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Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE

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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 Qaseem:**

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Friday raised concerns over the installation 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 clarity on who approved 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 Combined 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.

CM 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.

### Bushra Bibi's daughter moves LHC for visitation rights to her mother

**NEWS DESK:**

Bushra Bibi's daughter has moved the Lahore High Court (LHC), requesting to be allowed a meeting with her mother in Adiala Jail, it emerged on Friday.

Bushra is serving a seven-year sentence in the £190 million corruption case. She was recently sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment in the Toshakhana 2 case, which revolved around the purchase of an expensive jewelry set gifted to ex-premier Imran Khan by the Saudi crown prince during his May 2021 visit.

Bushra's daughter, Mubashra Khawar Maneke, filed the petition through LHC Bar President Asif Niswani under Article 199 of the Constitution.

The petition, a copy of which is available with Dawn, named the Punjab government, via the home department secretary, the provincial inspector general of prisons, and the superintendent of Adiala jail as respondents.

It said that Maneke was a "law-abiding citizen of Pakistan" as well as the real biological daughter of Bushra Bibi, and was "aggrieved" by the "unlawful, arbitrary, and unjustified refusal of the jail authorities to allow her to meet her mother, despite repeated requests, clear entitlement under law, and absence of any legal bar". "The petitioner, being her (Bushra's) real daughter, is deeply concerned about her physical, emotional and psychological well-being," the petition stated. It added that under the Pakistan Prison Rules as well as the Constitution, prisoners were entitled to family visitation, particularly by immediate blood relatives, "subject only to reasonable security regulations".

According to the petition, Maneke had made repeated visits and requests to meet her mother but had been denied access, although she had not been informed of "any security concern, restriction, prohibition or legal impediment" that justified the denial.

"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.

Further, the petition 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 on Friday.

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 31, 2025, Bannu 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 initial information, 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 Mehmood 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 Amir 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 Tehreek-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 the province's deep-rooted education crisis. While any increase in enrollment deserves acknowledgment, 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 or abandon education altogether.

Shelterless 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 reforms under the School Based Recruitment (SBK) system, absenteeism, political interference, and lack of accountability continue to

cripple public education. Reviewing recruitment processes is important, but without strict monitoring and enforcement, such reviews risk becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise.

The return of

45,000 children to schools should not be used to mask the harsh truth: millions are still deprived of their fundamental right to education. Poverty, insecurity, poor infrastructure, 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 statements and statistics. Massive investment in school infrastructure, transparent teacher management, community-based enrollment drives, and sustained political will are essential.

Without tangible action, promises will remain empty, and another generation of Balochistan's children will be left behind. Education cannot survive on rhetoric alone; it demands urgent, honest, and decisive action. School supplies

## 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 human-induced climate change. However, many residents mistake these extreme weather occurrences for regular fluctuations, hindering recognition of the escalating climate crisis.

## Balochistan becoming unbearably hot

Balochistan is becoming unbearably hot, with rising temperatures transforming heatwaves into a year-round threat. These heatwaves pose severe health risks, including heat stress, dehydration, and even fatalities. In

2017, Turbat recorded a scorching 53.5°C (128.3°F), setting a record for Pakistan. Unfortunately, forecasts suggest that temperatures will continue to rise.

However, the climate challenges in Balochistan extend beyond relentless heat waves. The province grapples with devastating droughts and floods, both of which wreak havoc on homes and infrastructure. The floods of 2010 and 2022 left nearly 4 million people displaced, disrupting lives and triggering food shortages and price spikes due to their impact on the agriculture sector.

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

The 2022 flood underscored the looming threat of climate

change over Balochistan. Driven by intensified and increasingly frequent monsoon rains, the full extent of the damage is yet to be comprehended. However, it exposed the province's vulnerabilities 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 severe droughts of 1997-2003 and 2014-2017 forced migrations to water-rich areas.

## CC affects economy

Climate change also decimated the region's economy

through the loss of livestock. Between 2010 and 2022, over 1.5 million livestock were lost, costing over \$1 billion and displacing over 100,000 people, particularly in districts like Quetta, Pishin, Turbat, Pajpore, and Khuzdar.

However, Balochistan need not accept this grim fate. It requires comprehensive strategies tailored to its unique challenges. The provincial government must implement robust climate change policies, emphasizing water resource management and disaster preparedness. Learning from the tragic dam collapses of 2022, preventive measures, such as effective water reservoirs and early warning systems, are imperative. Spreading awareness about climate change and promoting sustainable agricultural practices are

## Tree plantations could mitigate sweltering temperatures

In a province where tree planting could mitigate sweltering temperatures and climate change impacts, government initiatives should engage younger generations in green initiatives. Achieving a resilient future necessitates a collaborative effort involving government, local communities, civil society, and the commercial sector. Balochistan's path towards resilience begins with a symphony of collective action.

By addressing these critical issues, Balochistan can better adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, ensuring a more secure and sustainable future for its residents.

## 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 Soil

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 fans 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 foothills, 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 about crops of low

relief and dry mala bed. The soil is restricted to the narrow banks and low ter-

aces along the main stream. However, the nature of the soil in Belli

is silty clay which is not suitable for cultivation. Similarly, the

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 Sariah Lora, Hanna river, Habib Nallah near Hudda. 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.

A review of existing 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.





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

**NEWS DESK:** The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has informed the Lahore High Court (LHC) 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 while hearing a petition filed against an alleged social media smear campaign against judges.

The PTA had sub-

mitted a report to the court, according to which, more than one 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 197,000, or nearly 86%. TikTok 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.

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

On YouTube, authors 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, 891,000 out of 898,000 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.

