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Rs.10.00 Vol.VII:No:106  
Email address:quettavoice@gmail.com  
Website: www.quettavoice.com

Monday 12, January, 2026

First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE



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

NEWS DESK:

National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadig 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 had accused the government of delaying the appointment despite them putting forward Mahmood Khan Achakzai's name for the role, Sadig has maintained that the delay was because the matter was subjudiciable. At the outset of Monday's session, Sadig reiterated his stance that he could not initiate the nomination process earlier as the matter was subjudiciable and the NA Secretariat had been made a party in the cases.

He said as PTI's Ayub had withdrawn his case in the Supreme Court and high courts against his removal, the nomination process could now be formally initiated.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]," Sadig said. Addressing the opposition benches, he said proposals for nominating the opposition leader may be submitted in his chamber by 3pm tomorrow (Tuesday), 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 proposal for nomination which may present it. Sadig 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(i) of the Rules of Procedures after 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 nomination of Sardar 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, people can transform governance, unlock the potential of the province's youth, and set a powerful example for the rest of Pakistan.

## 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-seizing, Balochistan's 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 prioritizing merit over connections, it rewards candidates who are 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-qualified civil servants, leading to more efficient public service. It also promotes merit, merit, 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, people can transform governance, unlock the potential of the province's youth, and set a powerful example for the rest of Pakistan.

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 focusing 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 re-organized the city 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.

## Hazara Women Stage Protest in Quetta Over Prolonged Gas Outages and Heavy Bills

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, with no 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, power outages, and complete administrative silence. Every year, citizens are told to "bear with the situation" as temperatures fall and heating systems break, and generators turn useless. Yet the authorities responsible—Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and the federal energy managers—continue to do their job 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 reform is introduced? Why are consumers asked to pay heavy bills for a service that barely exists? And why do officials in Karachi and Islamabad continue to treat Balochistan's gas issue as a second-best concern, 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 deeper divide 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 Excuses and Decades of Mismanagement

The SSGC's performance adds another layer to the administration's failure. Each year, the company offers the same explanations—“excessive demand,” “pipeline pressure,” “technical malfunctions,” “no one explains why these problems remain unresolved despite decades of complaints. Why have there been no significant improvements?”

Why has the company failed to introduce a clear winter management plan to treat Quetta? Why is communication with consumers absent? The lack of load shedding exposes a complete disregard for public convenience.

When outages are not

scheduled or announced, families cannot plan meals, heating, or even basic daily routines. Hospitals and clinics struggle to provide minimum requirements 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 management 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, long-term 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

Oaseem 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 poverty, pre-served 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

politicians who are able to

humble or poor backgrounds. They are intimately familiar with the hardships of ordinary citizens, and their leadership is based on empathy, accountability, and courage. Free from the constraints of dynastic obligations, self-made

Abraham Lincoln, born into poverty, pre-served 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 who are able to

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

In the end, self-made leaders rooted

in the harsh realities of poverty, unemployment, and social injustice. For them, bungalows, luxury cars, armed convoys, and protocol perks 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, prioritizing 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.

In contrast, self-made

leaders emerge from struggle, not inheritance, often from

who contrasted sharply with dynastic elites. Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan), born into modest circumstances, dedicated his life to advancing education, and the rights of the Pashtuns. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, though from a relatively well-off family, rose through political activism and mass mobilization rather than relying solely on inheritance, leaving a profound imprint on Pakistan's political cul-

ture. More recently, Imran Khan, initially a cricket superstar, built a political movement emphasizing accountability and reform, rooted in public engagement rather than family power. These leaders exemplify that real leadership is earned, not inherited,

in struggle, empathy, and public service are the only hope for meaningful change. True leadership requires more than a title or birthright; 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.

## 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 constraints. 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. More-

over, 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 Israeli-Palestine conflict. The concept that “the 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 humanistic 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 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.



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## 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 more than Rs15 million taken from illegal call centres during a meeting chaired by Senator Palwasha Khan.

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

General Investigation Agency (GIA) representatives said the matter is being handled as part of Anti-Corruption Wing case.

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

tions as extortion related to illegal call centre activities.

The total amount under allegation is Rs300 million.

Officials said Rs15 million had so far been recovered from a sub-inspector.

