



BALOCHISTAN
Governor Balochistan Announces Rs. 1 Lakh...

Page No 5



NATIONAL
Over 1.4m links blocked as part of actions against unlawful online...

Page No 3



INTERNATIONAL
Trump says he supports transitional Palestinian panel...

Page No 8

SPORT
Top seeds dominate at National Snooker Championship

Page No 7



Rs.10.00 Vol.VII:No:111

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Saturday 17, January, 2024

First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE



Chief Minister Balochistan addressing a press conference along with Chief Secretary and IG Police.

Rs3bn Fibre Project Launched and 12 Terrorists killed in Bank Robbery Attempt

Syed Muhammad Qasem:

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarifraz Bugti on Friday raised concern over the lack of coverage of internet towers in sparsely populated and remote areas of the province, warning that such infrastructure could pose security risks if misused by militant groups.

Speaking at a press conference in Quetta, the chief minister questioned the presence of high-speed mobile services in areas with little to no

civilian population. Citing locations such as Sangan, Bugti said it was surprising to see 4G connectivity in regions where hardly any residents live. He called for immediate action to approve these installations and stressed that unmonitored internet facilities could be exploited to target the state and law enforcement agencies.

At the same time, CM Bugti announced a Rs3 billion province-wide digital connectivity project aimed at expanding fibre optic services. Under the initiative, fibre cables will

be installed in schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals across Balochistan. He said the project is designed to improve public access to the internet while ensuring effective monitoring and regulation of its usage.

Addressing the security situation, the chief minister commended the Frontier Corps for a successful operation in Kharan, where 12 terrorists were killed during an attempted bank robbery. He said a group of 15 to 20 armed individuals tried to break into multiple

banks, damage ATMs, and flee with cash.

Bugti confirmed that one civilian was injured during the operation and is currently undergoing treatment at the Central Military Hospital. He added that four militants were killed on the spot at three separate locations, while others were intercepted during the coordinated response by security forces. Some attackers reportedly managed to steal around Rs3.4 million from one bank before being stopped.

The chief minister noted that such incidents reflect a disturbing shift, with ideologically driven militants increasingly resorting to criminal activities like bank robberies.

Bugti also linked the recent security challenges to the regional situation following the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 2021. According to official figures shared by military authorities, law enforcement agencies conducted more than 75,000 intelligence-based operations across Pakistan in 2025, resulting in the killing of over 2,500 terrorists.

The refusal is therefore arbitrary, discriminatory and violative of Pakistan prison rules and the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution of Pakistan 1973," it said.

"The petition also said that the sustained denial of meetings over a long time had caused mental agony, emotional trauma and psychological distress to the petitioner.

Under construction house hit by rocket in Bannu's Defence Colony

NEWS DESK:

Bannu Cantonment once again came under a rocket attack after a projectile hit an under-construction house in the Defence Colony area.

The rocket was fired from an unknown direction, resulting in a several-feet-deep crater and the collapse of the house's ceiling.

Fortunately, no casualties were reported. Earlier on the night of December 16, 2023, the cantonment was also targeted in a rocket attack when a rocket landed in vacant houses near the CMH. While no loss of life occurred in that incident, property damage was reported. According to reports, the same type of rocket was used in both attacks, which militants have named the "Al-Farooq 2".

Following the December 31 attack, the model of the fired rocket was also widely circulated on social media.

Security agencies have launched a comprehensive investigation into the incident, while evidence is being collected from the site to determine the motives behind the attack and identify those responsible.

Mehmood Khan Achakzai Appointed Opposition Leader in National Assembly

NEWS DESK:

Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Chairman Mehmoor Khan Achakzai has been officially appointed as the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, bringing an end to a prolonged delay in filling the position. An official notification issued by the National Assembly Secretariat confirms that the Speaker has declared Achakzai as the opposition leader with effect from January 16, 2025.

The announcement was made during a National Assembly session, where Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq summoned PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Chief Whip Amr Dogar to his chamber to formally convey the decision. Earlier this week, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar had confirmed that the party had resubmitted Achakzai's nomination papers to the Speaker.



This was the second formal attempt by the opposition to propose his name for the post.