Content against "decency and morality" accounted for the largest share, with over 1.06m links blocked.

A further 148,000 links were removed for content deemed to be "against security and defence of Pakistan". More than 109,000 links containing anti-religious material were also blocked, alongside over 76,000 links related to sectarian and hate content.

The lowest blocking rate was recorded for content involving defamation and fake identities at 56.7%, the report noted.

## ECP suspends 159 members of parliament, provincial assemblies for failing to submit asset details



**NEWS DESK:** The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has suspended 159 members of parliament and provincial assemblies for their failure to submit statements of their assets and liabilities.

The suspension affects 32 National Assembly members, 50 members of the Punjab Assembly, 33 of the Sindh Assembly, 28 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, and seven Balochistan Assembly members. Nine senators were also suspended, and the suspended members will not be able to participate in any parliamentary or provincial assembly proceedings until their memberships are restored.

Prominent political leaders who have been suspended include Balochistan National Party chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, been suspended from the National Assembly. Members National Assembly Speaker Ahsan Ishaq, former chief minister Qaim Ali Shah, and Saeed Ghani have also been suspended.

From the Senate, the memberships of Fauzia Arshad, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Abid Sher Ali and Musaddiq Malik, along with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Murtaza Saeed, and Noor ul Haq Qadri have been suspended.

From the Sindh Assembly, Speaker Ahsan Ishaq, former chief minister Qaim Ali Shah, and Saeed Ghani have also been suspended.

The ECP says the memberships 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 election laws, all elected representatives 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.

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

**SYED ALI SHAH:**

Mehmood Khan Achakzai, a veteran politician known for his unwavering commitment to democracy and constitutionalism, has been appointed Leader of the Opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly. Currently heading Tehreek Tahafuz-e-Aam-e-Pakistan (TTAP), his nomination for the role was proposed last year by the incarcerated founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan.

Achakzai's political journey spans decades and is deeply rooted in resistance against authoritarian rule. One defining moment came in October 1983, during General Ziaul Haq's martial law, when he led a pro-democracy procession in Quetta. Despite severe threats, the protest went ahead, resulting in four deaths and dozens of injuries after security forces opened fire.

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

**Early Life and Education**

Born in Inayatullah Karez, Gulistan, in present-day Killa Abdullah district of Balochistan, Mehmood Khan Achakzai grew up in a politically active household. He completed his early education in Gulistan, earned his intermediate degree from Science College, Quetta, and later graduated 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 Khan Achakzai, on December 2, 1973. A prominent Pashtun nationalist leader, Abdul Samad Khan had parted ways with the National Awami Party after opposing the merger of Pashtun-majority areas with princely states to form Balochistan. Instead, he advocated either a unified Pashtun province or the restoration of British Balochistan.

While still imprisoned, he founded the Pashtunkhwa National Awami Party — a decision that isolated him politically and ultimately led to his killing. His stance faced opposition not only within Pakistan but also from Afghan President Daoud Khan, who rejected the idea of consolidating Pashtun regions.

**Rise Without Patronage**

Following his father's death, Mehmood Khan Achakzai contested a by-election in 1974 that was widely viewed as a political contest between Kabul and Islamabad. Despite pressure from Afghan officials to withdraw, he refused, choosing to uphold his father's political legacy. Over the years, Achakzai carved out a rare political path — operating without support from state institutions or foreign patrons. His survival in Pakistan's turbulent politics has relied largely on 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-

founded the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement in the 1990s, and later joined the All Parties Democratic Movement against General Pervez Musharraf.

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

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

From street protests to parliamentary leadership, Mehmood Khan Achakzai's political career reflects a consistent struggle for democracy, federalism, and constitutional rule in Pakistan.

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## Malir River Bridge completion scheduled for May 2026, CM Murad

**NEWS DESK:** Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has officially set May 2026 as the final deadline for the completion of the Malir River Bridge.

The 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 inspected the N-5 Murgha Khana bridge in Quaidabad to ensure regional connectivity standards are met. Previously, in December, the date set for the completion of the bridge was March 2026, but it has now been extended.

Technical briefings presented to the Sindh CM revealed that the project, valued at Rs. 3,006.69 million, has 65% of physical construction now finalised. On the fiscal side, approximately 61.6% of the total budget has already been utilised. CM Shah

underscored that while speed is essential, the "quality of developmental work remains paramount," warning officials that no shortcuts would be tolerated as the project enters its final phases.

To ensure the structural longevity of the bridge, the P&D team conducted "Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) on-site to verify concrete strength, alongside rigorous measurement checks for girders and

transoms. The team reported that the current pace of work is satisfactory, though certain external hurdles remain.

Addressing logistical bottlenecks, the Sindh CM took notice of delays caused by utility shifts. He directed that formal letters be issued to K-Electric to expedite the relocation of their infrastructure, which currently hinders progress.

Furthermore, he ordered the immediate procurement and stockpiling of gravel and aggregate base materials for the ramps, noting that a seamless supply chain is the only way to guarantee the project stays on track for its 2026 inauguration. In 2022, traffic police requested the expansion of the bridge, as the first bridge built on the Malir River in the city's history. They sent a letter to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) in this regard, stating that the National Highway Authority built the Malir Bridge in 1970.

## 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 Substances 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 Ali Baqar Najafi and Muhammad Karim Khan Agha.

The bench was hearing a petition jointly moved by the federal government and the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) seeking to set aside the KP's Narcotics Substances Act 2019. The controversy revolves around whether a provincial law can enact a parallel narcotics law in the presence of Section 71 of the CNSA 1997 — a move that the petitioners argue "undermines the federal government's authority to legislate."