They added that three people were unaccounted for and five subjects were on bail, and three were in custody.

GIA officials said the inquiry could widen to include personnel from other departments.

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

Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officials told the committee that cases being viewed as a federal anti-corruption matter and that the NCCIA is a separate entity from the FIA.

IT ministry secretary told the committee that call centres are not illegal and 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 motorway police have said that the 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 on Monday due to improved visibility."

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

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

On January 7, dense fog delayed traffic on M-5 from Rohri to Rahim Yar Khan, but it had now been opened due to "improved visibility."

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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 Darakhan, and the M-11.

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motorway is closed from Shershah to Pindi Bhattroji.

While the M-5 motorway is closed from Shershah to Zaheer Peer, and the M-11 motorway is closed from Lahore to Sambrial, earlier, the NHMP said.

Motorway M-5 was closed from Rohri to Rahim Yar Khan, but it had now been opened due to "improved visibility."

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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 delayed traffic on M-5 from Rohri to Rahim Yar Khan, but it had now been opened due to "improved visibility."

### 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 traveling from Goraya Tank in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials said.

The martyred included Station House Officer (SHO) Iaqo Marwat, Constable Sher Aslam, driver Abdul Majed, and constables Arshad Ali, Hazrat Ali, and Iqbal Ali. The police said one civilian passer-by 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 Darah Tang Police Station in Lakki Marwat. Three police personnel, including SHO Razza 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.

He said the sacrifice of the martyrs would not go in vain as 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 attacks would be stopped to justice soon. In another incident, local sources said a police officer identified as Ismat, 25, and his cousin were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the Kach Kathgarh area.

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Before the petition was withdrawn, Speaker Ayaz Sadig said he couldn't begin the appointment process as the issue was sub-judge.

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

position to follow the nominated process for appointing a new leader.

The opposition has repeatedly accused the government of delaying the appointment process to the National Assembly.

## 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 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 economic engagement, defence and security, and people-to-people exchange, said Foreign

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 is the near-finalisation of the Pakistan-GCC Free Trade Agreement and recent visa relaxations.

leaders placed economic cooperation at the centre of their discussions.

Bilateral trade currently exceeds \$50 million US dollars, with both sides expressing a desire to further accelerate through the finalisation of the Pakistan-GCC Free Trade Agreement and to improve business mobility.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also invited Bahraini investors to explore opportunities in defence, infrastructure, technology, construction, mining and minerals, renewable energy, healthcare, and tourism.

The two leaders re-

### 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 protest against inflation, unemployment and lack of basic travel requirements.

"All Pakistanis national traveling to Pakistan from Iran must ensure that either 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 the appropriate requirements are met," the ambassador said in a statement.

He also cautioned that those traveling by road to reach the border points well before closure times and coordinate their onward travel inside. "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 the Arab world, the United States 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 president 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.

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 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 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 Sadig said he couldn't begin the appointment process as the issue was sub-judge.

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

position to follow the nominated process for appointing a new leader.

The opposition has repeatedly accused the government of delaying the appointment process to the National Assembly.

position to follow the nominated process for appointing a new leader.

which the opposition may present it.

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.

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## 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 re-

leased 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 over the past 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 a rise 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 recorded by Rs 134 in Gujranwala and by Rs 120 in both Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Karachi

Peshawar, Sukkur and Larkana recorded increases of Rs 100. The price of a 20-kilogram bag of flour went up by Rs 80 in Hyderabad and Sialkot. Bannu saw a rise of Rs 50, whereas Lahore and Rawalpindi, Karachi

experienced a relatively smaller increase of Rs 20. Following these hikes, the 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 prices has left 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 (NVTTC).

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

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON, Engineer Aman Nazeer, Sunday, attended the event organized by the chief guest, which was organized by the Pakistan South Africa Association in Pretoria, Lodhiem, South Africa.

The prestigious event was attended by High Commissioner of Pakistan, Malik Muhammad Farooq, the Overseas Pakistani 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 sig-

nificant 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 Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defense 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 and said that after the Indian aggression, the overseas Pakistani community resolved 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 their resolve to achieve cooperation.

