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# QUETTA VOICE

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## Balochistan's Historic Shift to Merit-Based Government Jobs: Ending Corruption and Empowering Youth

**Syed Ali Shah:**

**QUETTA:** In a province long plagued by nepotism and job-selling scandals, Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has taken a bold and welcome stand. He has declared zero tolerance for corruption, favoritism, and the sale of government posts—and he is backing his words with action. The announcement of filling 111 Finance Department vacancies through a fully online, paperless, and 100%

merit-based recruitment process marks a genuine turning point for transparent governance in Balochistan.

For the first time in the province's history, candidates will apply and be tested entirely online. Qualifications will be verified instantly, and successful applicants will receive appointment letters within an hour. This fast, fair system eliminates middlemen, backdoor deals, and bribery—the very practices that have robbed deserving young people of opportunities for decades.

This merit-based recruitment drive in Balochistan is more than administrative reform; it is a lifeline for the province's educated youth.

By ensuring government jobs go to qualified candidates rather than relatives or those who can pay, the initiative restores hope and dignity. As Chief Minister Bugti has promised, the model will soon expand to all departments, creating a culture where talent, not connections, determines success.

The broader impact on

Balochistan's development and stability could be profound. Transparent hiring means better, more efficient public services, reduced wastage of funds, and faster implementation of development projects. When resources reach the people instead of corrupt pockets, infrastructure, education, and health services improve—laying the foundation for sustained economic growth.

Equally important, fair job opportunities address a major source of youth frustration in

the province. Giving young Baloch the chance to serve their homeland on merit can reduce alienation and contribute to lasting peace.

Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti's focus on merit, technology-driven transparency, and accountability offers real hope. If these anti-corruption reforms in Balochistan are implemented with consistency, they can transform governance, unlock the potential of the province's youth, and set a powerful example for the rest of Pakistan.

## NA speaker finally gets the ball rolling on opposition leader's appointment

**NEWS DESK:**

National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq on Monday sought proposals for the nomination of the opposition leader in the lower house of Parliament.

The post has been vacant since August 2025, following the disqualification of PTI's Omar Ayub by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). While the opposition has accused the government of delaying the appointment despite them putting forward Mahmood Khan Achakzai's name for the role, Sadiq has maintained that the delay was because the matter was sub judice. At the outset of Monday's session, Sadiq reiterated his stance that he could not initiate the nomination process earlier as the matter was sub judice and the NA Secretariat had been made a party in the cases.

He said that as PTI's Ayub had withdrawn his petitions in the Supreme Court and high courts against his removal, the nomination process could now be formally initiated.

"This issue had to head towards resolution only then. We would have done so if we had not been made a party [to the case]," Sadiq said. Addressing the opposition benches, he said proposals for nominating the opposition leader may be submitted in his chambers by 3pm tomorrow (Tuesday), as per Rule 39(ii) of the Rules of Procedures.

Rule 39 confirms it is the sole prerogative of the speaker to ask the opposition at any time to submit a name, after which the opposition may present it. Sadiq stated that the nominations should be accompanied by the signatures of members of the opposition. The count will be made at 3pm on January 14 in accordance with Rule 39(ii) of the NA rules, the speaker announced. The MNA having the greatest numerical strength after the signature of the members shall be declared as the opposition leader. It is worth noting that the opposition had submitted the name of Achakzai—who heads the opposition alliance Itehad-i-Tahafuz-i-Ayn-i-Pakistan (ITAP)—to the speaker's office in October 2025 rather than presenting it to the speaker personally. Speaking in the NA, Sadiq recalled that he had informed PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan and opposition chief whip Malik Amir Dogar that the matter was sub judice when they had called on him in November 2025.

## Islamabad Local Government Act amended, city polls reset

**NEWS DESK:**

President Asif Ali Zardari has issued an ordinance amending the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Act, reshaping the federal capital's local government structure and forcing another reset of the city's delayed municipal election process.

The Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, was promulgated on January 9 and published the next day, according to the gazette notification.

The ordinance replaces the "Metropolitan Corporation" model with "Town Corporation" structures across the law. It requires Islamabad to be divided into three Town Corporations, each aligned "as far as practicable" with the territorial limits of a National Assembly constituency.

Each Town Corporation will contain as many union councils as the federal government notifies, with Union Councils to be delimited based on population equality and administrative convenience, using the latest official census.

**Staff Reporter:**

**QUETTA:** Women from Quetta's Hazara community staged a protest demonstration outside the regional office of the Southern Gas Company on Monday, blocking Samungli Road for more than six hours to protest unannounced and prolonged gas load-shedding amid freezing temperatures.

The protesters said gas supply had remained suspended for extended periods in their localities without prior notice, making daily life extremely difficult during the harsh winter.

Holding placards and chanting slogans, they demanded immediate restoration of uninterrupted gas supply, particularly during morning and evening hours when temperatures drop sharply in the provincial capital.

The women also accused the gas utility of issuing excessively high bills to low-income



households despite irregular supply. They said many families in their areas survive on

daily wages and are unable to pay inflated bills, calling the practice unjust and exploitative.

"There is no gas, yet we are receiving heavy bills. How are poor people supposed to

pay?" one protester asked.

The demonstration caused significant traffic congestion on Samungli Road and adjoining areas, prompting authorities to hold talks with the protesters to ease the situation.

Officials of the Southern Gas Company later arrived at the protest site and held negotiations with representatives of the Hazara community. According to the protesters, the officials assured them that gas supply in their areas would be restored and maintained without interruption.

They also pledged that consumer bills would be scrutinized and complaints regarding overbilling would be addressed.

Similar complaints of gas shortages and inflated bills have been reported from various parts of Quetta in recent weeks, as residents across the city struggle to cope with freezing temperatures and prolonged outages during the peak winter season.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

## How Long Will Quetta Pay the Price for SSGC and Federal Negligence?



**Editorial:** Quetta is once again at the mercy of a winter crisis that has become all too familiar: low gas pressure, unannounced load shedding, and complete administrative silence. Every year, citizens are told to "bear with the situation" as temperatures fall and heaters, stoves, and geysers turn useless. Yet the authorities responsible — Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and the federal energy managers — continue to operate without accountability.

**A City Freezing While Authorities Look Away**

The people of Balochistan are right to ask: Why must Quetta suffer the same crisis every winter while no structural reforms are introduced? Why are consumers forced to pay heavy bills for a service that barely exists? And why do officials in Karachi and Islamabad continue to treat Balochistan's gas issues as a seasonal inconvenience rather than a governance failure?

**Despite** Balochistan being an energy-producing re-

gion, its residents struggle every winter for the very resource extracted from their own soil. This contradiction reflects a deep-rooted policy imbalance in the federation, where Balochistan remains last on the priority list — not because of a shortage of resources, but because of a shortage of political will.

**SSGC's Repeated Excuses and Decades of Mismanagement**

The SSGC's performance adds another layer of frustration. Each year, the company offers the same explanations — "excessive demand," "pipeline pressure issues," "technical challenges." Yet no one explains why these problems remain unresolved despite decades of complaints. Why have there been no significant infrastructure upgrades? Why has the company failed to introduce a clear winter management plan for Quetta? Why is communication with consumers absent? The unannounced nature of the load shedding exposes a complete disregard for the public convenience. When outages are not

scheduled or announced, families cannot plan meals, heating, or even basic daily routines. Hospitals and clinics struggle to maintain warm environments for patients. Small businesses suffer. And in a city where temperatures can drop below freezing, such negligence is not just inconvenient — it is dangerous.

**Federal Government's Weak Oversight and Balochistan's Low Priority**

The federal government cannot escape responsibility either. Energy management is a national issue, and the pattern of winter mismanagement in Balochistan reflects weak oversight, poor planning, and an unfair allocation of resources. The silence of policymakers during these crises sends a clear message: Quetta's suffering is not a priority.

What Quetta needs is not another round of hollow statements. It needs a transparent winter gas plan, proper infrastructure investment, honest communication with the public, and real accountability for SSGC.

## Hereditary Politics vs. Self-Made Leaders: Why Privilege Fails the People

**Qaseem Shah:** Politics in Pakistan has long been dominated by dynastic families, where power is inherited rather than earned. While such politicians often claim experience and continuity, their record exposes a harsh truth: hereditary leadership breeds entitlement, detachment, and compromise, leaving ordinary citizens' struggles ignored. Born into privilege, raised in opulent homes, and educated in elite institutions, dynastic leaders are often insulated from the harsh realities of poverty, unemployment, and social injustice. For them, bungalows, luxury cars, armed convoys, and protocol parks are not luxuries but assumed necessities. Over time, these comforts transform into entitlement, making public service a secondary concern.

Worse, dynastic politicians are bound by political debts, family obligations, and elite alliances, which forces them to compromise on issues critical to national interest. Challenging corruption, confronting anti-political elements, or addressing systemic inequality often takes a backseat to protecting their personal and family power. This creates a leadership class that is cautious, compromised, and frequently unwilling to act decisively for the public good.

In contrast, self-made leaders emerge from struggle, not inheritance, often from humble or poor backgrounds. They are intimately familiar with the hardships of ordinary citizens, and their leadership is grounded in empathy, accountability, and courage. Free from the constraints of dynastic obligations, self-made politicians are able to

challenge entrenched interests, fight corruption, and prioritize public service over personal gain. History provides numerous examples of such leaders. Globally, Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for decades under apartheid, led South Africa to justice and reconciliation. Lula da Silva, a former factory worker, became Brazil's president and implemented programs that lifted millions out of poverty.