Filed against the backdrop of KP's parallel legislation, despite the CNSA 1997 already being in effect, the petition asked the FCC to interpret the executive powers of both the federal and provincial governments under the Constitution.

The petition argued that the federal government played a vital role in controlling and eliminating 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 multifaceted drug problem since long.

"Not a dispute," During the hearing, Barrister Syed Ali 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.



In response, Attorney General (AAG) Chaudhry Amir Rehman questioned how a provincial law could repeal a federal legislation.

He added that once a province established its own law or agency to implement such a law, a dispute between the federal and provincial governments was bound to erupt. The FCC adjourned further proceedings until next week. "Comprehensive law" The petition expressed the concern that the provincial law repealed the CNSA 1997 within KP to the extent of cultivation, possession, sale, purchase, delivery, and transportation of narcotics.

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

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

The provincial law, the petition contended, would create grave legal and constitutional chaos, including duplication of special courts, overlapping jurisdiction, and conflict of authority with other law enforcement agencies. This, the plea 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 as 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, any 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 parliament 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.

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

RAWALPINDI (NP): Senior parliamentarian, Tahira Aurangzeb MNA on Thursday strongly condemned any mistreatment of polio workers and reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to ensuring their complete safety and respect.

While welcoming the frontline health workers with tea at 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, and 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 receives polio drops without fail. "Your positive and supportive attitude is extremely important for the success of the

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

house marking is done solely to facilitate parents and maintain accurate records of vaccination of children. Tahira Aurangzeb reiterated that the government, under the leadership of Mian Muhammad Nawaz

Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, has taken decisive and far-reaching steps toward eradicating 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 encouragement and support, describing the interaction as a morale booster for their ongoing efforts in the field.



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

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

ISLAMABAD (NP): 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 Bedru Goletu, virtually, said a press release.

Ambassador designate of Ethiopia to Pakistan Dr. Omer Hussein Oba witnessed the ceremony at the ISSI, Islamabad, while his counterpart Ambassador Atif Sharif Mian was

present at the IFA 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 researches.

Felicitating both sides on achieving a milestone in the bilateral relations, the Executive Director of IFA said Ethiopia and Pakistan have walked 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 regional research 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 counterterrorism, and deliver policy recommendations that reflect today's realities," Jafar Bedru remarked.

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

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

and called for the two think tanks to actively collaborate to utilize each other's potentials.

He stressed the importance of reinforcing all existing pillars of the relationship particularly in political and economic spheres and urged both the institutions to work closely within this framework that is imperative for strengthening bilateral relations.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Ethiopia Atif Sharif noted growth in Pakistan-Ethiopia relations, highlighting opening of the Ethiopian Embassy Islamabad, start of Ethiopian Airlines operations in Karachi, delegations exchange in various sectors and the recent Pakistan Single Country Exhibition that held in Addis Ababa in October, 2025.

## Dense winter fog disrupts travel across Punjab, major motorways closed

ISLAMABAD (NP): Dense winter fog has once again disrupted road travel across Punjab, forcing authorities to close major motorways as visibility dropped to 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 Bhatian to 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, reducing visibility to near zero in several areas, and National Highway at Lahore, Manga Mandi, Phool Nagar, Jambar, Pattoki, Renala Khurd, Okara, Sahiwal, Chichawatni, Kismal, Iqbal Nagar, and Mian Channu. 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 daytime hours, noting that safer travel times in foggy conditions are generally between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm. Drivers have also been urged to use fog lights, avoid unnecessary travel, refrain from speeding, and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle ahead.

The Motorway Police further advised citizens to remain cautious and patient until weather conditions improve. Motorists seeking guidance or assistance can contact the Motorway Police Helpline at 130.



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

## ECP suspends 159 lawmakers for not submitting accounts' details

ISLAMABAD (NP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has suspended membership of 159 legislators from Parliament and provincial assemblies for not submitting details of their assets.

The Election Commission said nine lawmakers were suspended from upper house of the parliament which is Senate while 32 were suspended from the lower house which is the National Assembly.

Fifty members of the Punjab Assembly, 33 from Sindh Assembly, 28 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, seven from Balochistan Assembly were also suspended.

A day earlier, the ECP had reminded the lawmakers to submit details of their assets and liabilities, warning of suspension if they fail to do so by January 16.

"The members of Senate, National Assembly and provincial assemblies who have not submitted details of their assets and liabilities are directed to submit it on the prescribed Form B under Section 137 of the Elections Act by January 15, 2026," said a statement issued by the ECP. "In case of failure to submit the statement, the membership of the concerned lawmakers will be suspended from January 16, 2026," it

stated.

The ECP further informed that the offices of the political finance wing (Kohsar Block) at the commission would remain open for the receipt of statements until 12:00 midnight on January 15. Last week, the ECP had said 446 lawmakers had failed to submit their statement of assets and liabilities with the due date of December 31, 2025. It notified them to submit it by January 15. Out of these, 125 lawmakers were members of the National Assembly, 26 Senators, 159 members of the Punjab Assembly, 62 members of the Sindh As-

sembly, 48 members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly and 26 members of the Balochistan Assembly. The ECP had stated that the submission was a mandatory requirement under Section 137 of the Elections Act 2017. Section 137 (1) of the Elections Act, 2017 stipulates that "every member of an assembly and senate shall submit to the Commission, on or before Dec 31 each year, a copy of his statement of assets and liabilities, including assets and liabilities of his spouse and dependent children as on the preceding thirtieth day of June on Form B."