Renowned scientist Yusuf Aramji and local councilor Naeem Patel also stressed on further strengthen bilaterial 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 com-

munity, he said that in the war of truth, the Pakistani Armed Forces will give a befitting reply like a war of truth. The minister said that a conducive environment had been provided for investment in Pakistan and a one-window facility for investment had been established through SIFC so that overseas Pakistani would 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

### Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan formally inaugurated

ISLAMABAD (INP): The newly established Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan (FCCP) was formally inaugurated on Monday in a simple yet dignified ceremony, marking a historic milestone in the country's constitutional evolution.

Chief Justice Justice Amin ud Din Khan, the first head of the FCCP, formally unveiled the plaque of the newly created top constitutional court.

All sitting judges of the FCCP — Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Aman Nazeer, Justice Asif Iqbal Naja, Justice Muhammad Karim Agha Khan, Justice Rozi Khan Barrech and Justice Arshad Husain Shah — were accompanying the Chief Justice in the inauguration. Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tariq, Reg-

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

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) chairman has added enhanced features.

Authorities revealed that previously, foreign nationals were not able to register their 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 premises were previously occupied by the Federal Shariat Court (FSC), which has now shifted to the ongoing household survey via the Household App.

The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan was created on November 13, 2025, through the Twenty-Seventh Constitutional Amendment.

Din Khan took oath as the court's first Chief Justice the following day, November 14, 2025.



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

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

RAWALPINDI, Jan 11 (INP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Habib Zafar 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 warning an attempt to steal valuable railway tracks in Karachi, said a news release.

He said such

criminal activities cause heavy losses to the railway 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, recovering railway material worth millions of rupees and arresting four suspects.

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

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

Peshawar, Sukkur and Larkana recorded increases of Rs 100.

The 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 prices has left burdened households already grappling with rising living costs, deepening public concern over inflation.

tal railway infrastructure.

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 strengthen its operations against such criminal elements to ensure the protection of national assets.

### 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 Motorway Police spokesperson, Motorway M1 from Peshawar to Burhan, Motorway M2 from Thokar Niaz Baig to Chakri, Motorway M3 from Faizpur to Darkhana, Motorway M4 from Shershah to Pindi Bhattian, Motorway M5 from Rohri to Shershah and Motorway M6.

Motorway M1 from Lahore to Sambrial have been closed for all kind of traffic. Motorway M4 from Shershah to Pindi Bhattian, Motorway M5 from Rohri to Shershah and Motorway M6.

Motorway Police spokesperson said the closures were necessary to protect lives and property amid hazardous weather conditions.

Authorities have

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: Hassan Ahmed Qureshi, Managing Director PPRA, accompanied by Dr Adam Wasem, DG Legal PPRA, and Sheikh Afzal Raza, Project Director EPADS, highlighted landmark procurement reforms while briefing journalists at PID.

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

LAHOTRE (INP): A unique recreational project aimed at food-loving Lahoreites has officially begun, with the launch of a canal ship restaurant at Jallo Mor, 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 both inside the ship restaurant and in the surrounding areas.

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 is set to be completed within this year.

The Punjab cabinet approved the project in August last year, allocating a total cost of Rs 549.4 million, underscoring the government's push to 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 resolve to strengthen the state government's fight against 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 ac-

countability and im-

prove the system of

governance in

Balochistan.

As part of these

reforms, Mr. Sarfraz

Bugti announced that

for the first time in

the province's history, 111

government posts in

the Finance Depart-

ment will be filled

through a fully online,

paperless, and 100%

merit-based re-

cruitment process.

He described the

move as a historic step

towards eliminating

corruption and intro-

ducing meaningful in-

situational reforms.

Under the new

system, candidates

will undergo online

testing, with their

qualification and eli-

gibility assessed in a

transparent manner.

Successful applica-

nts will receive their

appointment letters

within one hour, ensur-

ing swift and

merit-based hiring.

The chief minister

said the initiative will

begin with the Finance

Department and will

be gradually ex-

panded to all other de-

partments of the

Balochistan govern-

ment.

He noted that con-

crete and effective

## Polio Eradication Campaign in Khuzdar: DC Abdul Razak Sosoli 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 Sosoli.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that the up-

coming polio vaccination

will be executed in "mis-

sed mode" with toler-

ance for negligence. He

underlined the impor-

tance of the campaign's

success to ensure a polio-

free future for the

district.