The office of the opposition leader had remained vacant for nearly five months following the disqualification of PTI leader Omar Ayub in August 2025.

In January, the Speaker had stated that the appointment

process would be initiated afresh in line with constitutional requirements.

PTI founder Imran Khan had first nominated Achakzai for the position in August last year, shortly after Omar Ayub was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan in connection with convictions related to the May 9, 2023 incidents.

Achakzai, who also heads the opposition alliance Tareekh-i-Tahafuz-i-Ayin-i-Pakistan, was again nominated in October, though procedural issues contributed to further delays.

Under the National Assembly's Rules of Procedure, the authority to seek and approve a nomination for opposition leader rests solely with the Speaker. After legal ambiguities surrounding Omar Ayub's disqualification were resolved and required documents were submitted, the process moved forward, culminating in Achakzai's appointment.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Education Crisis: Beyond Numbers and Empty Promises



Editorial:

The Balochistan government's claim that around 45,000 children have returned to schools is being presented as a major breakthrough in addressing one of the province's deep-rooted education crisis. While any increase in enrollment deserves acknowledgement, this figure pales in comparison to the magnitude of the challenge. More than 3.1 million children in Balochistan remain out of school, a reality that exposes decades of neglect, mismanagement, and hollow commitments by successive provincial governments.

For years, education in Balochistan has been treated more as a slogan than a serious policy priority. Governments have consistently paid lip service to the issue, announcing plans, committees, and reforms that rarely translate into

meaningful change on the ground. The result is a broken system where thousands of schools remain without proper buildings, forcing children to study under open skies and abandon education altogether.

S h e l t e r l e s s schools are not an exception but a norm across vast parts of the province.

Equally alarming is the issue of so-called "ghost teachers" and ineffective staffing.

Despite repeated

claims of reform, un-

der the School Based

Accounting (SBAK)

system, absenteeism,

political interference,

and lack of account-

ability continue to

cripple public education.

Reviewing recruit-

ment processes is

important, but without

strict monitoring and

enforcement, such re-

views risk becoming

yet another bureau-

cratic exercise.

The return of

45,000 children

schools should not be

used to mask the

harsh truth: millions

are still deprived of

their fundamental right

to educate. Poor infra-

structure, and weak

governance continue

to push children out of

classrooms and into

labor, vulnerability, and

hopelessness.

If the Balochistan

government is serious

about change, it must

move beyond state-

ments and statistics.

Massive investment in

school infrastructure,

transparent teacher

management, commu-

nity-based enrollment

drives, and sustained

political will are essen-

tial.

Without tangible

action, promises will

remain empty, and an-

other generation of Balochistan's children

will be left behind.

Education cannot sur-

vive on rhetoric alone;

it demands urgent,

honest, and decisive

action. School supplies

to the ground.

The result is a broken

system where thousands

of schools remain with-

out proper buildings,

forcing children to

study under open skies

and abandon education

altogether.

B a l o c h i s t a n becoming un-

bearably hot

Balochistan is becom-

ing unbearably hot,

with rising tem-

peratures transform-

ing heatwaves into a

year-round threat.

These heatwaves

pose severe health

risks, including heat

stress, dehydration,

and even fatalities. In

the global battle

against climate

change, Balochistan

serves as a stark re-

minder of the urgent

need for climate resi-

liance. The province is

experiencing increas-

ingly severe weather

events, a conse-

quence of climate

change.

Unfortunately, fore-

casts suggest that tem-

peratures will contin-

ue to rise.

However, it exposed

the province's vulnera-

bility and highlighted

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gies.

Balochistan's annual rainfall of just 200

mm barely meets the

needs of its parched

population. This water

scarcity adversely af-

fects food production,

access to drinking

water, and livestock

numbers, exacerbated

by climate change.

The severe droughts

of 1997-2003 and

2014-2017 forced mi-

grations to water-rich

areas.

Balochistan in the Eye of Climate Change Storm: Calls for Resilient Climate Policies Surface

Chandni Kakar:



In the global battle against climate change, Balochistan, Pakistan, serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for climate resilience. The province is experiencing increasingly severe weather events, a consequence of climate change. Unfortunately, forecasts suggest that temperatures will continue to rise.

However, it exposed the province's vulnerability and highlighted the urgent need for effective management strategies.