Abraham Lincoln, born into poverty, presided over the United States during its gravest crisis and abolished slavery — proving that real leadership grows from struggle, not comfort. Pakistan's political landscape has its share of self-made leaders

equipped to address pressing social and economic challenges. As long as politics is dominated by inherited privilege, the needs of the poor and marginalized remain sidelined, and reforms remain superficial.

In the end, self-made leaders rooted

in struggle, empathy, and public service are the only hope for meaningful change. True leadership requires more than a family name; it requires vision, courage, and the willingness to put the people above privilege, comfort, and personal gain. For Pakistan, the challenge is clear: move away from dynastic entitlement and empower leaders who have earned the right to lead.

and it demands courage, integrity, and connection with the people. Dynastic politics, in contrast, remains a structural barrier to progress in Pakistan. Leaders born into privilege often see public service as an entitlement rather than a responsibility. Their compromised independence, obsession with status and perks, and reluctance to confront entrenched interests make them ill-

equipped to address pressing social and economic challenges. As long as politics is dominated by inherited privilege, the needs of the poor and marginalized remain sidelined, and reforms remain superficial. In the end, self-made leaders rooted in struggle, empathy, and public service are the only hope for meaningful change. True leadership requires more than a family name; it requires vision, courage, and the willingness to put the people above privilege, comfort, and personal gain. For Pakistan, the challenge is clear: move away from dynastic entitlement and empower leaders who have earned the right to lead.

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

**By Samiullah:**

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

**The Inhuman Act: Targeting Hospitals:**

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

**The Impact of the Attack:**

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



dren, the wounded, and the elderly, were directly affected by this grave violation of international law. Lives were lost, and the injured faced dire circumstances with limited access to medical care. Moreover, such actions further fuel the cycle of violence in the region, making it increasingly difficult to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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

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

to adhere to the rules of war and peace. **Thucydides' Insights: Rules of War and Peace:** The ancient Greek historian Thucydides,

in his timeless work "History of the Peloponnesian War," underscored the importance of rules in times of war and peace. He argued that upholding these rules is not a sign of weakness but an essential

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

**To Sum Up:** The illegal Israeli attack on a hospital in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the tragic consequences that the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to impose on innocent lives. It is imperative for the international community to unite in its efforts to promote peace, protect the most vulnerable, and ensure the principles of war and peace are upheld. As Thucydides noted, these principles are not a sign of weakness but the cornerstone of a just and humane world order. It is high time for the United Nations and powerful nations to take proactive measures to end the suffering and work towards a lasting solution in the region.

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



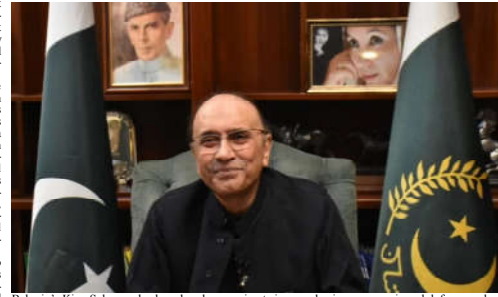
## President Zardari to visit Bahrain from Jan 13-16

**NEWS DESK:** President Asif Ali Zardari will embark on an official visit to Bahrain from January 13 to 16, accompanied by a high-level delegation.

According to the Foreign Office post on X, the president is scheduled to hold talks with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. The meetings will focus on strengthening bilateral relations, as well as discussing regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The visit aims to deepen Pakistan's longstanding partnership with Bahrain and explore new avenues of cooperation in trade and economic engagement, defence and security, and people-to-people exchanges, says the FO.

Pakistan-Bahrain economic ties have gained momentum in recent months. On November 26, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and



Bahrain's King Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa agreed to increase bilateral trade to one billion US dollars within three years—one of the most ambitious economic targets set between the two countries to date.

The commitment was made during talks at Qasr Al-Qudbiya in Manama, where both

leaders placed economic cooperation at the centre of their discussions. Bilateral trade currently exceeds \$50 million US dollars, with both sides expressing confidence that growth could be accelerated through the near-finalisation of the Pakistan-GCC Free Trade Agreement and recent visa relaxations

to improve business mobility. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also invited Bahraini investors to explore opportunities in food security, information technology, construction, mining and minerals, renewable energy, healthcare, and tourism.

The two leaders re-

viewed defence and security cooperation and agreed to expand collaboration in areas including training, cybersecurity, defence production, information sharing, and enhanced port-to-port connectivity between Karachi and Gwadar and Bahrain's Khalifa bin Salman Port to facilitate trade.

## Rs300m call centre extortion case debated in Senate Information Technology IT committee

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology has reviewed allegations of embezzlement linked to money collected from illegal call centres during a meeting chaired by Senator Palwasha Khan.

Officials told the committee the case relates to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) and concerns an alleged monthly amount of Rs15 million taken from illegal call centres.

Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) representatives said the matter is being handled as an Anti-Corruption Wing case.

They stated that a first information report had been registered against 13 suspects and described the allega-

tions as extortion related to illegal call centre activity. The total amount under allegation is Rs300 million.

Officials said Rs1.5 million had so far been recovered from a sub-inspector.

They added that three people were unaccounted for, five suspects were on bail, and three were in custody. FIA officials said the inquiry could widen to include personnel from other departments if further evidence emerges.

Senator Pervaiz Rashid said the issue of illegal call centres had been reported for years, referring to past comments by former interior minister Rehman Malik, who had said such operations were sometimes run from

vehicles and could involve government officials.

Senator Rashid asked how authorities could identify such network before crimes are committed, and whether similar call centres operate in the United Kingdom.

He said complaints about call centres based in Pakistan were being raised internationally.

Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officials told the committee that the case is being viewed as a federal anti-corruption matter and that the NCCIA is a separate entity from the FIA. The IT ministry secretary told the committee that call centres are not illegal if registered, but those involved in unlawful activities are treated as illegal.

## Motorways now open for traffic, say police following partial closure due to dense fog conditions

**NEWS DESK:** The motorways police have said that all motorways under its jurisdiction have been opened for traffic, after dense fog conditions prompted partial closure of several motorways early on Monday.

In a post on X, the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) said, "All motorways falling under the jurisdiction of the NHMP have been opened for traffic upon improved visibility." Earlier, due to dense and persistent fog conditions, the motorway police had partially closed various key motorways, including sections of the M-2, M-3, M-4, M-5, and M-11.

At 10:25am on Monday, NHMP said on its X account that the M-2 motorway had been closed from Thokar Niaz Baig to Sial Mor, the M-3 motorway remained closed from Faisal Pur to Darakhana, and the M-4

motorway was closed from Shershah to Pindi Bhattian.

While the M-5 motorway was closed from Shershah to Zahoor Peer, and the M-11 motorway was closed from Lahore to Sambrial. Earlier, the NHMP said that Motorway M-5 was closed from Rohri to Rahim Yar Khan, but it had now been opened due to "improved visibility."

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department's fog forecast, the M-2 (Pindi

Bhattian-Lahore), M-3 (Lahore-Abdul Hakim), M-11 (Sialkot-Lahore), M-4 (Pindi Bhattian-Faisalabad), and M-5 (Multan-Sukkur) were expected to remain in "dense" fog situation till 11am.

Last week, three people were killed, and 34 others were injured in fog-related accidents in various parts of Punjab. On January 7, dense fog paralysed road traffic across large parts of Punjab, prompting authorities to close several key motorways.



## Six policemen, one civilian martyred in K-P IED blast as violence intensifies

**NEWS DESK:** At least six police officers, including an additional station house officer, and a civilian were martyred on Monday when a police armoured personnel carrier was hit by an improvised explosive device while travelling from Gomul to Tank in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, officials said.

The martyred include Station House Officer (SHO) Ishaq Marwat, Constable Sher Aslam, driver Abdul Majed, and constables Arshad Ali, Hazrat Ali, and Ehsan Ullah. Police said one civilian passerby was also killed in the attack. The identity of the civilian victim has not yet been established.

In a separate attack the same day, an IED targeted a police vehicle near Darah Tang in the jurisdiction of Saddar Police Station in Lakki Marwat. Three police personnel, including SHO Razaq Khan, were injured in the blast, police said.

The device had been planted near the Darah Tang bridge. At the time of the incident, the District Police Officer of Lakki Marwat

was on a routine patrol of police posts and was expected to pass through the same route. A day earlier, unknown armed assailants had abducted a lawyer from the same location, according to officials.

K-P Inspector General of Police Zulfiqar Hameed said the cowardly terrorist attacks in Tank and Lakki Marwat would not shake the resolve of the police force. He said the martyred officers and personnel laid down their lives in the line of duty and that the entire force was proud of their sacrifice. "The morale of the police is high, and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa police will

confront terrorism with even greater determination and courage," the KP said.

He said the sacrifices of the martyrs would not go in vain and assured that the families of the slain personnel would receive full support and all possible assistance.

The police chief said investigations had been accelerated and those involved in the attacks would be brought to justice soon. In another incident, local sources said a police officer identified as Ismat, a resident of Sydowali, and his cousin were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the Kachi Kathgarh area.



## Pakistan watches Iran unrest warily, fears spillover from any instability

**NEWS DESK:** Islamabad is closely following the situation in Iran and does not want an upheaval in the neighbouring country, as any major instability across the border would have far-reaching implications for Pakistan's security, economy and regional standing.

Islamabad understands that a section of the Iranian population is protesting against inflation, unemployment and the rising cost of living but there is also a clear concern within Pakistan's security and diplomatic circles that Iranian dissidents based abroad are actively trying to exploit the unrest and push it in a particular political direction.