Key Participants of

the Meeting:

The session was at-

tended by several key

officials, including SSP

Khuzdar, Omar Akbar

Babu, Assistant Com-

missioner Wadil Akbar

Ali, District Health Of-

ficer Dr. Muhammad Nas-

er, and others.

Dr. Nasir, WHO's Area

Coordinator, provided

a comprehensive re-

viewing on the upcom-

ing polio campaign.

He confirmed that the

vaccination drive

will commence on Febr-

uary 2, 2026, and con-

tinue until February 5,

2026, over the course of

four days.

During this period,

171,820 children and

100 health workers of

Khuzdar district will re-

ceive polio drops. The

campaign will target all

children under the age of

five, ensuring that no

child is left unvaccin-

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Dr. Nasir, WHO's Area

## 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 (Car-ec) Development in the first Programme's Tranche III could lapse next year without project's completion.

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

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

After a meeting between Dawn, the ADB informed the economic affairs division that based on current progress, there was a significant risk the approved \$300m under the Multilateral Investment Financing Facility (MIF) 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.

The bids were opened in February 2025 and approved by the ADB shortly thereafter, the process faced sen-

ior five parliamentary standing committee meetings and Public Procurement Regulatory Authority.

Despite the administrative hurdles, the Islamabad High Court recently ordered that the work be awarded within four further delay.

The court noted

that continued bidding could result in loan cancellation, cost escalation and reputational damage" to the national exchequer.

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

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

The ADB covers

Rs108bn of the total with the remainder of Pakistan's funding the remaining balance.

Officials indicate the NHA is in a difficult position regarding fund utilisation. Re bidding is considered unfeasible, as obtaining new approvals from the ADB and Feneec would take time, whether or not stressed, the ADB's 2027 deadline is "firm with no possibility of extension".

"We seek ADB's support in assisting NHA to expedite implementation, completing procurement and ensuring full utilisation of the loan needs within the MIF period," the ADB stated. The Feneec has approved the bids from

a joint venture comprising NXCC, Dynamic Constructor and Rustam Assof, and through 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 blacklisted by any bank.

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

Lot 1: Ranapur to Jam-pur (57.5km) for Rs23.5bn; Lot 2: Jampur to Dera Ghazi Khan (64km) for Rs29.1bn; Lot 3: Dera Ghazi Khan to Thatta (42.5km) for Rs52bn; Lot 4: Tibi Qasrani to Dera Ismail Khan (96.2km) for Rs42bn.

IHC rejected Feneec's bid for Rs172bn Care-Tranche III award to JV. In its verdict, the court warned that the regulator's recent decisions "may also lead to inconsistent outcomes" and declared the petitions infundibular.

### Replacing colonial-era water laws

**NEWS DESK:** An agreed upon 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 combat, additionally, the fast-emerging challenges of disaster mitigation, climate change, and environmental issues.

The draft of the new law under preparation, primarily at the Sindh Irrigation Department (SID), it would be a broader legal instrument to regulate water-related challenges from commands to drainage, groundwater aquifers, and wetlands. It was being drafted in the light of the Sindh Water and Agricultural Transformation (SWAT) project, a major US\$1.2 billion World Bank (WB) funded project that is already underway.

The new law aims to merge the over 150-year-old, colonial era Sindh Water 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, as a shape of SID, established to promote a participatory irrigation system by ensuring farmer-led elected self-governance in the canal command areas of each of the Sindh districts.

The ordinance had also substituted the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (SIDA) Act 1997.

The proposed law aims to merge century-old irrigation rules into a single framework to tackle climate change and ease management. Since then, two parallel irrigation systems have been in place. Both SID and SIDA had, historically, not been on the same wavelength over the last two decades, with the latter blaming the former for undermining its authority.

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

To create a conducive working environment in a fair, equitable, rule-based, transparent manner, has been a major challenge for the irrigation department.

The committee was formed to devise a strategy avoiding any further intervention by the government.

According to synopses compiled after weeks-long consultations with public and private sector stakeholders, the committee concluded that the current state of affairs was not capable of driving a fast-growing population of 250 million towards sustainable development because of cross-links 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 Social Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

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

It was found that "export competitiveness is undermined by high and volatile energy costs, with electricity and gas tariffs remaining above regional benchmarks and delayed to frequent changes".