Balochistan's annual rainfall of just 200 mm barely meets the needs of its parched population. This water scarcity adversely affects food production, access to drinking water, and livestock numbers, exacerbated by climate change.

The 2022 flood in Balochistan underscores the looming climate change threat.

The 2022 flood underscored the looming threat of climate change. The 2022 flood in Balochistan underscored the looming climate change threat.

Climate change also decimated the region's economy.

Chiltan surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams.

The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides poor grazing for livestock.

Soil erosion As far as soil erosion is concerned, both stream erosion of soil and wind erosion is occurring in the district.

The stream erosion takes place in the piedmont plain along the banks and beds of streams.

Such streams are Sassi, Lora, Hanna river, Habib Nullah near Hudder. Wind erosion occurs in the valley.

This all requires a review of the existing plans and documents and preparation of the digitized base map of Quetta with a protocol for its updating.

Reviewing policies, procedures, plans, studies conducted by donor agencies, and other relevant data. Current and future population trends need to be reviewed.

Transportation, mass transit, and city traffic management and monitoring system, housing commercial, and industrial land use, evaluation of the existing condition of buildings and housing schemes should be thoroughly reviewed.

To be precise, the city needs a master plan on an emergency basis to address the looming threat of climate change and natural disasters.

Quetta City, Proposed Master Plan

Abdul Latif Kakar : QUETTA: The mountain-ringed, Quetta city needs a comprehensive master plan to ensure the solution of problems faced by citizens and address the mega question of climate change.

Through the proposed plan, scarce resources would be transparently and rationally utilized to make it a better living city in the country.

For the first in the history of the province, the Urban Planning Development (UPD) under the leadership of chief minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has started the preparation of the master plan.

Geographical location, looming threat of natural calamities including earthquakes, drought, and floods, the need for making a comprehensive master plan for Quetta city is growing. Rather, it is now indispensable to make this plan, before it is already late.

Geography and

Four main units may describe the soils of Quetta i.e. (1) piedmont plains (very deep and well-drained soil) (2) piedmont basins (3) salinity and alkalinity (4) gravelly piedmont and aprons bordering the mountains and plains.

The central part of the Quetta valley is covered by a soil that ranges from sandy loam to silt loam. This type of soil is good for crop production.

At the margin of the valley near foot-hills, the soil consists of sandy loam, mixed with pebbles and rock fragments and is suitable for vegetation. In the Hanna valley, the greater part of the valley floor is covered by barren rock boulders of low relief and dry mala bed. The soil is restricted to the narrow banks and low terrace along the main stream. However, the nature of the soil in Belili is silty clay which is not suitable for cultivation. Similarly, the

soil surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams.

The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides poor grazing for livestock.

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Over 1.4m links blocked as part of actions against unlawful online content, PTA informs LHC

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) has informed the Lahore High Court that it has blocked more than 1.4 million web links and URLs in its ongoing drive against "unlawful online content" amid growing concern over coordinated social media campaigns targeting state institutions, including the superior judiciary.

The Lahore High Court (LHC) had directed the PTA on Thursday to approach Facebook, X and other social media platforms to ensure the removal of defamatory and contemptuous content targeting judges, observing that legal action can be taken in Pakistan even if such material was created and shared from abroad.

Justice Ali Zia Bajwa had issued the directions after a petition filed against an alleged social media smear campaign against judges.

The PTA has sub-

mitted a report to the court, according to which more than 1.4 million links were reviewed and blocked across major social media platforms due to containing "unlawful online content", with the largest number of blockings carried out on Facebook and TikTok.

As per the report, the PTA reviewed 229,000 Facebook links, blocking around 93,600, or nearly 41% of the total.

Content against "decency and moral" accounted for the strictest enforcement action with more than 174,000 links reviewed and over 163,000 blocked, representing a 94% blocking rate.

On Instagram, 38,000 out of 43,000 reviewed URLs were blocked for an 87% blocking rate.

On YouTube, authorities reviewed 72,000 links and blocked more than 64,000. Meanwhile, over 112,000 links were examined on X, with 70,800 links blocked, recording the lowest blocking rate at

62%. On other miscellaneous digital platforms, around 89,000 of 89,000 reviewed links were blocked, reflecting near-total enforcement of 99%.