"Pakistan is very cautious. This is Iran's internal matter. We, nevertheless, are closely following the situation," a government official said, adding that the Pakistani government has no interest in seeing chaos in neighbouring Iran.

Any prolonged instability there will spill over into the region, and Pakistan would be among the first countries to feel the impact, the official said while requesting not to be named given the sensitivity of the issue. Reflecting these concerns, Pakistan has issued a travel advisory for Iran and ac-

tivated contingency planning to assist its nationals if the situation deteriorates further. The advisory came amid reports of violence in several Iranian cities, temporary internet shutdowns and heightened security deployments.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran, Mudassir Tipu, urged the Pakistani nationals to strictly follow immigration and travel requirements.

"All Pakistani nationals traveling to Pakistan from Iran must ensure that they have a valid visa or exit stamp (Kharooj) on their passports," he said.

"The students may ensure that they have clearance certificates from their universities. Otherwise, Iranian immigration

authorities will not allow them to travel till they complete requisite procedures," the ambassador said in a statement.

He also cautioned that those travelling by road to reach the border points will before closure times and coordinate their onward travel inside Pakistan in advance. "We are always available for any assistance," the ambassador assured.

The Foreign Office said: "In view of the ongoing situation, the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan has issued a Travel Advisory on Iran. Our nationals are kindly requested to adhere to the Advisory. We will be very grateful for your cooperation & understanding & will do our best to assist you."

The unrest in Iran

has drawn sharp reactions from Washington and Tel Aviv, with both the US and Israel openly backing calls for political change.

US President Donald Trump has gone a step further, threatening military action if Iranian security forces kill protesters.

His remarks were met with a strong response from Tehran, with Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf warning that any attack on Iran would trigger strikes against Israel and US military installations in the region.

Despite the heated rhetoric, analysts caution against drawing premature conclusions about regime change.

"I have seen four protest movements in Iran in the last three decades and there is no sign yet that the current protests could lead to regime change," Muhammad Hussain Bakari, an Iran-based international affairs expert, told The Express Tribune.

Bakari said the majority of demonstrators were peaceful citizens expressing genuine economic grievances.

"But around 10 to 15% are armed and apparently backed by external players who are attacking state institutions," he added, arguing that this factoring in could worsen the situation and hardened the state's response.

For Pakistan, the stakes are high. Any prolonged instability in Iran could disrupt cross-border trade, fuel smuggling networks, complicate border management in Balochistan and add to refugee pressures, according to analysts.

A wider regional escalation involving the US or Israel could also place Pakistan in a difficult diplomatic position, given its ties with Iran, Gulf countries and China. Officials say Islamabad's priority remains stability next door. "Pakistan has no desire to see Iran weakened or fractured," a diplomat said.



## Opposition leader's appointment awaited as National Assembly session summoned

**NEWS DESK:** President Asif Ali Zardari has summoned the National Assembly session on Monday (today), setting the stage to initiate the process of appointing the leader of the opposition.

The opposition leader issue is expected to resurface after PTI's Omar Ayub withdrew his petitions in the Supreme Court and high courts against his removal.

Before the petition was withdrawn, Speaker Ayaz Sadiq said he couldn't begin the appointment process as the issue was subjudice.

With the summoning of the assembly, Speaker Sadiq is expected to ask the op-



position to follow the process for appointing a new leader. The opposition has repeatedly accused the government of delaying the appointment process

and nominated Pasht-un-khwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) chief Mehmood Achakzai as the opposition leader. Rule 39 of the "Rules of Procedure

and Conduct of Business in the National Assembly 2007" confirms it is the sole prerogative of the speaker to ask the opposition to submit a name, after

which the opposition may present itself. However, the opposition has already submitted the name of Achakzai to the speaker's office rather than presenting it to the speaker personally.

The rule also states the speaker must verify the signatures of all opposition members voting in favour of the candidate. Rule 39, titled "Declaration of Leader of the Opposition," states that after each general election—and at any time thereafter—the National Assembly speaker must declare the opposition leader as soon as possible following the election of the prime minister.

## Flour prices surge nationwide, adding to inflation woes

ISLAMABAD (INP): A sharp rise in flour prices across the country has intensified the hardships of citizens already struggling with high inflation. According to official documents released by the Federal Bureau of Statistics, the price of a 20-kilogram bag of flour has recorded significant increases in various cities over the past week. The data shows

that flour prices have risen by up to Rs 590 in some cities within just one week. Islamabad witnessed the highest overall price, with a 20-kilogram bag of flour now costing Rs 2,893. In

Sargodha, the price surged by Rs 590, while Multan saw an increase of Rs 226.66. Prices rose by Rs 200 in Khuzdar, Rs 163.33 in Bahawalpur and Rs 140 in Quetta during the same period.

Other major cities have also been affected. The price of a 20-kilogram bag of flour increased by Rs 134 in Gujranwala and by Rs 120 in both Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Karachi,

Peshawar, Sukkur and Larkana recorded increases of Rs 100, while prices went up by Rs 80 in Hyderabad and Sialkot. Bannu saw a rise of Rs 50, whereas Lahore experienced a relatively

smaller increase of Rs 40. Following these hikes, the current price of a 20-kilogram bag of flour has reached Rs 2,866 in Rawalpindi, Rs 2,850 in Peshawar, Rs 2,800 in Bannu, Rs 2,660

in Quetta and Rs 2,600 in Karachi. The latest surge in flour prices has further burdened households already grappling with rising living costs, deepening public concern over inflation.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTC).

## Pakistan on path of economic stability, development: Amir Muqam

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON, Engineer Amir Muqam, Sunday, attended the event as the chief guest, which was organized by the Pakistan South Africa Association in Pretoria, Lodheim, South Africa. The prestigious event was attended by High Commissioner of Pakistan Malik Muhammad Farooq, the Overseas Pakistan community, political and social figures and hundreds of people from different walks of life, said a press release.

Addressing the event, the federal minister extended heartfelt congratulations to the attendees on the New Year and said that last year, 2025, proved to be a year of achievements for Pakistan. Pakistan achieved significant milestones in defense, economy, diplomacy, sports, and other fields, he added.

He appreciated the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and said that due to the hard work and timely decisions of the current government, Pakistan was on the path of rapid development.

Amir Muqam emphasized that under the leadership of Field Marshal and Chief of Defence Forces General Syed Asim Munir, the Pakistani Armed Forces achieved historic successes in the war of truth. He said that in the war of truth, the Pakistani Armed Forces defeated the enemy and raised the head of the entire nation with pride.

He paid tribute to the overseas Pakistanis who have been providing for investment in Pakistan and a one-window facility for investment had been established through SIFC so that overseas Pakistanis could invest confidently.

Speaking on the Kashmir issue, he said that it is imperative to give the Kashmiri people the right to self-determination in accordance with the UN

resolutions and that lasting peace in the region was not possible without a solution to this long-standing issue.

Earlier, the central president of the Pakistan South Africa Association, Mian Naseer Ahmed, welcomed the chief guest and informed him about the problems faced by overseas Pakistanis and appealed for cooperation to resolve them.

Renowned journalist Yousaf Abrarji and local councilor Naeem Patel also stressed on further strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and South Africa.

High Commissioner of Pakistan Malik Muhammad Farooq welcomed the arrival of the federal minister and assured all possible cooperation for the overseas community.

Senate IT Committee briefed on NADRA data leak, irregularities in family records

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and interior ministry officials briefed Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology about data leak, anomalies in Pakistani family trees, but after thorough scrutiny, up to 80% of such entries have been removed. Foreign nationals are now being removed from the database in Pakistan as well.

Officials emphasized the importance of knowing who resides in Islamabad. The data collected through self-enumeration is critical, as previously Pakistani citizens' information was reportedly being sold on the dark web. Senator Afanullah noted that past investigations into data leaks had resulted in 15 NADRA officers being dismissed.

A year ago, and the new NADRA chairman has added enhanced features. Authorities revealed that previously, foreign nationals were included in Pakistani family trees, but after thorough scrutiny, up to 80% of such entries have been removed. Foreign nationals are now being removed from the database in Pakistan as well.

The Deputy Commissioner stated that fewer citizens are now providing data through self-enumeration. The "Door-to-Door" survey app will be launched soon. Officials from the Ministry of Interior highlighted that NADRA's data is now more secure compared to

## Abbasi reaffirms zero-tolerance policy against theft and sabotage

RAWALPINDI, Jan 12 (INP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi on Monday reaffirmed that a strict zero-tolerance policy is being enforced against individuals involved in the theft and sabotage of railway property.

The minister lauded the timely action of SHO Railway Police Landhi Muhammad Habib Zafar and his team for successfully thwarting an attempt to steal valuable railway tracks in Karachi, said a news release.

He said such

criminal activities cause heavy losses to the national exchequer and damage critical public infrastructure.

In line with the government's zero-tolerance policy against theft and damage to national assets, the Railway Police conducted a major operation in Karachi to recover railway material worth millions of rupees and arresting four suspects.

According to details, the Railway Police Karachi Division carried out a successful raid within the jurisdiction of Railway Police Station Landhi,

near Murtaaza Chowringhi and along the Malir River. During the operation, a gang involved in stealing railway tracks and other equipment was caught red-handed while cutting railway lines using gas cutters.

Initial investigations revealed that the recovered railway material was worth millions of rupees and that the criminal activity had already caused significant financial losses.

The timely intervention by the Railway Police prevented further damage to vital railway infrastruc-

ture. A case has been registered against the arrested suspects at Railway Police Station Landhi, while raids are ongoing to apprehend other members of the gang involved in railway theft.