It was warned that volatility was inflating production costs across manufacturing, agro-processing, minerals, fisheries, and services

eroding margins and driving 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 distortionary taxation, inverted input taxation, and income tax decreases, delayed sales tax refunds and persistent working capital lockups".

It said these issues disproportionately affected exporters and were particularly binding

### Pakistan makes major strides in regulatory reforms

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan has made major strides forward in modernising its regulatory landscape, delivering significant enhancements to anti-money laundering safeguards, corporate transparency, the simplification 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 "Finance Reform Champion" from the prime minister in December 2025 during the launch of the National Regulatory Reforms Initiative.

The recognition highlighted the regulator's dedication to institutional integrity, digital innovation, greater ease of doing business, and updating the Companies Act, among other 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.

One of the main milestones 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 screening 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 held 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-

ing papers, research papers before the introduction of the objective of reducing volatility in the repo, being operationally valid, goes against the global justification of the inflation targeting framework, reducing inflation volatility as an objective but a by-product of a smooth and coherent monetary system.

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## 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 to win the Spanish title.

Alberto Moleiro and Gerard Moreno and Georgi Mikhailev struck in the second half to cut Barcelona's lead to eight points, having played one fewer game after the Catalan champions.

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

"We hope we're capable of winning (our game) in hand too and to do the 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 game of few clear chances, but Villarreal stepped up a



gear after the interval. "It's true that in January we don't have a lot of time for the weather, making your legs cold and your mind cold, but teams are often inconsistent," said Marcelino. "In the second half, we put together some superb moves, and we scored three beautiful goals."

Playmaker Moleiro has been in superb form in recent weeks and was surprised when he opened the scoring.

Moleiro brilliantly cut home an equalizer in the 60th minute 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 Mikhailev, who fired home a composed finish after Moleiro had missed a chance.

Villarreal were cruise-

ing when Thomas Partey clumsily gave the ball away in front of his own goal, and Moreno rammed home to salvage some pride for Alaves, who are 15th in the table.

Knocked out of the Copa del Rey early and in the Spanish Cup, Alaves' main focus is now La Liga.

The Yellow Submarine will never give up 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 Spanish League, but we're alive in La Liga and we want to enjoy ourselves and keep adding points like we've been doing," Villarreal director Juan

Foith told DAZN.

Levante's Los Che winners Los Che won in 18th and coach Carles Cuellar is fighting for his job.

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

Former West Bromwich Albion midfielder Grady Diangana sent the visitors ahead in the 75th minute, but a goal from Perpulu slotted home a late penalty to rescue a point.

Kiplimo became only the fourth man to win three world cross country titles in a row, and his third consecutive women's crown at Apalachee Regional Park in fallahasee, Florida.

Agnes Negetich, the world 10km record holder, took the women's title in 31:28 over 10km to defend her Kenya 10th consecutive women's crown at Apalachee Regional Park in fallahasee, Florida.

Negetich defeated Uganda's Joyciline Jepkosgei, by 42 seconds in a dominant performance with Ethiopia's Berhane Aregawi 18sec back in a third consecutive women's title with Kenya's Daniel Ebenyo third in 28:45.

Kiplimo became only the fourth man to win three world cross country titles in a row, and his third consecutive women's crown at Apalachee Regional Park in fallahasee, Florida.

"Today was the hardest one," Kiplimo said.

"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.

Agnes Negetich, 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 final edition of the event.

Jimmy Gressier, the Frenchman who had been tipped for a podium finish after his shock 10,000m victory on the track at last year's world championships, was a disappointing 15th.

Kenya's Beatrice Chebet, the reigning 5,000m and 10,000m champion, did not seek a third consecutive women's world half marathon runner-up Ebenyo Kiplimo surged ahead by eight

## ICC unlikely to move Bangladesh T20 World Cup matches from India

**NEWS DESK:** The International Cricket Council (ICC) is

expected

to respond

this week

to a formal re-

quest

from the

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to shift their T20 World Cup 2026 matches from India to Sri Lanka due to security concerns.