## Rana Sanaullah congratulates Mahmood Khan Achakzai, renews call for dialogue with opposition

ISLAMABAD (NP): Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah Khan Friday renewed call for dialogue with the opposition while congratulating newly appointed Opposition Leader Mahmood Khan Achakzai.

He reiterated an offer of dialogue to the opposition, stating that the Prime Minister's invitation for negotiations remains open. "Previous offer from the government had not received a positive response from the opposition," Rana Sanaullah said during his informal talk with reporters inside the Parliament House.

Rana Sanaullah said if talks are to move forward, the Speaker's Office would be the most appropriate forum. He described the appointment of the opposition leader as a confidence-building measure that should be viewed positively.

Responding to a journalist's question on whether Nawaz Sharif played any role in Achakzai's appointment, Rana Sanaullah said he was not aware of any such involvement, adding that the NA speaker would be better placed to clarify the matter.

When asked whether Achakzai had

requested him to facilitate a meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan, Rana Sanaullah said the issue of meeting the PTI founder was a separate matter and had, in the past, been missed. 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 raise the matter during that meeting, but the suggestion was not accepted at the time.

## Lahoris to enjoy 4-day weekend on Basant Festival

LAHORE (NP): Lahoris will enjoy a "long weekend" during the Basant Festival, which will be celebrated from February 6, 2026, to February 8 in Lahore. According to details, the Punjab government is considering declaring Friday as a holiday while Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday are already declared holidays. In case of Friday's holiday, Lahoris will observe four holidays. The purpose is to make the Basant Festival historic and secure. A low number of motorcycles will be on the roads.

Basant is returning to Lahore after 18 years, following the passage of the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Bill, 2025, by the provincial assembly on December 24.



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

## Govt, opposition urged to open dialogue for political stability

LAHORE (NP): 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, calling for a renewed "Charter of Democracy" to steer the country out of escalating uncertainty.

The two PTI leaders were presented before the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Lahore after their legal teams filed an application for their attendance in cases linked to the May 9 unrest.

The presiding judge extended their interim bail until February 13. Inside the

courtroom, Qureshi and Umar held a brief discussion on the country's fast-changing political landscape. Speaking informally to journalists before hearing, former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi emphasised that political engagement between the government and opposition was essential for national stability.

PTIs detained leader said Pakistan had responded robustly during the recent flare-up with India but warned that New Delhi "was not likely to back off" and could "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 not "a guerrilla nation" but "civil 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 public 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 assure 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.



## Governor Balochistan Announces Rs. 1 Lakh Reward for Gold Medalists at Lasbela University Convocation

**LASBELA:** In a significant announcement during the 5th Convocation of Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Governor Balochistan, Jaafar Khan Mandokhail, declared that each gold medalist will be awarded a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh.

He emphasized the university's unique and strategic position in Pakistan's higher education landscape, particularly with its focus on agriculture, water resources, marine sciences, and emerging technologies.

Governor Mandokhail lauded the leadership of Vice Chancellor Dr. Abdul Malik Tareen and his team for their continuous efforts in academic excellence, research, and community service, which have contributed to both provincial and national socio-economic development.

Addressing the graduates, the Governor said, "Lasbela University holds a critical



role in shaping the future of the region, and I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the graduates receiving their degrees today.

Your hard work, perseverance, and commitment have culminated in this momentous achievement. The event was attended by several

dignitaries, including Provincial Minister Rahela Hamid Khan Durani, Parliamentary Secretary Zareen Magsi, Provincial Secretary Colleges and

Higher Education Saleh Baloch, and a large number of parents and students. In total, approximately 400 graduates, including MPhil and

Ph.D. scholars, were awarded their degrees, with 45 gold medalists recognized for their academic excellence. Governor Mandokhail high-

lighted that the Balochistan government is committed to providing all necessary support to strengthen higher education institutions and produce

skilled, capable human capital. "The future of our province depends on well-educated, skilled, and morally grounded graduates like you, and I have no doubt that you will be the architects of a bright future for Balochistan," he stated.

Commitment to Excellence and Innovation Governor Mandokhail also praised the faculty for their dedication to providing quality education and research despite limited resources. "Your role in shaping the minds and character of our youth is invaluable," he said. He also urged graduates to use their acquired knowledge and skills for the betterment of society.

He concluded by urging graduates to maintain values of honesty, discipline, tolerance, and hard work as they embark on their professional careers. Remember, your degree is not just a certificate; it is a responsibility," he emphasized.

### Commissioner Naseerabad Chairs CRC Meeting to Review Recruitment Objections and Ensure Transparency

**NASEERABAD:** A detailed and important CRC meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Naseerabad Division, Salahuddin Noorzi, to review objections and complaints related to the recruitment process.

The meeting was attended by Divisional Deputy Director Schools Abdul Rauf Jamali, District Officer Sobhatpur Panhal Khan, Saadia Khan, Sabir Nawab, Muhammad Akbar Gola, and other concerned officers.

During the meeting, a total of 15 objections and complaints were presented before the committee by various candidates, including 12 male and 3 female applicants. Commissioner Naseerabad and other committee members thoroughly reviewed all objections and relevant documents.

Addressing the

meeting, Commissioner Salahuddin Noorzi stated that complete and transparent verification of all documents will be ensured so that no candidate faces injustice or error.

He emphasized that after hearing the candidates' complaints, it has become clear that transparent and merit-based decision-making is the need of the hour.

He further stressed that justice against any candidate is proven, not only will their complaint be resolved, but the rightful candidate will be given their due immediately in accordance with merit.

He also directed that strict legal action be taken against individuals found possessing fake degrees. Commissioner Noorzi stated that the

purpose of the meeting was to review all records in detail and resolve complaints in light of facts, so that public trust in the recruitment process is further strengthened and no candidate is deprived of their rightful opportunity.