The operation was conducted under the leadership of SHO Railway Police Landhi Muhammad Habib Zafar. The minister also directed the Railway Police to further intensify effective operations against such criminal elements to ensure the protection of national assets.

## Thick fog blankets national highways, shutting motorways across country

PESHAWAR, Jan 11 (INP): Thick 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, the dense fog severely affected the routine life of citizens.

Motorway M-1 was closed from Peshawar to Rakshai, M-2 from Thokar Niaz Baig to Chakri, M-3 from Thokar Niaz Baig to Dargahana, M-4 from Pindi Bhattian to Sher Shah, M-5 from Sher Shah to Sukkur, M-11 from Lahore to Sambrial, and M-14 from Injara to Esa Khel were closed for all kinds of traffic. Thick fog also gripped adjacent areas on the National Highway which include Lahore, Pattoki, Okara, Sahiwal, and Iqbal Nagar, Mian Channu, Khanewal, Multan, Basti Malook, Lodhran, and Bahawalpur, Ahmadpur Sharqia, Taranda

Mohammad Pannah, Iqbalabad, Rahim Yar Khan, and Sadiqabad. Visibility was also reduced from 10 to 30 meters from Sehwan to Larkana. Spokesperson for the Motorway Police, Central Region, Syed Imran Ahmed, said the decision to close the motorways was taken to protect the lives and property of the public. He warned that lane violations during foggy conditions could lead to serious accidents.

The Motorway Police advised drivers to strictly follow lane discipline and avoid unnecessary travel during fog. Citizens were urged to prefer traveling during daylight hours, noting that safer travel times in fog are between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm. Drivers were instructed to use fog lights mandatorily, avoid overspeeding, and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle ahead. Motorists requiring guidance or assistance were advised to contact the Motorway Police helpline at 130.

Authorities have

## Motorway sections closed as fog descends on Punjab, KP, Sindh

LAHORE (INP): Heavy fog in plain areas of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on night between Sunday and Monday forced closure of several motorway sections after visibility dropped.

According to the Motorway Police spokesperson, Motorway M1 from Peshawar to Burhan, Motorway M2 from Thokar Niaz Baig to Chakri, Motorway M3 from Faislpur to Dargahana, Motorway M4 from Shershah to Pindi Bhattian, Motorway M5 from Rohri to Shershah and Motorway

M11 from Lahore to Sambrial have been closed for all kind of traffic. Motorway Police spokesperson said that the closures were necessary to protect lives and property amid hazardous weather conditions.

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.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry chairing a meeting on Port Qasim.



ISLAMABAD: Hasnat Ahmed Qureshi, Managing Director PPRA, accompanied by Dr. Aslam Waseem, DG Legal PPRA, and Sheikh Ahsan Raza, Project Director EPADS, highlighting landmark procurement reforms while briefing journalists at PID.

## Dining on the water: Lahore's first canal ship restaurant opens in Jallo

LAHORE (INP): A unique recreational project aimed at feeding the growing love for water in Lahoreites has officially begun, with the launch of a canal ship restaurant at Jallo, offering dining and entertainment right on the water.

Construction work on the canal ship restaurant has formally started at Jallo Mor, where heavy machinery has already reached the site.

To facilitate the project, canal water has been temporarily shut off, allowing excavation and structural

work to proceed smoothly. Officials say the initiative is designed to transform the canal area into a modern recreational hub.

For the construction of the floating ship restaurant, the canal depth is being increased to 13 feet, while the width is being expanded to 30 feet. These changes are necessary to safely accommodate the ship and related facilities.

After construction, the entire stretch of the canal will be illuminated with modern lighting models to enhance its nighttime appeal. Surrounding greenbelts will be converted into dedicated picnic areas for families and visitors.

In addition to dining on the water, citizens will be able to enjoy a range of recreational activities. Plans include live cultural performances, evening music, and other entertainment.

After construction, the entire stretch of the canal will be il-

luminated with modern lighting models to enhance its nighttime appeal. Residents have already expressed excitement about the prospect of enjoying food while seated on canal waters.

Punjab Housing Minister Bilal Yasin said the canal ship restaurant project is expected to be completed within this year.

The Punjab cabinet approved the project in August last year, allocating a total cost of Rs49.4 million, underscoring the government's push to both inside the ship develop new urban recreation facilities in Lahore.



## Balochistan CM Announces Fully Merit-Based Online Recruitment to Curb Corruption



### NEWS DESK:

**QUETTA:** Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has reiterated his firm stance against the sale of government jobs, corruption, and nepotism, stating that these practices will not be tolerated under any circumstances in the province.

In a post on social media platform X, the chief minister said restoring public trust and ensuring transparent governance remain top priorities of his government.

He noted that concrete and effective

measures are being taken to strengthen accountability and improve the system of governance in Balochistan.

As part of these reforms, Mir Sarfraz Bugti announced that for the first time in the province's history, 111 government posts in the Finance Department will be filled through a fully online, paperless, and 100 per cent merit-based recruitment process.

He described the move as a historic step towards eliminating corruption and introducing meaningful

institutional reforms. Under the new system, candidates will undergo online testing, with their qualifications and eligibility assessed in a transparent manner.

Successful applicants will receive their appointment letters within one hour, ensuring swift and merit-based hiring.

The chief minister said the initiative will begin with the Finance Department and will be gradually expanded to all other departments of the Balochistan government.

He added that the provincial administration is committed to promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability through the use of modern technology.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti stressed that merit, transparency, and honoring commitments made to the people form the foundation of his government's policies, and such reforms will continue to empower youth and ensure that deserving individuals are given their rightful opportunities.

## Deputy Commissioner Quetta Orders Strict Action Against Unjustified Increase in Roti Prices and Weight Reduction



**QUETTA:** A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Quetta, Mehrullah Badini, to address the arbitrary increase in roti prices and reduction in weight in the city.

The meeting was attended by all Assistant Commissioners, the Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue), and the Additional Deputy Commissioner (General).

Focus on Price and Weight Complication: The meeting extensively discussed the fixed prices of roti and the specified weight standards.

It was emphasized that any violation of the government's approved price list or weight specifications will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

The district administration decided that strict legal action, including fines, sealing of shops, and registration of cases, will be taken against bakers

found violating these regulations. An Action Plan for Enforcement: The Assistant Commissioners have been directed to ensure daily inspections in their respective areas and guarantee that bread is provided to the public at the prescribed price and weight.

The Deputy Commissioner stressed that the exploitation of the public's economic situation will not be tolerated and that a zero-tolerance policy will be adopted against violators.

The district administration clarified that the monitoring process will be strengthened to protect public interests, and actions against price hikes and weight reductions will continue uninterrupted.

The public is urged to report any discrepancies to the authorities to ensure compliance.

## Musa Khel Police Seizes 10 Kilograms of Hashish, Arrests Drug Dealer



**MUSA KHEL:** The Musa Khel Police successfully carried out an effective operation against drug dealers, recovering 10 kilograms of hashish and arresting a suspect.

This operation was carried out under the directives of DIG Police Loralai Range, Junaid Ahmed Shaikh, and the guidance of SP Musa Khel, Kaleemullah Kakran.

**Operation Details:** The operation was led by SHO Inspector Nishtar, Anwar Khetran of the Musa Khel Police Station, who, along with a special team, apprehended the accused, Kareem son of Faiz Ahmad.

According to police, the accused was found in possession of 10 kilograms of hashish. A case has been

filed under the Narcotics Act, and further investigation is underway.

**Zero Tolerance:** The police authorities have reiterated that the district is committed to a zero-tolerance policy against drugs.

They emphasized that indiscriminate actions will continue to eradicate this social menace, with all available resources being utilized to cleanse society from narcotic-related crimes.

## Polio Eradication Campaign in Khuzdar: DC Abdul Razak Sasoli Emphasizes Mission Mode Approach

**KHUZDAR:** A crucial meeting of the District Polio Eradication Committee (DPEC) was held in Khuzdar, chaired by Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razak Sasoli.

In his address, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized that the upcoming polio vaccination campaign will be executed in "mission mode," with no tolerance for negligence.

He underlined the importance of the campaign's success to ensure a polio-free future for the district. Key Participants of the Meeting: The session was attended by several key officials, including SSP Khuzdar Omar Abbas Babar, Assistant Commissioner Wadh Akbar Ali Mazari, District Health Officer Khuzdar Dr. Muhammad Nuseem

Lango, District Manager of PPHI Khuzdar Dr. Munir Ahmad Baloch, MS Teaching Hospital Khuzdar Dr. Sarfraz Saad, National Staff Officer Dr. Farman Bajoi, and 49 union council members.

Dr. Nasrat, who's Area Coordinator, provided a comprehensive briefing on the upcoming polio campaign. He confirmed that the vaccination drive will commence on February 2, 2020, and continue until February 5, 2020, over the course of four days.

During this period, 171,820 children across 49 union councils will be targeted. The campaign will focus on identifying "missing" children and addressing cases where children have been left out of the vaccination drive.

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### TENDER NOTICE

The Executive Engineer, Irrigation Division Wushuk invites tenders based on Balochistan Composite Schedule of Rates 2023 as per Schedule B & Schedule-A under Balochistan Special Development Initiatives (SDSI), Bid Security 4% and Tender Fee 2000/-.