The report said the blocked content covered a wide range of categories, including contempt of court, obscenity, hate speech, religious violations, proxy services and material deemed against the state.

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Mehmood Khan Achakzai: From Anti-Dictatorship Struggle to Leader of the Opposition

SVEDALISHAH:

Mehmood Khan Achakzai, a veteran politician known for his unwavering commitment to democracy and anti-dictatorship, has been appointed Leader of the Opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly. Currently heading Tehreek Tahafuz-e-Aain-e-Pakistan (TAP), he was nominated for the role by a proposal last year by the incarcerated founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan.

Achakzai's political journey spans decades and is widely noted in resistance against authoritarian rule. One defining moment came in October 1983, during General Ziaul Haq's martial law, when he was a defendant in a democratic process in Quetta. Despite severe threats, the protest went ahead, resulting in four deaths and dozens of injuries as security forces opened fire.

The incident cemented Achakzai's image as a steadfast opponent of military rule.

Early Life and Education

Born in Baitullah Karez, Gulistan, in present-day Killa Abdullah district of Balochistan, Mehmood Khan had partial education with the National Awami Party after opposing the rule of Ziaul Haq. He joined the PDM in a politically active household. He completed his education in Gulistan, earned his intermediate degree from Science College Quetta, and later gradu-



ated in Civil Engineering from the University of Engineering, Peshawar.

Political Inheritance and Tragedy

Achakzai's entry into politics followed the assassination of his father, Khan Abdul Samad

on December 2, 1973. A prominent Pashtun nationalist leader, Abdul Samad Khan had partial ways with the National Awami Party after opposing the rule of Ziaul Haq.

Achakzai contested a by-election in 1974 that was widely viewed as a political contest between Balochistan and Islamabad. Despite pressure from Afghan offi-

cial to withdraw, he refused, choosing to uphold his father's political legacy. Over the years, Achakzai faced legal challenges without support from state institutions or foreign patrons. His survival in Pakistan's turbulent politics has relied largely on personal conviction and grassroots backing.

Role in Democratic Movements

Achakzai has been a central figure in several major opposition alliances. He actively participated in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy against General Zia's rule, co-

founding the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement in the 1990s, and later joined the All Parties Democratic Movement under General Pervaiz Musharraf.

More recently, he played a prominent role in the Pakistan Democratic Movement. In 2025, he launched

Tehreek-e-Aain-e-Pakistan to safeguard the 1973 Constitution, strengthen democratic institutions, and uphold civilian supremacy.

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Malir River Bridge completion scheduled for May 2026, CM Murad

NEWS DESK: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has directed the Sindh CM to finalise the completion of the Malir River Bridge.

Chief Minister's directive came following an evaluation of the project's progress by a specialised team from the Planning and Development (P&D) Department, which also inspec-

ted the N-S Mughal Khan bridge in Quaidabadi to ensure re-

gional connectivity standards are met. Previ-

ously, in December 2025, the

date for the comple-

tion of the bridge was

underscored that while speed is essential, the quality of development work remains param-

ountant. It was also

stressed that no shortcuts

would be tolerated as

the project enters its final phases.

Addressing logistic

and technical challenges, the

Sindh CM took notice of

KP narcotics law undermines federal powers, FCC told

NEWS DESK: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) was told on Thursday that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's having its own narcotics law, in addition to the Control of Narcotics Act (CNSA) 1997, would only undermine the federal government's anti-drug efforts and might add to legal complications.

The arguments were advanced by the federal government before a two-judge FCC bench comprising Justices Ahsan Qasim and Muhammad Karim Khan Ahsan.

The bench was hearing a petition jointly moved by the federal government and the concerned members of the KP Assembly.

The ECP says the members of the concerned members will not be restored until they submit their statements of assets and liabilities.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq has directed the suspended members to leave the House, saying their attendance will not be recorded, nor will they be allowed to sit in.

Under Pakistani law, members of the concerned members are required to submit annual statements of their assets and liabilities to the ECP. Failure to comply with this requirement results in automatic suspension of membership.

The petition argued that the federal

government played a vital role in addressing the narcotics threat in the country, particularly in the processing and trafficking of heroin and charas.