He assured that all decisions will be made strictly in line with the principles of merit, transparency, and justice.



### Deputy Commissioner Chairs District Health Committee Meeting to Improve Healthcare Services in Jaffarabad

**JAFFARABAD:** An important meeting of the District Health Committee was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Jaffarabad, Khalid Khan, to review the provision of healthcare facilities and address challenges faced by the health sector in the district.

The meeting was attended by District Health Officer Dr. Abdul Manan Lakhtu, PPHI District Support Manager Faisal Iqbal Khosa, along with other officers and doctors. During the meeting, the District Health

Officer briefed participants that doctors and paramedical staff are performing their duties across all health facilities in the district to ensure better medical services for the public.

He stated that staff performance is being regularly monitored, strict action is underway against absentee employees, and the availability of medicines at all health centers is being ensured.

Addressing the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan emphasized that the timely provision of

basic healthcare facilities to the public is the top priority of the district administration. He directed concerned departments to immediately resolve issues of non-functional health facilities so that patients do not face disappointment after reaching medical centers.

The Deputy Commissioner further made it clear that the attendance of doctors and paramedical staff must be ensured under all circumstances.

Any negligence or carelessness will not be tolerated, and strict disciplinary action will

be taken against those found responsible.

He urged doctors to further improve their performance to provide immediate relief to the public.

Expressing his commitment, Khalid Khan stated that the district administration is utilizing all available resources to serve the public.

He instructed all departments to strengthen mutual coordination and teamwork and to play an active role in the field so that public issues can be resolved in a more effective and timely manner.



### District Emergency Operations Center (DEOC) Inaugurated in Nushki with Support of Azat Foundation, WFP, and EU Humanitarian Aid

**NUSHKI:** An inaugural ceremony of the District Emergency Operations Center (DEOC) was held at the Deputy Commissioner Office Nushki. The center has been established under the auspices of Azat Foundation with the financial and technical support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the European Union Humanitarian Aid.

The DEOC was formally inaugurated through a ribbon-cutting ceremony by Additional Deputy Commissioner Nushki Mr. Umar Jamali, Assistant Commissioner Nushki Ms. Maria Shamoon, and Mr. Naem Gul, Programme Policy Officer of the World Food Programme.

Prior to the inauguration, Khalid Latif Abbasi, Anticipatory Action Specialist at Azat Foundation, briefed the participants in detail about the establishment, scope, and objectives of the District Emergency Operations Center.

He explained that



the DEOC aims to ensure timely information sharing, effective coordination, and rapid response at the district level to cope with natural disasters, emergencies, and climate-related risks, thereby safeguarding precious human lives.

He said the center will not only enhance coordination among various departments during emergencies but will also play a vital role in timely decision-making and effective response.

He further praised the support of Azat Foundation, WFP, and EU Humanitarian Aid, noting that such initiatives significantly strengthen the capacity of district administration.

### SSP Loralai Chairs Key Meeting After Levies-Police Merger, Announces Crackdown on Crime and Drugs

**LORALAI:** Following the merger of Levies into the police force, a significant meeting was held under the chairmanship of SSP Loralai, Malik Muhammad Asghar Usman, with former Levies and current police officers.

The meeting was attended by DSP Legal Sardar Nasrullah Khan Hamza.

SDPO Kareem Mandokhail, and SHO of various police stations of Loralai. Addressing the participants,



TENDER NOTICE					
The Executive Engineer Public Health Engineering Division Waskul invites sealed Percentage rate tenders based on composite schedule of rates 2021 Government of Balochistan market rate for interested contractors, Drilling Agencies, Civil Work, Solar Work and pipe Manufacturers/Authorized Dealer/Firm for the works mentioned below under BSOI Phase-I for the year 2023-28. Bid Security 2% Estimated cost of each work.					
S	Name of Work	ESTIMATE #	Cost	Tender Fee	Time Limit
1	CONSTRUCTION OF WSS WITH SOLAR SYSTEM FOR DIFFERENT VILLAGES OF UC DAL DISTRICT WASKUL UNDER BSOI PHASE-I	21775400	1000	45	25/01/2024
2	INSTALLATION OF 3 RO PLANTS AT DIFFERENT VILLAGES OF TIRSH, WASKUL DISTRICT WASKUL UNDER BSOI PHASE-I	225650	1000	45	25/01/2024
3	SUPPLY OF HDPE PIPE FOR VARIOUS BSOI SCHEMES PHASE-I	225650	1000	45	25/01/2024

The procurement shall be carried out in accordance with Balochistan Public Procurement rules, 2014.