S/R	Name of Work	Cost
1	1.000 PROTECTION BUND DISTRICT COMPLEX, 54.872 M FC CAMP AND SURROUNDING AREAS (PHASE-I)	TSE-25261049273

Procurements shall be made as per BPPRA Rules 2014. Bidding is open to all bidders who meet the following Basic Eligibility Criteria: An individual bidder having valid PRC registration in the category of civil or above with specialization codes in CEM (4), (6) and CEM (6) (R). Has completed one (01) contract of similar nature and scale in last five years. Has an average annual turnover of 70% of project cost during last two years. Presence on FSR Active Site Paper List and registration with Balochistan Revenue Authority (BRA). Has a minimum Specific Bank Credit Line Facility equal to at least 50% of the project cost. The contractor has not been blacklisted earlier by any government agency or private organization. No litigation against, in case of litigations, history should be disclosed. Fresh attested affidavit on Rs. 100 stamp paper required. The amount of bid security shall be 4% of the approved cost in the form of CDR or a bank guarantee issued by a Scheduled Bank in Pakistan. Tender fee must be deposited via Green Channel in NBP under Head C-03434. Submission of application on firm letterhead duly signed and stamped with Original CDR and Green Channel in office on or before due date is mandatory. Non-compliance with mandatory criteria shall render the firm technically ineligible. The contractors quoting rates below or above the approved project cost must attach Rate Analysis for each item of work. Bids without proper rate analysis shall be rejected specifically when quoting lower than acceptable thresholds. As per BPPRA rule 25 (sub rule 4 amended rule) conditional bid shall not be entertained & (sub rule 3) only one bid can be submitted against one ITN. Method of Procurement: Single Stage Two Envelope Procedure. The bidding documents can be downloaded from [www.bppra.org.pk](http://www.bppra.org.pk). The bidding documents duly signed and stamped must be **uploaded through e-Bidding** on or before January 27, 2020 at 12:00 hrs. In case of any query contact to Office of the Executive Engineer, Irrigation Division Wushuk at Email: [eeo550@gmail.com](mailto:eeo550@gmail.com). Bids will be opened on the same day through e-Bidding Procedure at 13:00 hrs.

**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
IRRIGATION DIVISION  
WUSHUK

## Price Control Committee Meeting in Chaman: DC Habib Ahmed Bangulzai Takes Strong Action on Price Regulation

**CHAMAN:** A crucial meeting of the Price Control Committee was held in Chaman under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Habib Ahmed Bangulzai.

The session was attended by Price Control Officers, committee members, local traders, and other relevant officials. During the meeting, new price rates for various essential items, including food, tailoring services, barbers, and other commodities, were finalized.

It was decided that all shopkeepers in Chaman must display the official price list at visible locations in their shops. Any violation of the official pricing guidelines will result in severe penalties, including fines, shop closures, and the possibility of arresting the shopkeepers.

These measures aim to ensure transparency and fairness in pricing across the district. DC Habib Ahmed Bangulzai's Address: During the meeting, DC Bangulzai emphasized the importance of adherence to government-set prices to protect the public's interest. He urged all traders and shopkeepers to strictly follow the official price list to ensure that consumers can access essential goods at fair and regulated prices.

On the occasion, Director General Sports Dr. Yasir Khan Bazi, Deputy Commissioner Nasirabad Captain (R) Zulfikar Ali Khan, political and tribal leader Babu Yar Muhammad Lohi, District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Hussain Jamali, PPHI DSM Tariq Shehbaz, along with other concerned officers, were also present.

Commissioner Nasirabad Division Salahuddin Noonazi stated that several public welfare development

## Parliamentary Secretary Sanjay Kumar Panjwani Inspects Renovation Work at Dera Murad Jamali Circuit House

**NASIRABAD:** Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Minority Affairs Sanjay Kumar Panjwani, accompanied by Commissioner Nasirabad Division Salahuddin Noorazi, visited the Dera Murad Jamali Circuit House and conducted a detailed inspection of the ongoing renovation and reconstruction work.

During the visit, Sanjay Kumar Panjwani termed the renovation process as highly necessary and positive, stating that the deteriorating condition of the one circuit house of Nasirabad Division required urgent attention.

He said the improvement of this important government facility would greatly facilitate the execution of official affairs and provide better services to both officers and the public.

He further assured that he would make every effort to ensure the early release of adequate funds for the renovation so that the beautification and upgrading work could be completed in a more efficient and high-quality manner, bringing the building up to modern standards.

On the occasion, Director General Sports Dr. Yasir Khan Bazi, Deputy Commissioner Nasirabad Captain (R) Zulfikar Ali Khan, political and tribal leader Babu Yar Muhammad Lohi, District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Hussain Jamali, PPHI DSM Tariq Shehbaz, along with other concerned officers, were also present.

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S	Name of Work	Estimate	Tender Fee	Bid Security	BID Opening	BID Opening
1	CONSTRUCTION OF 4 NOS CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	11,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
2	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK ALONG WITH REPAIR OF GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
3	CORRET OF ADD ROOMS AND REPAIR & RENOVATION OF GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	14,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
4	CORRET OF ADD ROOMS AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
5	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
6	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
7	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
8	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
9	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
10	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
11	CORRET OF 3 NOS CLASSROOMS WITH TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	14,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
12	REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
13	REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
14	CORRET OF ADD ROOMS AND REPAIR & RENOVATION OF GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	14,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
15	CORRET OF 2 NOS CLASSROOM AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	7,000,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
16	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
17	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
18	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
19	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020
20	CONSTRUCTION OF 400 CLASSROOMS AND TOILET BLOCK AT GEMS WASHAW DISTRICT PAFKOT. TSE-25261049273	5,970,000	2,000 PKR	5%	11:00 AM on 28-01-2020	12:00 PM on 28-01-2020

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**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (Buildings)**  
CWPPH Department  
Wushuk

## Asian Development Bank (ADB) warns \$360m loan for highway project risks lapsing

**NEWS DESK:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has expressed concern that a \$360 million (Rs108 billion) loan earmarked for the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor (CAREC) Development Investment Programme's Tranche III could lapse next year without project completion.

The significant delay in utilising the loan is mainly due to the failure of the Tranche III road project to begin, resulting from controversies in the bidding process discussed in five parliamentary standing committee meetings.

Without immediate acceleration by the National Highway Authority (NHA), the funds will expire without the completion of the Tranche III road project, which involves widening sections of the N55 Highway.

In a letter seen by Dawn, the ADB warned the economic affairs division that based on current progress, there was a significant risk the approved \$360 million under the Multi-Tranche Financing Facility (MFF) would not be fully utilised by the expiration



date of Dec 31, 2027.

The project has been stalled for eight months following controversies surrounding the bidding process.

Although bids were opened in February 2025 and approved by the ADB shortly thereafter, the process faced scrutiny

from five parliamentary panels and Public Procurement Regulatory Authority.

Despite the administrative hurdles, the Islamabad High Court recently ordered that work be awarded without further delay.

The court noted that continued stalling could result in loan cancellation, cost escalation and "serious reputational damage" to the national exchequer.

The total of the project cost is estimated at Rs170bn, which includes land acquisition, consultancy and taxes

while the lowest bid received by the NHA for the project was of Rs147 billion.

The ADB covers Rs108bn of the total, with the government of Pakistan funding the remaining balance.

Officials indicate the NHA is in a difficult

position regarding fund utilisation. Rebidding is considered unfeasible, as obtaining new approvals from the ADB and Enecne would take more time, while the ADB stressed that its 2027 deadline is "firm, with no possibility of extension".

"We seek EAD's support in assisting NHA to expedite implementation, complete pending procurements, and ensure full utilisation of the loan proceeds within the MFF period," the ADB stated. The Enecne has approved the bids from

a joint venture comprising NXCC, Dynamic Constructor and Rustam Associates even though parliamentary committees and the PPRA expressed concerns.

The NHA defended the choice, stating that allegations of non-performance against the lead partner "did not reach finality in accordance with the procedure and rules", and the firm was never black-listed by any agency.

The ADB confirmed it has no objection to awarding the contracts to the lowest evaluated bidder across four specific lots:

Lot 1: Rajanpur to Jampur (57.5km) for Rs23.5bn; Lot 2: Jampur to Dera Ghazi Khan (64km) for Rs29.1bn; Lot 3: Dera Ghazi Khan to Tibi Qaisrani (111.7km) for Rs52bn; Lot 4: Tibi Qaisrani to Dera Ismail Khan (96.2km) for Rs42bn.

IHC rejected PPRA's petition on the Rs172bn CAREC Tranche III award to JW. In its verdict, the court warned that the regulator's recent decision may also lead to the refusal of the finance facility agreed by the ADB, and declared the petitions infructuous.

## Replacing colonial-era water laws

**NEWS DESK:** An entirely new unified water law is on the anvil to govern the water sector in Sindh. The idea is to run the sector more effectively and efficiently, and to address, institutionally, the fast-emerging challenges of disaster mitigation, climate change, and environmental issues.

The draft of the new law is under preparation, primarily at the Sindh Irrigation Department (SID). It would be a broader legal instrument to regulate water-related components, from canal commands to drainage, groundwater aquifers, and wetlands. It was being drafted in the light of the Sindh Water and Agricultural Transformation (SWAT) project, a multi-million-dollar World Bank (WB) funded project that is already underway.

The new water law aims to merge the over 150-year-old, colonial-era Sindh Irrigation Act 1879 and Sindh Water Management Ordinance (SWMO) 2002. This would also eventually decide the fate of the Sindh Irrigation and

Drainage Authority (SIDA), which was an offshoot of SWMO 2002.