It stated that the federal government had already taken effective measures to combat all aspects of the multi-faceted drug problem since 1997.

"Not a dispute." During the hearing, Barrister Syed Zafar, representing the KP government, argued that the matter did not represent a dispute between the federal and provincial governments, as the law was duly enacted by the KP Assembly.

The KP government argued that the provincial law repealed the CNSA 1997 within KP to the extent of cultivation, manufacture, sale, purchase, delivery, and transportation of narcotics.

It termed the KP law a "mala fide" and "colourable" exercise of power, seeking its declaration as illegal.

It stated that licensing authority for import, export, internal transport, transhipment, and manufacture of narcotic drugs fell within the purview of the federal government under the CNSA 1997.

The provincial law, the petition contended, violated constitutional law and created legal and constitutional chaos, including duplication of special courts, overlapping jurisdiction, and conflict of authority with other law enforcement agencies. This, the petition added, could lead to a legal and constitutional crisis.

The petition argued that the CNSA 1997 was a comprehensive law applicable across Pakistan to curb the menace of narcotics at airports, dry ports, seaports, and land borders fell under the exclusive control of the federal government, which exercised its jurisdiction through the ANF. It contended that as narcotics trafficking was not only a cross-border offence but one with regional and international implications, the federal agency could effectively deal with the menace as the jurisdiction of provincial force extended only within its frontiers. The petition further argued that in the presence of a federal law enacted by an entity within its legislative competence under Articles 90 and 142 and Entries 3, 26, 27, 32, and 58 of the Federal Legislative List, any provincial law would be contradictory and thus void.



NEWS DESK: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has suspended 159 members of parliament, provincial assemblies for failing to submit asset details

Akhtar Mengal, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, been suspended from the National Assembly.

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Tahira Aurangzeb reaffirms govt's unwavering commitment to ensuring polio workers' complete safety, respect.

RAWALPINDI (INP): Senior parliamentarian, Tahira Aurangzeb MNA on Thursday strongly condemned the treatment of polio workers and reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to en-

suring their complete safety and respect.

While welcoming the frontline workers to her home, Tahira Aurangzeb praised their tireless dedication. "Polio workers are performing their

duties with utmost sincerity and passion, any kind of misconduct towards them will not be tolerated," she said.

The government stands fully committed to protecting their honour and security", she said. She urged all parents to extend full cooperation to the polio teams and ensure that every child remains safe and healthy.

for the success of the

anti-polio campaign", she said. The polio workers briefed the MNA on the various challenges and faced realities that encounter during door-to-door campaigns.

She highlighted that house-to-house marking is done solely to facilitate parents and maintain accurate records of vaccination to curb the spread of polio. She noted a significant decline in polio cases and expressed optimism that Pakistan

could become completely polio-free by 2026. The polio workers appreciated the MNA's support and her report, describing the interaction as a morale booster for their ongoing efforts in the field.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meeting with the National Pahlaam-e-Aman Committee.

Pakistan, Ethiopia agree to institutionalize intellectual, policy cooperation for driving innovation

ISLAMABAD (INP): The two premier think tanks of Pakistan and Ethiopia on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding to institutionalize intellectual and policy cooperation for driving innovation and growth across both nations.

The MoU was signed by Chairman of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) Ambassador Khalid Mahmood and Executive Director of the Institute Foreign Affairs (IFA) Ethiopia Jafar Bedra. Additionally, said Ambassador designee of Ethiopia to Pakistan Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba witnessed the ceremony at the ISSI, Islamabad, while his counterpart Ambassador Atif Sharif Mian was

present at the IFAs headquarters in Addis Ababa.

The MoU will allow the two institutions to establish a framework for cooperation in the fields of diplomatic training, professional development, research and analysis through delegations' exchange, conferences, co-publications, and joint research.

Felicitating both sides on achieving a milestone in the bilateral relations, the Executive Director IFA said Ethiopia and Pakistan will walk a long road together, guided by mutual respect, South-South solidarity, and a shared hope for a more stable, prosperous world.