**Eligibility:** The Firm/Company and contractor must have valid registration with Pakistan Engineering Council in relevant category with renewal up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026, registration with tax authorities (NTN), sales tax, BPA (Department) who are registered suppliers and are active tax payers (ATL) of FBR. Bank financial statement of last three years and only registered firms, who are on active tax payers list of FBR will be allowed to participate in the tender opening. Proof of at least 3 years' experience in the relevant field/similar nature upto 2 Million. 02 Completion Certificate and 02 on-going schemes of similar nature in previous year, no litigation certificate with any Govt. Department, an affidavit showing the contractor is not associated, the contractor must submit proof of their tax returns, authority letter in case of representative of the company where priority will be given to the authorized dealer in the relevant field. In Solar the Firm must have PEC code (eEEY1) (Solar) Authorized representative of company will only be allowed, having a specific Authorization letter for the Schemes mentioned above. (The Authorization letter must be provided on Non-Judicial Stamp Paper Valuing Rs. 100, duly attested by first class Magistrate). NEC 61215 & NEC 61730 Certificates, Joint venture is not accepted. Contractor should down load tender document by self. All documents should be provided in original to the undersigned. Method of Procurement: Single Stage, Two Envelope Procedure Bidding/Tender Documents. (i) Sequence: Tender document will be issued to Contractor / Firm, Authorized Firm Dealer after publication of notice at PPHD web site after presentation of above said criteria and each tender fee (non-refundable) Rs. 1500/- 1000/- in shape of green cheques/bank deposited in NBP Waskul, under head of account C-2725-02. (ii) 2% of estimated cost of each work for earnest money/Security deposit in shape of call deposit refundable. (iii) Submission date and time which can also be viewed on [www.bppr.org.pk](http://www.bppr.org.pk). Note: It may be noted that no pay order will be accepted. (iv) Extension and time complete the name should be written on the call deposit. Submission: The bidding documents duly filled along with supporting documents must be submitted on or before 02-02-2024 till 11:00 AM Opening: Technical bid will be opened on 02-02-2024 at 12:00 PM and Financial Bid will be open on 04-02-2024 at 12:00 PM before procurement committee in the presence of Manufacturers/ Firm/ Company or their authorized representative agents, place of issuance inquiries and opening will be Address: Office of the Executive Engineer PHE Division Waskul, Telephone No. 0947520120 Email Address: [skhalid@balochistan.gov.pk](mailto:skhalid@balochistan.gov.pk) Fax No. 0947520120

PRC No. 3272/16-01-2026

Executive Engineer  
Public Health Engineering  
Division Waskul

## Central Development Working Party (CDWP) clears Rs40bn health cover for AJK, GB, ICT

**NEWS DESK:** The government on Thursday cleared a Rs40.188 billion Sehat Sahulat Programme to provide universal health coverage in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) for two years ending June 30, 2027.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to formally launch the project within the next couple of days. This was one of the five health sector projects worth Rs79.35bn cleared by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) at a meeting presided over by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal.

The Sehat Sahulat Programme was originally launched on Feb 7, 2018, and gradually expanded across the country and extended from the initial three years to seven years, ending June 2025 and was devolved to provinces.

Presiding over a meeting on Jan 2, 2026, PM Shehbaz approved the continuity of the programme beyond June 30, 2025 until June 30, 2027, for AJK, GB and ICT only.

Rs79bn health projects approved, Poly-



clinic-II plan revised Under his directives, a modified project with a revised capital cost of Rs40.188bn was cleared by the CDWP and referred to the Executive Committee of the

National Economic Council (Nec) for formal approval under universal health coverage (UHC) scope. The project is a key component of the Uraan Pakistan social sector initiative and seeks to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare services for all citizens, particularly the poor, vulnerable and underserved segments of society.

Under the revised framework, the Sehat Sahulat Programme is being implemented through the development budget on a universal basis in the three federal territories for improving overall public

health outcomes by expanding coverage of secondary and priority inpatient treatments. The programme would provide health insurance coverage for indoor healthcare services

to all permanent resident families in the covered districts as per Nadra records to reduce out-of-pocket expenses and catastrophic health expenditures related to hospitalisation by up to

60 per cent. The minister told the meeting that the programme was initially launched in 2015 by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif with the core objective of providing 100pc health coverage exclusively to poor and deserving families.

He alleged that the subsequent renaming and expansion of the programme to affluent segments in certain regions led to the misuse of resources and restricted access for genuinely deserving households.

He directed that the programme be renamed its original title, i.e. the Prime Minister's National Health Programme, and that public resources remain focused on protecting vulnerable groups and strengthening the social safety net. All in all, the CDWP approved three smaller development projects with a combined estimated cost of Rs12.5bn under its financial powers and referred two larger (Rs56.8bn) projects,

including the Rs40.188bn Sehat Sahulat and Rs15.95bn Jinnah Hospital (Poly-clinic-II), Islamabad, to Nec for formal approval.

## Petrol, diesel unchanged, levy increased

**NEWS DESK:** The government on Thursday kept the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD) unchanged, but increased the petroleum levy on both products.

According to a press release issued by the Petroleum Division, the price of petrol will remain at Rs253.17 per litre and that of HSD at Rs257.08 for the up-

coming fortnight starting January 16.

The petroleum levy was increased by Rs4.65 on petrol and by 80 paise on HSD. Together, the petroleum and carbon levies now total Rs87 on petrol and Rs79 on diesel.

Petrol is primarily used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers, directly af-

fecting the budgets of the middle and lower-middle classes.

Most of the transport sector runs on HSD.

Its price is considered inflationary as it is used in heavy transport vehicles, trains, and agricultural engines, particularly contributing to rising prices of vegetables and other food items.

## Defence export boom sparks call for economic reset

**NEWS DESK:** As Pakistan enters a phase marked by unprecedented defence export opportunities and an equal chance to reposition itself within evolving global economic dynamics, business leaders are calling for a fundamental restructuring of the country's external economic relationships to achieve sustainable, self-driven growth.

Former president of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik has urged the government and the private sector to prioritise competitiveness, investment and innovation as the cornerstones of Pakistan's economic revival. He said the country stands at a critical juncture where it can either continue a cycle of crisis management or break free towards genuine economic sovereignty. "For too long, we have been caught in a trap of external assistance that has weakened our structural foundations and discouraged strategic planning," said Malik. He added that the current global realignment, combined with growing interest in

emerging markets and regional connectivity initiatives, presents Pakistan with a rare opportunity to recalibrate its economic priorities and pursue growth on its own terms.