The SWMO was introduced under WB-led intervention in Sindh in the shape of SIDA, established to promote a participatory irrigation system by ensuring farmer-led elected self-managed areas of each of Sindh's three barrages. The ordinance had also substituted the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (SIDA) Act 1997.

A new provincial law aims to merge century-old irrigation rules into a single framework to tackle climate change and case management.

Since then, two parallel irrigation systems have existed in Sindh. SIDA then produced the Farmers Organisation (FO) and Area Water Board (AWBs) for the regulation of irrigation supplies and recovery of water charges, ie, abiyana.

Three independent AWBs—Ghotki (Guddu barrage), Nara (Sukkur barrage) and the Left Bank Canals (Kotri bar-

rage)—out of 14 canals that emanate from these barrages, were also created within SIDA, having elected representation in addition to officers.

SIDA remained an autonomous body, having been led by managing directors (MDs) mostly from SIDA. A full-fledged SIDA headquarters/secretariat was also built in Hyderabad, reflecting a corporate sector style environment unlike the provincial irrigation department. SIDA executed WB-funded projects under the Water Sector Improvement Project or WSIP.

According to syndicates compiled after week-long consultations with public and private sector stakeholders from Jan 5 to 9, the panel concluded that the current state of affairs was not capable of driving a fast-growing population of 250 million towards sustained prosperity because of cross-cutting constraints affecting "all 20 priority export products and six export drivers".

Ironically, most of these constraints are generally well known, but the government's inability, despite special interventions here and there, including through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

To create a conducive working environment in a fair, equitable, rule-based and transparent manner, has hampered sustainable growth path beyond stabilisation under a restrictive programme volunteered to the IMF.

The plan proposed

## Urgent reforms proposed to avert another International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan

**NEWS DESK:** A body constituted by the prime minister and led by Minister for Planning Anwar Iqbal has called for urgent reforms to improve the case of doing business and for a serious restructuring and rationalisation of tariffs

both energy prices and trade duties — to more than double exports to over \$60 billion within three years.

The committee was formed to devise a strategy for avoiding another IMF programme once the current \$8.4bn arrangement expires at the end of 2027, amid mounting pressure from persistently weak economic indicators.

According to syndicates compiled after week-long consultations with public and private sector stakeholders from Jan 5 to 9, the panel concluded that the current state of affairs was not capable of driving a fast-growing population of 250 million towards sustained prosperity because of cross-cutting constraints affecting "all 20 priority export products and six export drivers".

Ironically, most of

these constraints are generally well known, but the government's inability, despite special interventions here and there, including through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

To create a conducive working environment in a fair, equitable, rule-based and transparent manner, has hampered sustainable growth path beyond stabilisation under a restrictive programme volunteered to the IMF.

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eroding margins and diverting orders to competing countries.

The Planning Commission also pointed out that the cost of doing business in Pakistan remained "structurally high due to fragmented and distortive taxation, inverted input tariffs, advance income tax deductions, delayed sales tax refunds and persistent working capital lockups".

It said these issues disproportionately affected exporters and were particularly binding

on small and medium enterprises across manufacturing and agri-based value chains.

The panel said that policy unpredictability was also weakening investment and buyer confidence. "Frequent changes in tax policy, energy pricing, tariff structures, export incentives and regulatory regimes, often announced late in the business cycle, constrain forward planning, capacity expansion and scaling-up, particularly around annual export order booking cycles," it said.

The syndicate also highlighted institutional fragmentation and regulatory burdens.

They said inconsistent definitions of SMEs across the State Bank of Pakistan, SMEDA, the Federal Board of Revenue and provincial authorities restricted access to finance, incentives and support schemes.

Overlapping mandates, discretionary enforcement, excessive audits and weak inter-agency coordination increased compliance costs and uncertainty, the panel said.



## Pakistan makes major strides in regulatory reforms

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan has taken bold steps forward in modernising its regulatory landscape, delivering significant enhancements to anti-money laundering safeguards, corporate transparency, and the simplicity of starting a business, initiatives that have positioned the country as a more competitive and compliant player on the global stage.

At the heart of these achievements is the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), which earned the title of national "Reforms Champion" from the prime minister in December 2025 during the launch of the National Regulatory Reforms Initiative.

The recognition highlights the regulator's dedication to institutional integrity, digital innovation, greater ease of doing business, and updating the Companies Act, 2017, to international standards.

In the 2024-25 financial year, the SECP-led national risk assessments drove forward the AML/CFT National Ac-



tion Plan and worked closely with domestic and international partners to meet the Financial Action Task Force requirements.

A key milestone was the introduction of a dedicated Corporate Ultimate Beneficial Owner (UBO) Registry through extensive amendments to the Companies Regulations, 2024.

Fully aligned with OECD guidelines, the new framework requires companies to issue formal notices to share-

holders to identify and verify the indirect ultimate beneficial owners, the natural persons who truly control or benefit from a company — effectively preventing the misuse of anonymous corporate structures for illicit purposes.

In February 2025, the SECP launched a risk-based beneficial ownership supervision methodology that complies completely with FATF standards. By concentrating on higher-risk cases, the system ensures owner-

ship information remains accurate, up to date, and protected against money laundering or terrorist financing risks.

To strengthen compliance across sectors, the SECP organised 14 capacity-building sessions, both in-person and virtual, reaching over 900 participants from capital market institutions, securities brokers, non-banking financial companies, the insurance sector, and various corporate entities including limited liability partnerships.

This has been quite contrary to the case of Pakistan, where a significant domestic literature and official SBP communication, such as work-

## Inflation targeting-lite: strategic transition or operational stopgap?

**NEWS DESK:** In August 2009, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) officially changed its monetary policy framework from targeting monetary aggregates to an interest rate-based monetary policy framework, known as the inflation-targeting-lite regime, by introducing the interest rate corridor (IRC).

Within international systems, the adoption of IRC would be a transitional move for implementing a flexible or full-fledged inflation targeting monetary policy framework, where the policy rate is used as a primary tool for anchoring inflation expectations not only to stabilise overnight rates but also to anchor these rates around a policy rate, thereby strengthening monetary policy transmission and policy signalling.

This has been quite contrary to the case of Pakistan, where a significant domestic literature and official SBP communication, such as work-

ing papers, research bulletin, and policy notes emphasise that the IRC was introduced as a means of reducing volatility in the weighted average overnight repo rate (repo), which has weakened policy signalling and disrupted money markets (Mahmood, 2016).

Moreover, the SBP's working papers and policy notes also document how liquidity shocks, often driven by government cash flows and FX operations, caused overnight rates to deviate from the

policy makers' desired levels before 2009. The objective of reducing volatility in the repo, being operationally valid, goes against the global justification of the inflation targeting-lite regime, that is, reduction in volatility is not an objective but a by-product of a smooth and coherent monetary system.

Thus, the IRC was implemented in an economy where the macroeconomic conditions for interest rate-led inflation control were partially established.

It would not be the

design of the corridor which is challenging, but the surroundings where it functions. The inflationary trends in Pakistan are heavily influenced by administered prices, especially energy, college tuition, and regulated food items, which can be adjusted through fiscal adjustments but not market forces.

These non-continuous changes, which are frequently large and discrete, can undermine the relationship between policy rate and headline inflation.





## Villarreal sink Alaves to stay in La Liga hunt

**NEWS DESK:** Villarreal eased to a 3-1 victory over Alaves on Saturday to move clear of Atletico Madrid in third in La Liga and stay in contention to win the Spanish title.

Alberto Moreno, Gerard Moreno and Georges Mikautadze struck in the first half to cut Barcelona's lead to eight points, having played one fewer game than the Catalan champions.

Villarreal climbed three points ahead of Atletico and within four of second-placed Real Madrid, who have also played an extra game.

"We hope we're capable of winning our game in hand too, adding three more points to this extraordinary first half of the season," Villarreal coach Marcelino Garcia Toral told DAZN. Top two Barcelona and Real Madrid meet in the Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday in Saudi Arabia.

Alaves kept the hosts at bay comfortably in a first half of few clear chances, but Villarreal stepped up a



gear after the interval.

"It's true that in January, I don't know if it's because of the weather making your legs cold and your mind cold, but teams are often inconsistent," said Marcelino. "In the second half we had put together some superb moves, and we scored three beautiful goals."

Alaves kept the hosts at bay comfortably in a first half of few clear chances, but Villarreal stepped up a

after 49 minutes. Moleiro brilliantly curled home his eighth goal of the season from the edge of the box when the ball dropped kindly for him. Six minutes later veteran striker Moreno fired home the second for his first goal since November.

Marcelino's side grabbed the third through Georgia striker Mikautadze's delightful chipped finish after Moleiro played him in.

Villarreal were cruising when Thomas Parrey clumsily gave the ball away in front of his area and Toni Martinez rammed home to salvage some pride for Alaves, who are 15th in the table.

Knocked out of the Copa del Rey early and set for an early Champions League departure, Villarreal's main focus is now La Liga.

The Yellow Submarine have never won the title and although they remain outsiders, this victory helped them stay

in the hunt for unlikely domestic glory. "We hoped to do better in the Champions League than we've done in La Liga and we want to enjoy ourselves and keep adding points like we've been doing," Villarreal defender Juan Foyth told DAZN.

Juarez for Valencia. Valencia rescued a 1-1 draw at home against Elche but their players were booed off after a sixth league game without a win.

Six-time La Liga winners Los Che are down in 18th and coach Carlos Corberan is fighting for his job.

Valencia were much improved against Elche than in some recent showings, despite missing suspended top scorer Hugo Duro, but it was not enough to get three points or ease tensions at their Mestalla stadium.