"By combining IFA's deep knowledge of the Horn of Africa and

the Red Sea with ISSI's research expertise and strengths, we are building a platform that can do real work; align our views on maritime security and trade routes, craft joint approaches to stability and counter-terrorism, and deliver policy recommendations that reflect today's realities," Jafar Bedra remarked.

Ethiopia is a gateway to Africa, said the ISSI Ambassador while emphasizing on establishing robust academic linkages that are crucial to furthering the bilateral delegations exchange and policy dialogues for benefit of both the nations.

Ambassador Dr. Oumer Hussein highlighted the positive trajectory of relations between the two countries

LHC bars PHA from commercial use of parks

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) has barred the Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) from using or renting parks for commercial purposes.

Justice Shahid Karim issued the directions while hearing petitions related to smog, environmental degradation, and water-level issues.

The court ruled that no commercial activity may be carried out in any park without prior approval from the Environmental Commission.

The court further directed that two parks in the city be restored to their original condition and developed as model parks.

In the hearing, Justice Karim observed that industrial units are the biggest contributors to pollution and emphasized the need for a dedicated regulatory unit for industries. "There should be a proper, separate

unit for industries," he remarked.

The court stressed that the PHA's primary responsibility is the maintenance and protection of parks rather than using them for commercial activities.

Justice Karim also asked the PHA to present any judicial precedent on the matter, adding, "You expect the court to do everything."

The lawyer for the petitioner argued that a restaurant had been established in a Dunga ground point and that a floating restaurant was being constructed on Canal Road near Jallo Park.

Justice Karim reiterated that the court had repeatedly directed the PHA not to build restaurants in parks and had instead suggested establishing libraries and public spaces for community use. The Lahore High Court adjourned the hearing until January 23.

Dense winter fog disrupts travel across Punjab, major motorways closed

ISLAMABAD (INP): Dense winter fog has once again disrupted road travel across Punjab, forcing authorities to close major motorways as visibility conditions are at hazardous levels. According to details, Motorway M-2 was closed for all kinds of traffic from Lahore to Kot Momin, M-3 from Faizpur to Darkhana, M-4 from Pindi to Lahore, M-5 from Multan, M-11 from Lahore to Sambrial, and M-5 from Multan to Zahir Pir. Thick fog engulfed large parts of Punjab and adjoining regions, leading to near zero visibility in several areas and National Highway at Lahore, Manga Mandi, Phool Nagar, Jambar, Pattioki, Renala Khurd, Okara, Rawalpindi, Chakwal, and Kiswali. Lahore, Nagan, and Mian Chanru. Traffic pressure increased on the National Highways due to the closure of Motorways.

Syed Imran Ahmed, spokesperson for the Motorway Police Central Region, said that lane violations during foggy conditions can lead to serious accidents. He emphasized that motorists must strictly adhere to lane discipline and avoid risky driving behaviors. Authorities have advised road users to prefer traveling during daylight hours, not at night, to ensure safety. Lane markings are generally between 1000am and 600pm. Drivers have also been urged to use fog lights, necessary travel, refrain from speeding, and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle ahead.

The further Motorway Police Central Region said that weather conditions improve. Motorists seeking guidance or assistance can contact the Motorway Police Helpline at 130.

Rana Sanaullah, Khurram Khan, and Imran Khan

requested him to facilitate a meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan.

Rana Sanaullah said the issue of meeting the PTI founder was the most appropriate forum.

He described Imran Khan as a crucial role in building the movement.

He said the issue could be discussed further in the coming days and might also come up when

Mahmood Khan Achakzai meets the prime minister.

The senior politician added that he had previously advised Achakzai to meet the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister during that meeting, but the suggestion was not accepted at the time.



ISLAMABAD: Acting President, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani in a meeting with Hafiz Hussain Ahmed Madani at Awan-e-Sadr today.

Govt, opposition urged to open dialogue for political stability

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leaders, former federal ministers Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Asad Umar, on Friday urged both the government and the opposition to open dialogue in pursuit of political and economic stability.

Speaking informally to journalists before hearing, former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi emphasized that political engagement between the government and opposition was essential for national stability.

The two PTI leaders said Pakistan had responded robustly during the recent flare-up with India but warned that New Delhi "was not likely to back off" and "act again".

Qureshi said global conditions were deteriorating due to the growing confrontation between the United States and

Iran, placing Pakistan in a "particularly vulnerable position".

