a telephone call to US President Donald Trump to close a deal they were negotiating, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said on Friday.

The trade talks fell apart last year and Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods in August to 50 per cent, the world's highest rate, including a levy of 25pc in retaliation for India's purchases of Russian oil. "It's all set up and you have got to have Modi call the president. And they were uncomfortable doing it," Lutnick said in an interview on the AII-In podcast, a US show by four venture capitalists that focuses on business



and technology. "So Modi didn't call."

The comments came after Trump stepped up the pressure for talks with a warning

this week that tariffs could rise further unless India curbs its Russian oil imports.

That step pushed record low and spooked investors waiting for progress in two-way negotiations for a trade deal that remains elusive. India still seeks a

tariff rate between Washington's offers to Britain and Vietnam that had formerly been agreed but the offer has expired, Lutnick added.

Riyadh says Yemeni separatist leader has fled

NEWS DESK: The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said on Thursday that southern separatist leader, Aidarus al-Zubaidi, has fled the country by boat, as government forces advanced on the port city of Aden.

The coalition said in a statement that Zubaidi travelled from Yemen to Somalia, where he boarded an aircraft to Mogadishu.

The coalition stated the plane was later tracked to a military airport in Abu Dhabi.

The Somali government announced it has launched an investigation to determine if its airports were used to transport a "political fugitive", a reference to Zubaidi.

The country's Immigration and Citizenship Agency said that if this proved to be true, it would constitute a "serious violation" of

national sovereignty. Zubaidi's escape follows his failure to appear for crisis talks in Riyadh on Wednesday.

His group, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), claimed he had been asked to go to Saudi Arabia under threat.

In a statement, the Saudi-led coalition provided further details about the flight from Somalia.

It said the aircraft turned off its identification system over the Gulf of Oman before turning it back on 10 minutes before its arrival at Al Reef military airport in Abu Dhabi.

The situation in Aden appeared stable on Thursday, with Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces patrolling the streets and no sign of STC forces, a witness told Reuters. Authorities have also

imposed a nighttime curfew in the city. Aden served as the seat of Yemen's internationally recognised government since Houthis forces seized the capital.

Sanaa, in 2014, but leaders of the Saudi-backed government left Aden last month after the STC took control of the city.

The Saudi-led coalition first intervened in Yemen in 2015 to support the government against the Houthis, an intervention that led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The STC was established in 2017 and later joined the government coalition.

An STC delegation in Riyadh said it had held fruitful talks with the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, according to comments by Mohammed Al Gharbi,

a senior official of the group.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council on Thursday ousted the separatist leader from its ranks and referred him for

investigation on charges of high treason after he fled the country, according to Arab News.

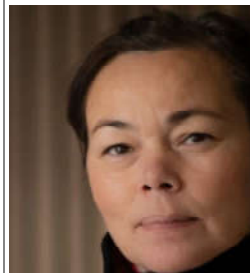
The council held an emergency meeting, revoking Zubaidi's membership and dismissing two ministers, Transport.

Minister Abdul-salam Humaid and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Waed Badhib, from their posts.

The meeting also revealed a split within the STC, as its prominent members, Abdulrahman Al-Muharrami, attended the session that voted



Greenland to meet Rubio, Danish officials



NEWS DESK: Greenland's government will join a meeting between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Danish officials next week following renewed US claims on the Arctic

island, its foreign minister said on Wednesday. Of course we will take part. We're the ones who requested a meeting," Vivian Motzfeldt told Danish public broadcaster DR after

Rubio confirmed the meeting would take place. US President Donald Trump has "actively discussed" the purchase of Greenland with his team, the White House said Wednesday.