Former West Bromwich Albion midfielder Grady Diangana sent the visitors up in the 75th minute but Valencia's Pepelu slotted home a late penalty to rescue a point.

## Kiplimo captures third straight world cross country title

**NEWS DESK:** Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo, the reigning Chicago Marathon champion, won his third consecutive men's crown on Saturday at the World Cross Country Championships.

The 25-year-old completed the hat-trick over 10 kilometers in a winning time of 28min 18sec with Ethiopia's Berihu Aregawi 18sec back in a third consecutive women's crown.

Kiplimo became only the fourth man to win three world cross country titles in a row after Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele (2002-2006) and the Kenyans Paul Tergat (1995-1999) and John Ngunjiri (1986-1989).

"To win three times, I'm so happy about it," Kiplimo said. "I think it's about the consistency in your training. Another thing it's about is believing in yourself."

Kiplimo was last year's London Marathon runner-up in 2hr 3min 57sec in his debut

at the 26.2-mile distance, then captured the Chicago Marathon in 2:02:23 last October, a quick turnaround that added to the challenge of defending his title.

"Today was the hardest one," Kiplimo said.

Agnes Ngetich, the world 10km record holder, took the women's title in 31:28 over 10km to deliver Kenya a 10th consecutive women's crown at Apalachee Regional Park in Tallahassee, Florida.

Ngetich defeated Uganda's Joy Cheptoyek by 42 seconds in a dominant performance with Ethiopia's Senayet Getachew third in 32:13 over a course featuring sand, water and mud zones plus barriers resembling fallen logs.

In the men's final, Kiplimo was second by two seconds at the mid-race mark and with two kilometers remaining was alongside Aregawi and world half marathon runner-up Ebenyo Kiplimo surged ahead by eight

seconds on Aregawi entering the final kilometer and raced across the finish line to cheers.

He does not expect to seek a fourth world cross country crown as he will turn his attention to the marathon.

"I think now maybe this one is going to be the last one because of the marathon... because I'll be training for the marathon," Kiplimo said.

Aregawi, the 10,000m runner-up at the 2024 Paris Olympics, had lost by nine seconds to Kiplimo in 2023 and by only three seconds in 2024 in the two prior editions of the event.

Kenya's Beatrice Chebet, the reigning 5,000 and 10,000m champion, did not seek a third consecutive women's title because she is beginning a 2026 maternity break.

## Arsenal mBarcelona clinch Spanish Super Cup final

**NEWS DESK:** Barcelona retained the Spanish Super Cup with an enthralling 3-2 Clasico win over Real Madrid in the final here on Sunday.

Raphinha struck twice for the Catalans with Robert Lewandowski also on target as they beat Xabi Alonso's team for a record-extending 16th triumph, despite Ferenc

de Jong's late red card for a foul on Kylian Mbappe.

The French forward could only feature in the final stages as a substitute after a knee injury that brought him back to the pitch with the defeat likely to bring back recent doubts around Madrid coach Xabi Alonso's future up front

over Ferran Torres and after Raphinha sent Barcelona ahead, Vinicius Junior pulled Madrid level with a fine individual goal to kick-start a frenetic end to the first half in Jeddah.

Lewandowski chipped Barca back in front, but Gonzalo Garcia struck deep in stoppage time to send the teams in level at the break.

The battle was decided by a deflected Raphinha effort after 73 minutes, as Barca claimed the fourth trophy of coach Hansi Flick's reign.

Alonso is still looking for his first ever arrival in June, and Madrid's run of five consecutive wins across all competitions was

brought to an end by their arch-rivals.

"Whatever way you lose it hurts, but it's clear that this was a very even game, hotly contested, with a bit of everything," Alonso told Movistar. "We were very close to equalising, we fought it out until the end, and I have to congratulate Barca."

Barcelona thrashed Real Madrid 5-2 in last season's final, also at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium, but this was a far closer affair.

Flick, who led Barca to four Clasico wins over Madrid last season in four clashes, opted for Lewandowski up front over Ferran Torres and

brought teenage star Lamine Yamal back in on the right wing.

It was a scrappy start in the Saudi evening heat, with Barcelona keeping the ball and Madrid sitting deep to resist them, while looking to find Vinicius Junior on the counter.

The Brazilian had not scored in his previous 16 matches but offered a potent threat, flying down the left and forcing Joan Garcia into the first save.

Barcelona began to take up the heat, and Raphinha found a breakthrough after 36 minutes. Moments after the winger fired a fine chance badly wide, he

made up for it with a low, early strike from just inside the area, across Thibaut Courtois and into the bottom corner.

Real Madrid pulled level with a superb Vinicius strike, floating in from the left, nutmegging Jules Kounde and slotting home. Barcelona went back ahead four minutes into first-half stoppage time, with Lewandowski, flying past Courtois after being played in by Pedro.

However, Madrid rapidly hit back just before the interval through Gonzalo Garcia, who finished well while falling after Dean Huijsen's headed rebound back to him off the crossbar.

Despite Madrid's numerical advantage, Barca had the best chance in stoppage time with Marcus Rashford firing wide when through on goal.

Asencio might have grabbed an equaliser at the death but headed straight at Garcia. The last four winners of the Spanish Super Cup have gone on to claim La Liga and Barcelona will be hoping it proves a platform for success once again.

They have won 10 straight games across all competitions and lead La Liga, despite an inconsistent start to the season.



## Third time lucky as Poland beat Switzerland to clinch United Cup

**NEWS DESK:** Poland battled past Switzerland 2-1 in the United Cup final on Sunday to banish the pain of title-round defeats in the previous two editions and secure a long-awaited maiden triumph in the season-opening mixed-team competition.

Hubert Hurkacz continued his resurgence in his first event back after a near seven-month injury layoff by beating veteran Stan Wawrinka 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 to level the tie at 1-1 after Jak Swiatek lost 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 to an inspired Belinda Bencic.

The mixed doubles duo of Katarzyna Kawa and Jan Zielinski then downed Bencic and Jakob Paul 6-4, 6-3 in the deciding match to trigger jubilant scenes in Sydney, where Poland finally converted their dominance into silverware.

"We've finally made it. Third time lucky," Swiatek said. "We worked hard... I want to thank the team. This year it was such a team effort, I really felt the support. Even though my singles performances weren't per-



fect, you got my spirits up and you all believed until the end."

Bencic won 12 of the final 15 games against a shell-shocked Swiatek, earning her second victory over the world number two.

"To be honest, I felt I was in the match from the very first point,"

said Bencic, who won all five of her singles matches in the tournament.

"I thought I was going great and I was 0-2 down. I was 'OK, what do I have to do?' I think I just tried to keep the level and just wait for some chances."

Victory capped a superb campaign for Poland, who beat last year's champions the United States in the semi-finals, and set up Hurkacz to carry momentum into his singles campaign at the Australian Open that begins on Jan 18.

Playing in his final season on tour, Wawrinka pushed Hurkacz hard to force a deciding set in the second singles encounter but the 40-year-old was unable to grab the victory that would have clinched the tie.

"He's definitely an inspiration," Hurkacz said about the three-times major champion.

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"He's definitely an inspiration," Hurkacz said about the three-times major champion.

## Sabalenka downs Kostyuk to claim Brisbane crown

**NEWS DESK:** World number one Aryna Sabalenka warmed up for a tilt at a third Australian open title in four years in ominous fashion by winning her second successive Brisbane International crown on Sunday.

Sabalenka scored a dominant 6-4, 6-3 win over Maria Kostyuk in just 78 minutes.

"Every day you go out there and prove your level, and I think this week I did it really well," said Sabalenka after a tournament in which she powered to the title without dropping a set.

Looking ahead to the Australian Open, which begins next Sunday, Sabalenka said: "The only thing I know is that I'll be there, I'll be fighting."

Sabalenka lost in the Melbourne Park final last year to Madison Keys, having been Australian Open champion in 2023 and 2024.

"I'll do my best to go as far as possible," said Sabalenka. "And do a little bit better than last year. That's my focus."

Kostyuk, the world number 26, had enjoyed



a spectacular week, beating three top 10 players on the way to the final. But she had no defence, I can use my slice, I have a good touch.

"I'm super happy to see that things are clicking together."

There has been animosity between the two players in the past. Like many Ukraine players, Kostyuk refuses to shake hands with Russians or Belarusians because of the war in her homeland.

There was no handshake at the end of the final and in her speech at the trophy presentation, Kostyuk brought up the situation in Ukraine.

"I finally found the touch game," she said. "I figured something and I kind of changed my

game style — now I'm not only the aggressive player, I can play at the net, I can be in defence, I can use my slice, I have a good touch.

"I'm super happy to see that things are clicking together."

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## Iran's FM says protests turned 'bloody' to invite Trump intervention

**NEWS DESK:** Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has alleged that nationwide protests "turned violent and bloody to give an excuse" for United States President Donald Trump to intervene militarily in the country, according to Al-Jazeera.

Speaking to foreign diplomats in Tehran on Monday, Araghchi said that the violence spiked over the weekend, but the "situation is now under total control".

"We are ready for war but also for dialogue," he said.

According to reports, Araghchi also said Iran has footage of weapons being distributed to protesters and said that authorities will soon release confessions of detainees, adding that authorities are "closely following" the ongoing events on the streets.

The demonstrations were "stoked" by foreign elements and security forces would "hunt down" those responsible, he said.

Iran's spiralling protests have now spread to a third week amid a na-

tionwide internet blackout and repeated military intervention threats from Trump.

Authorities have not confirmed the number of demonstrators who have lost their lives, but opposition activists based outside the country say the death toll is higher and includes hundreds of protesters.