He also disclosed that his brother-in-law, whom he described as being "like a real brother, had recently passed away.

He said that despite requesting parole to attend the funeral prayers, he was not granted permission.

Talking to the media, Asad Umar said PTI supporters were "a genuine, hard-working, and decent people" committed to democratic politics.

He maintained that the government would eventually need to sit with the opposition to craft a fresh democratic accord.

Umar argued that while the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) had exhibited political

maturity, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) had "lost its political grounding," insisting the party "did not come to power through genuine support."

Umar said Pakistan's only way forward was democracy, adding that the public was "fully aware of who is right and who is not."

He stressed that the opposition must accept citizens that any negotiations with the government would not amount to "a deal or compromise".

Commenting on regional developments, he said the situation in Iran remained volatile, but Pakistan had played "a very positive role" amid escalating tensions.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan in a meeting with German Ambassador.

Bangladesh Cricket Board removes director Najmul Islam amid player boycott

NEWS DESK: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Thursday removed director Najmul Islam following protests from players ahead of Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches over his comments against the country's cricketers. The Daily Star reported that the BPL match scheduled for 1pm local time today was delayed as players from Chittagong Royals and Noakhali Express did not show up at the National Cricket Stadium for the game, according to The Daily Star.

Islam was handed a show-cause notice by the BCB a level above the one which was set to begin. However, the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) had called for a nationwide boycott of all BPL matches unless Islam tenders his resignation.

In a media release

today, the BCB said the decision to remove Islam was taken by president Aminul Islam Bulbul "after taking a review of recent developments and in the best interest of the organisation", and that it would come into effect immediately. The Daily Star reported that the decision had been taken in accordance with the authority vested in the BCB President under Article 31 of the BCB Constitution and is aimed at ensuring the continued peace and effective functioning of the Board's affairs," the statement read.

The Board remains fully committed to upholding the dignity of all players within its jurisdiction." In this regard, the BCB hopes that all cricketers will continue to display the highest standard of conduct and ethics, and to contribute to the betterment of Bangladesh cricket, and will do their

utmost to ensure continued participation in the Bangladesh Premier League," it added.

Until further notice,

Bulbul will serve as the acting chairman of the finance committee that Islam was the chair

of Islam had said on Wednesday night that he believes national cricketers are asked to return to the "norms of the game" that the BCB spends on them. ESPN Cricinfo reported. The

BCB officially distanced itself from Islam's comments and expressed its "sincere regret for remarks that may be deemed inappropriate, offensive, or hurtful." The Bangladesh Cricket Board also makes it clear that it will take appropriate disciplinary action against any individual who violates conduct of conduct that is disrespectful, or causes harm to the reputation and integrity of Bangladesh cricket,

the board said in a statement, per Cricinfo.

"The boycott was

proposed ... by Mithun and Mithun, president of the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB), hours after Islam's press conference at the BCB's headquarters in Dhaka.

"The move made by the BCB director (Najmul Islam) has hurt the cricket fraternity greatly, and it's not acceptable," Mithun told reporters on Wednesday evening. "Islam has to resign. If he doesn't resign before tomorrow's match, we will announce a boycott of all cricket, starting from the BPL matches tomorrow."

According to The Daily Star, Islam said the board owes no compensation to players if Bangladesh miss the upcoming world cup, as he said they had never sought refunds from cricketers after poor performances at global events.

"The question of compensation does not even arise. We have invested so much [in]

the team that we have been able to achieve anything anywhere."

The Daily Star quoted Islam as saying: "Have we won a single global trophy till now? Then we could've said that. If you have failed to perform, whatever we have spent on you, now we will take it back. Return it to us," Islam said.

Islam's comments

came amid Bangladesh's stand-off with the International Cricket Council (ICC) over its refusal to travel to India for next month's 120 World Cup.

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Red Bull braces for F1 changes

NEWS DESK: Four-time world champion Max Verstappen said he's keen to get to grips with the new regulations that will be unveiled on Thursday for a 2026 Formula One season of massive change.

The team unveiled the regulations for next year before a few hundred guests at Detroit's Michigan Central Station, less than two months before the season opens in Melbourne on March 4.