The trade veteran stressed that attracting long-term foreign direct investment should take precedence over short-term capital inflows linked to balance of payments pressures. Such investments, he said, would bring not only capital but also technology transfer, managerial expertise and crucial access to global markets. Equally important is rebuilding confidence among domestic entrepreneurs and diaspora investors, who can provide the foundation for sustained economic expansion, he added.

Another prominent businessman, who requested anonymity, pointed to Pakistan's growing defence sector as a potential game-changer for the broader economy. Following the Pakistan-India conflict in May 2025, Pakistan's defence exports have surged to approximately \$13 billion, though a majority of this volume remains in the pipeline, opening new avenues

for economic diversification.

"The defence export boom is not just about military hardware; it represents a validation of Pakistani manufacturing capabilities and technical expertise," the businessman said. "These export orders are creating, and will continue to create, ripple effects across the private sector, helping manufacturers identify new international markets and establishing Pakistan as a reliable supplier. Beyond the immediate foreign exchange benefits,

which are substantial, this is building institutional capacity and global credibility that can be leveraged across multiple industries."

He added that the defence sector's success demonstrates what Pakistan industry can achieve when it focuses on quality, innovation and compliance with international standards, lessons that should be applied across other sectors of the economy.

Malik, however, emphasised that redefining Pakistan's external economic relations re-

quires a more balanced diplomatic approach, where trade agreements and regional connectivity projects are driven by national competitiveness rather than urgent financing needs. Diversifying export markets and reducing over-reliance on traditional partners would strengthen Pakistan's negotiating position globally, he said. Both business leaders said the future lies in leveraging innovation across sectors, including digitalisation, fintech, agriculture and renewable energy.



## Gas supply raised to 746mmcf/d on winter demand surge

**NEWS DESK:** Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik on Thursday directed gas utilities to take immediate steps to ease supply pressures on domestic consumers as severe cold weather pushed up demand across the country.

Chairing a meeting with senior officials of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA), the minister took notice of complaints from household consumers facing gas shortages during peak winter conditions. According to an official statement, Malik stressed that providing relief to domestic consumers remained the government's top priority and instructed the Sui companies to ensure maximum facilitation for households.

To strengthen oversight, the minister directed that weekly reports on gas demand and supply be submitted to the Petroleum Division, supported by daily operational-level



monitoring. Officials informed the meeting that a detailed report on the previous 24 hours' gas supply situation is already being presented to the division daily at 10am to allow timely corrective measures. Briefing the meeting, the managing director of SNGPL said gas supply had been increased from 691 million cubic feet per day (mmcf/d) to 746mmcf/d since January 6. He added that production from the Shiva gas field

had been raised from 55mmcf/d to 65mmcf/d, contributing to improved availability. The minister asked officials to explore all possible options to further reduce pressure on domestic consumers. He directed that the feasibility of diverting additional gas from the industrial sector to households be examined wherever possible during the critical winter period.

The managing director of SSGC told the meeting that the supply

situation had improved after the restoration of output from two gas fields. He said an additional 39mmcf/d was being supplied to domestic consumers compared to the same period last year. He also informed participants that consultations were underway with industrial stakeholders on the possibility of increasing weekly industrial gas shut-downs from one day to two days to prioritise household consumption.

## Shipping lines adopt official exchange rates

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan Customs has claimed the implementation of official bank exchange rates for shipping charges, effectively ending the long-standing practice of arbitrary and excessive billing by international shipping lines.

An official announcement of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has termed this a historic and industry-wide breakthrough by ensuring the application of official bank exchange rates for shipping charges.

All Pakistan Shipping Association through a formal communication on Jan 12, has confirmed that all member shipping lines are now charging shipping fees strictly on the basis of exchange rates provided by their respective authorised commercial banks, in accordance with State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) regulations.

This decisive development follows sus-



tained engagement by a high-level committee constituted by Pakistan Customs, which held extensive consultations with shipping agents, terminal operators, trade bodies, and international shipping lines. As a key milestone, Maersk — the largest shipping line operating in Pakistan

and handling nearly 26 per cent of the country's total cargo — earlier began applying official bank exchange rates. According to the announcement, written confirmations of compliance have been received from major international shipping lines and their local

agents, including Hapag-Lloyd, Ocean Network Express, COSCO Shipping, CMA CGM, Mediterranean Shipping Company, OOCL, and United Marine Agencies, among others, establishing full industry-wide adherence to SBP-compliant exchange rates.



# 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.

The first BPL match scheduled for 1pm local time today was delayed as players from Chattogram Royals and Noakhali Express did not show up at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium for the game, according to the Daily Star.

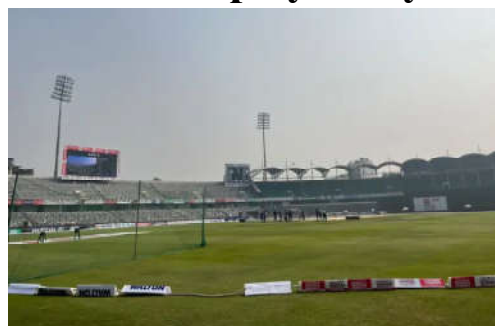
Islam was handed a show-cause notice by the BCB a few hours before the match was set to begin. However, the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) had called for a nationwide boycott on all forms of cricket unless Islam tapers his resignation.

In a media release

today, the BCB said the decision to remove Islam was taken by president Aminul Islam Bulbul. "Following 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.

The decision has 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 smooth and effective functioning of the Board's affairs," the statement read.