The Fars news agency reported that limited protest gatherings took place in several neighbourhoods of the capital on Sunday night.

There were limited "riots" in Navvab and Saadat Abad neighbourhoods of Tehran, Junjan and Hafshejan in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, and Taybad of Mashhad, which were intervened and dissolved by security forces, according to Fars.

The agency reported that the other cities and regions in the country were generally calm without "riots" overnight.

Iran's spiralling protests have now spread to a third week amid a na-



US President Donald Trump said Sunday that Iran's leadership had called seeking "to negotiate" after his threats of military action and mass anti-government protests in the Islamic Republic.

The leaders of Iran called yesterday,

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One, adding that "a meeting is being set up". They want to negotiate.

However, Trump added that "we may have to act before a meeting".

According to Reuters, Trump said on

Sunday he is weighing a range of responses to escalating unrest in Iran, including possible military options, as massive protests continue to roll the country.

Unrest in Iran has killed more than 500 people, a rights group said on Sunday, as

Tehran threatened to target US military bases if Trump carries out his new threats to intervene on behalf of protesters.

With the Islamic Republic's clerical establishment facing the biggest demonstrations since 2022, Trump has

repeatedly threatened to get involved if force is used on protesters.

According to its latest figures - from activists inside and outside Iran - US-based rights group HRANA said it had verified the deaths of 490 protesters and 48 security personnel, with more than 10,600 people arrested in two weeks of unrest.

Iran has not given an official toll, and Reuters was unable to independently verify the tallies.

Trump was to meet with senior advisers on Tuesday to discuss options for Iran, a US official told Reuters on Sunday.

The Wall Street Journal had reported that options included military strikes, using secret cyber weapons, widening sanctions and providing online help to anti-government forces.

"The military is looking at it, and we're looking at some very strong options," Trump told reporters travelling on Air Force One on Sunday night.

Trump said he was in contact with Iranian

opposition leaders.

He also said, without elaborating, that Iran's leaders had called him on Saturday and wanted to negotiate, and that he might talk to them.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf warned Washington against "a miscalculation".

"Let us be clear: in the case of an attack on Iran, the occupied territories (Israel) as well as all US bases and ships will be our legitimate target," said Qalibaf, a former commander in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards.

Authorities intensify crackdown The protests began on December 28 in response to soaring prices, before turning against the clerical rulers who have governed since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iranian authorities accused the US and Israel of fomenting trouble and called for a nationwide rally on Monday to condemn "terrorist actions led by the United States and Israel," Iranian media reported.

## Trump vows to cut off Cuba's oil after toppling Venezuelan ally Maduro

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump vowed on Sunday to "make a deal" soon, pledging to cut off all oil and money flowing to the communist-run island after the toppling of Havana's key ally, Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro.

The threatening social media post drew an angry retort from Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who said "no one would tell his country what to do".

Washington has imposed economy-crippling sanctions on its island neighbour for decades, but Trump has ramped up the pressure in recent days.

US special forces seized Maduro and his wife this month in a lightning raid that left dozens of the ousted Venezuelan president's security personnel dead - many of whom were Cuban.

Though Maduro's allies have become internal leaders, Trump has claimed the United States now actually controls Venezuela through a US naval blockade of its vital oil sector.

Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

"I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE."

He said, "Cuba lived, for many years, on large amounts of OIL and MONEY from Venezuela. In return, Cuba provided 'Security Services' for the last two Venezuelan dictators. BUT NOT ANYMORE!" "Most of those Cubans are DEAD from last week's U.S.A. attack, and Venezuela doesn't need protection anymore from the thugs and extortionists who held them hostage for so many years. Trump provided almost no details about what potential deal he referred to, or what such

an arrangement would achieve. Asked about it later on Sunday, Trump told reporters travelling with him on Air Force One that he wanted people forced out of Cuba or who "left under duress" to be taken care of.

"Most importantly, right now, we're going to take care of the people that came from Cuba, that are American citizens, or were country," Trump said, without clarifying how this would be achieved under a deal with Havana.

A week ago, Trump stated that "Cuba is ready to fall," noting that the island's economic crisis was worsening and it would be difficult for Havana to "hold out" without receiving heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

Earlier on Sunday, the president repeated a message that jokingly suggested US Secretary of State Marco Rubio - a child of Cuban immigrants who concurrently holds the posts of na-

tional security advisor, acting head of the US archives, and acting international aid administrator - could also become the president of Cuba.

Trump shared that post with the comment: "Sounds good to me!" Cuba's president rebuffed Trump's threatening language, saying the Caribbean island's residents were "ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood."

"Cuba is a free, independent and sovereign nation. No one tells us what to do," Diaz-Canel wrote on X.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez also weighed in to stress that Cuba is within its rights to import fuel from any willing exporter, "without interference or subordination to the unilateral coercive measures of the United States."

A Cold War-era US trade embargo has cinched Cuba's economy beginning in 1962, and since 2000 Havana has increasingly relied on Venezuelan oil

provided as part of a government was in full control of Aleppo on Sunday after taking over the city's Kurdish neighbourhoods and evacuating fighters there to Kurdish autonomous areas following days of deadly clashes.

Residents of the Ashrafiyeh neighbourhood, the first of two areas to fall to the Syrian army, began returning to their homes to inspect the damage, finding shrapnel and broken glass littering the streets.

The violence started earlier this week after negotiations stalled on integrating the Kurds' de facto autonomous administration and forces into the country's new government.

A Syrian security official said that 419 Kurdish fighters, including 59 wounded and an unspecified number of dead, were transferred from the Sheikh Maqad neighbourhood - the second area to come un-

der army control - to the Kurdish-controlled zone in the northeast.

The arriving fighters were met with tears and vows of vengeance from hundreds of people who gathered to greet them in the northeastern Kurdish city of Qamishi, according to correspondents at the scene.

"We will avenge Sheikh Maqad... we will avenge our fighters, we will avenge our martyrs," Umm Dalil, 55, said.

A correspondent saw crossed-out images of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and US envoy Tom Barrack, as people chanted against Sharaa.

Kurdish leader Mazlum Abdi said on X that the combatants were evacuated "through the mediation of international parties to stop the attacks and violations against our people in Aleppo". The Syrian official said that 300 other

Kurds, including fighters and members of the domestic security forces, had been arrested.

Britain-based monitoring online help to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that 300 "young Kurds" had been arrested, stating that they were "civilians, not fighters". Damaged walls, looted homes.

On Sunday, Ashrafiyeh, a correspondent saw people carrying bags and blankets return to their homes after being searched by security forces.

Yahya al-Sufi, a 49-year-old clothing seller, said he had fled during the violence. "When we returned, we found holes in the walls and our homes had been looted... Now that things have calmed down, we're back to repair the walls and restore the water and electricity," he said. Some had hoped calm would prevail between the govern-

ment in Damascus and the Kurdish fighters.

"We didn't want things to get this bad. I wish the Kurdish leadership the Syrian army had responded to the Syrian state. We've had enough bloodshed," said Mohammed Bitar, 39, who stayed in the neighbourhood.

"There's no Arab, no Kurd, we're all Syrians," Sheikh Maqad, however, remained off limits on Sunday, with their residents barred from returning, an interior ministry source said.

A correspondent in the area saw burnt armoured vehicles, cars loaded with ammunition and many landmines authorities took during their combat operation.

Syrian authorities said on Sunday that the toll from the fighting had reached "24 dead and 129 wounded since last Tuesday", while the Observatory reported 45 civilians and 60 soldiers and fighters were killed from both sides.

## Syrian forces take control of Aleppo's Kurdish areas



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## French Alps avalanches claim five lives in two days

**NEWS DESK:** Two avalanches killed two skiers in the French Alps on Sunday, resort officials said, following the deaths of three off-piste skiers a day earlier in similar incidents.

In one incident, a British skier aged about 50 was buried while skiing off-trail, according to a statement released by La Plagne ski resort in southeastern France.

More than 50 rescuers were deployed, finding the man buried under 2.5 metres (eight feet) of snow after nearly an hour of searching, but he could not be resuscitated.

A skier buried in an avalanche in Courchevel was also



found dead, the resort said, without providing further details.

French weather forecasters had

warned of a high risk of avalanches this weekend.

Officials in the Savoie region re-

corded at least six avalanches in the department's ski areas on Sunday morning.

Two separate

avalanches claimed the lives of three off-piste skiers in the French Alps on Saturday.

## Seoul issues denial as North Korea claims new drone incursions

**NEWS DESK:** NORTH Korea stepped up pressure on South Korea over the weekend, claiming that South Korean drones had been flown over its territory - an allegation immediately denied by Seoul, which has been seeking a breakthrough in stalled inter-Korean dialogue.

The exchange followed Pyongyang's claim on Saturday that South Korea had infringed on its sovereignty through drone incursions in September and again in the past week. South Korea's Defence Ministry rejected the accusation, saying the drones in question were not models operated by the South Korean military.

On Sunday, Kim Yo-jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's sister and vice department director of the rul-

ing Workers' Party of Korea, reiterated the accusation, stressing that Pyongyang views the alleged drone intrusion as a provocation regardless of political leadership in Seoul.

Kim described Seoul's initial response as a "wise choice", but made clear it did not alter North Korea's assessment of the incident.

She said it was "irrelevant whether the act occurred under the Yoon administration or the current Lee government." She also rejected Seoul's argument that the drone may have been operated by civilians, saying the essence of the issue lay not in who operated the drone but in the violation of North Korea's airspace itself.

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