The request came

after Bangladesh pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman was refused

entry to India

ICC is consid-

er

ate

Indian

venues

within India.

Chennai and

Thiruvananthapuram

have emerged as potential fallback options.

The Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) has indicated

it can accommodate

additional matches at

MA Chidambaram Stadium, citing the availability of eight

pre-arranged pitches.

The Kerala Cricket Association (KCA) has also ex-

pressed willingness to

host fixtures in

Thiruvananthapuram.

cerns over player safety within India.

Despite the re-

quest, sources suggest

the ICC is unlikely

to approve a move to Sri Lanka because of logi-

stical challenges,

with less than four

weeks to go before

the tournament starts

on February 7.

Reports

from

Cricbuzz, NDTV, and

Business Standard in-

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## Arsenal mBarcelona clinch Spanish Super Cup final

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

Both Spanish clubs struck twice for the Catalans with Robert Lewandowski also targeting the ball. Xabi Alonso's header from a record-breaking 160th triumph, despite Franck 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 sprain, with the defeat likely to bring back recent doubts around Madrid's coach Xabi Alonso's future.

After Raphinha sent Barcelona ahead, Vinicius Junior pulled Madrid level with a fine individual goal. It took a frantic end to the first half in Jeddah.

Lewandowski chipped Barca back in front, but Goncalo Garcia struck in injury time to send the teams in level at the break.

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

Alonso is still looking to prove his worth after arriving 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, but a very good game with a bit of everything," Alonso told

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, laying down the left and forcing Garcia to defend.

However, Madrid

rapidly hit back just

before the interval

through Gonzalo Garcia, who

ended the game with a

goal but Barca midfielder

De Jong was sent off for

a high lung on him.

Despite Madrid's numerical advantage Barca had a golden chance in stoppage time with Marcus Rashford firing wide when through on goal. Asenjo lunged to grab the ball, but Raphinha's shot from outside the box deflected in off Raul Asenjo to leave the ball wide. Barca's 15 minutes, trying to find a third goal and force a penalty shoot-out.

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Despite the request, sources suggest the ICC is unlikely to approve a move to Sri Lanka because of logistical challenges, with less than four weeks to go before the tournament starts on February 7.

Reports from Cricbuzz, NDTV, and Business Standard indicate that while the ICC is considering alternate Indian venues, a full relocation of Bangladesh's fixtures to Sri Lanka remains unlikely.

Instead, the ICC



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

**NEWS DESK:** Poland beat 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.

Hubrak continued his resurgence in his first event back after a near seven-month injury layoff by beating veteran Iwona Wawrzyniak 6-3, 6-3 to level the tie at 1-1 after Iga Swiatek lost 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 to an inspired Blanka Bencic.

The mixed doubles duo of Katarzyna Kawa and Jan Zielienski then downed Bencic and Jakub 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.

I want to thank the team. This was a team effort, the team effort. I really felt the support. Even though my singles performances weren't per-

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

Jan Zielienski beat the final 15 games against a shell-shocked Swiatek, earning her second title and 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 0-3. I was 'OK, what's the problem?' I just tried to keep the level and just wait for some chances."

Playing in his final

season on tour,

## Sabalenka downs Kostyuk to claim Brisbane crown

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

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

"Every day you go out there and private your level, and I think this week I did it really well," said Sabalenka after the final, 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.

The 27-year-old Belarusian said she had tried to introduce new elements to her game so far was "relaxing just on power, and I'm just paid off this week."

"I finally found the touch game," she said. "I figured something 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 outmaneuver, I have a good much."

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

There has been animosity between the two players.

Kostyuk refuses to shake hands with Russians or Belarusians because of the war in her homeland.

She has avoided hand-shake at the end of the final and in her speech at the trophy presentation, Kostyuk brought up the situation in Ukraine.



superb campaign for Poland, who beat the US in the semi-finals, and set up Hubrak to carry momentum into his singles campaign at the Australian Open that begins on Jan 18.

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

Wawrzyniak pushed Hubrak hard for a deciding set in the second round singles encounter but the 40-year-old was unable to grab the victory that would have clinched the title.

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

"I was really good at the beginning of the year, but I think I'm not as good as I was last year," said Hubrak. "I think I'm not as good as I was last year."