New rules for 2026 see aerodynamic changes to make cars lighter and smaller along with modifications to engine specifications to make for a greater contribution from electric power in the hybrid units.

"There is a lot of unknown, there are big changes, there are a lot of 'ifs' in the car," Verstappen said. "Initially I'll take time to adjust during test days. The motivation is very high."

It always takes a bit of time to get used to things," he added. "You need to understand where the most performance is to be found, get comfortable in the car. It's a bit of a new engine now as well, that will take a bit of time."

Red Bull, which has previously relied on Honda engines, took the gamble with Sauber, then buying its own engine for 2026 in partnership with automotive giant Ford, which will return to F1 22 years after its departure, Verstappen's run of four straight titles ended in 2025 as McLaren's Lando Norris claimed the prize. But despite an inferior car

the Dutch driver battled from a massive deficit in the standings to challenge for the title, finishing second in 2024, more than either Norris or teammate Oscar Piastri.

This year Verstappen will be joined by French driver Isack Hadjar, promoted to the team's Number 2 seat after a successful rookie season with Racing Bull.

Hadjar was also on hand for Thursday's splashy big reveal, as was Red Bull boss Laurent Mekies, who saw the sweeping regulatory changes and a new engine would make for a steep learning curve.

"I think it would

be really nice of us to think about how to build our engine from scratch, and be more competitive right from the start than people who've been doing it for 95 years," he told AFP.

Hadjar dreaming big

Isack Hadjar is is starting the 2026 season with his fourth different Formula 1 teammate since the last race of 2024.

Alex Albon, Pierre Gasly and Tsunoda have all fallen by the wayside but the transition for Hadjar should be smoother than most have spent climbing through Red Bull's development ranks.

"The Red Bull family have been in it for many years and now I think I signed up with my idol, who he watched win four championships with Red Bull."

"It's a bit unreal for me to have won four championships with a kid watching TV. I saw (Sebastian) Vettel winning all those titles and now I'm finally in the big team," Hadjar said as Red Bull's 2026 line-up for 2026 car livery in Detroit.

A string of holes have failed to match Verstappen's relentless pace in Formula One, with the Dutch driver set

to start the 2026 season with his fourth different Formula 1 teammate since the last race of 2024.

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As for his 2026 goals having secured a podium with third place in the Dutch Grand Prix in his rookie season,

The shock result capped a dismal week for the club, who also lost 3-2 to Barcelona in Sunday's Spanish Super Cup final.

The 42-year-old Arbeloa inherits a side four points adrift of their arch-rivals Barcelona in La Liga and now out of the top four, despite a 1-0 defeat to Celta Vigo.

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At this club, a draw is always bad, a tragedy is painful, and I'm sure all our fans and hurting," Arbeloa told reporters. "I am responsible to the club. As for the line-up and the substitutions, I only thank the players. Now we have to recover for Saturday."

Real's decision

to rest several first-team stars came under scrutiny as Real struggled against an organised and determined Alba

side. Despite the result, Arbeloa doubled down on his choices.

"I don't regret it. I was convinced that the square was the right one," he asserted. "The players we had formed a great team. I would make the same decision a thousand times over."

Real's second consecutive loss in nine weeks was a blow for Arbeloa, but the manager remained steadfast in his belief that the team was stepping stones to success. "I'm not afraid of failure," he said. "I understand anyone who wants to describe defeat as a failure. Failure is part of life. We have to make life better, and it will make us all better. I've endured defeats harder than this one. We'll prepare for the next match with maximum dedication."

He added that Real had a lot of room for improvement physically, and a better team will need time to adjust to different ideas," he said. "What happens on the pitch is ultimately my responsibility."

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He added that Real

through, also capitalising on a corner, with Franco Mastantuono turning home from close range.

Alba

regained the lead in the 82nd minute after Real's defence failed to clear their lines from a corner, allowing an unmarked Benítez to find the net with a vicious strike at the far post.

Gonzalo García's pulled Real level in stoppage time with a well-placed header but there was a sting in the tale as Benítez, who had a corner-kicked finish from Jose Lazo found Javier Villar at the near post, with the defender

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Real's stand-in goal-

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Other players main-

tain a strong form

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continues his strong run

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