"The Board remains fully committed to upholding the honour and dignity of all players under its jurisdiction. In this regard, the BCB hopes that all cricketers will continue to display the highest standards of professionalism and dedication 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 team committee that is - lam was the chair

of Islam had said on Wednesday night that he believes national cricketers should be asked to return the "crores and crores of taka" 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

the board said in a statement, per Cricinfo.

The boycott was proposed by Mohammad Mithun, president of the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB). Hours after Islam's press conference at the BCB's headquarters in Dhaka.

"The remark made by the BCB director [Najmul Islam] has hurt the cricket fraternity greatly, and it's not acceptable," Mithun told reporters on Wednesday evening. "We demand his resignation. If he doesn't resign before tomorrow's match, we will announce a boycott of all cricket, starting from the BPL matches tomorrow (Thursday)." According to The Daily Star, Najmul said the board owes no compensation to players if Bangladesh miss the upcoming world cup, arguing that the BCB has 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] them, they haven't 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 every time, 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 standoff with the International Cricket Council (ICC) over its refusal to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup. Bangladesh announced on Jan 4 that it would not play its T20 World Cup matches in India after its player Mostafizur Rahman was released by his Indian Premier League (IPL) team amid growing tensions between the two countries.

## 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 car Red Bull unveiled on Thursday for a 2026 Formula One season of massive change.

The team unveiled the liveries for their new cars before a few hundred guests at Detroit's Michigan Central Station less than two months before the season opens in Melbourne on March 7.

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 in the engine 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."

"Also with the new engine now as well, that will take a bit of time. Red Bull, which has previously relied on Honda engines, took the gamble in 2023 of developing 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 world titles ended in 2025 as McLaren's Lando Norris claimed the prize. But despite an inferior car

the Dutch driver battled back from a massive deficit in the standings to challenge for the title, snatching eight wins - 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 Bulls.

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

"I think it would simply be naive of us to think we could 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 dreaming big after landing his fourth different team promotion to the Red Bull team, saying on Thursday that his goal for 2026 was to win at least one race after replacing Yuki Tsunoda as Max Verstappen's teammate.

The 21-year-old Frenchman, who impressed with sister team Racing Bulls last season, said the reality had still not fully sunk in as he teams up with his idol Verstappen in the program as a kid. So it's not fully new to me," Hadjar said.

"I'm lucky enough not to have to meet everyone the first time, there are familiar faces, also a couple of mechanics. I started to work quite early in the season to make sure I'm fully adapted and fully in the rhythm."

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



## Blame me, says Arbeloa, as Real exit Copa del Rey

**NEWS DESK:** New coach Alvaro Arbeloa said he was not afraid of failure as he took the blame for Real Madrid's stunning 3-2 defeat to second-division Albacete in the Copa del Rey round of 16 on Wednesday.

Substitute Jeffe Betancor scored twice as Arbeloa endured a nightmare start to his managerial career at Real after taking charge of the Spanish giants following Xabi Alonso's departure on Monday.

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 the arch-rivals Barcelona in La Liga and now out of the Copa del Rey.

Speaking after the humbling result at a misty Carlos Belmonte stadium, the former Real defender took full responsibility for the defeat but insisted that brighter days lay ahead.

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

Arbeloa's decision to rest several first-team stars came under scrutiny as Real struggled against an organised and determined Albacete



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

"I don't regret it. I was convinced that the squad I brought was the right one," he asserted.

"The players we had formed a great team. I would make the same decision a thousand times over."

It's difficult for players to adapt to everything I've asked of them in just one day. We also have many players who need to recover physically."

Real's second consecutive loss in less than a week was a blow for Arbeloa, but the manager remained steadfast in his belief that failure is a stepping stone to success.

"I'm not afraid of failure," he said. "I understand anyone who wants to describe this defeat as a failure. Failure is part of the road to success. It will make me 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.

"With a new manager, players will need time to adjust to different ideas," he said. "What happens on the pitch is ultimately my responsibility."

We need clearer ideas in how we approach matches, particularly against teams that defend deep."

Without French superstar Kylian Mbappe and various other key players, Arbeloa's side struggled against a side currently 17th in Spain's second division.

The hosts took the lead in the 42nd minute after a spell of pressure. A dangerous corner from Jose Lazo found Javier Villar at the head post, with the defender rising highest to deftly past Real's stand-in goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, sending the crowd into raptures.

Arbeloa's side levelled before the break

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

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

Gonzalo Garcia's pulled Real level in stoppage time with a well-placed header but there was a sting in the tale as Betancor produced a sensational lofted finish past Lunin to snatch a famous late victory for Albacete, their first ever against Real.

"We've hit rock bottom," we've been knocked out by a second division team," Real captain Dani Carvajal told reporters. "You have to face up to it when you lose, and that's what we have to do now. We, the players, are the ones ultimately responsible. There's little else I can say."

## Slot happy to welcome Salah back

**NEWS DESK:** Liverpool coach Arne Slot said he was delighted to have Mohamed Salah returning from Africa Cup of Nations duty soon, despite an apparent falling-out just weeks ago.

In a fiery outburst after a 3-3 draw at Leeds United, the Egyptian forward accused the club of throwing him "under the bus" and said his relationship with Slot had broken down.

The 33-year-old, who will be involved in Egypt's third-place match against Nigeria on Saturday, had been left on the bench for three matches and has not started for Liverpool since November.

"First-off, he has to play another big game for Egypt on Saturday," Slot told reporters ahead of Saturday's home game against Burnley.

"I'm happy he's coming back. If I had 15 attackers, I would still be happy to have him back."

The Dutch coach said an 11-game unbeaten run across all competitions had



boosted Liverpool's season. But five Premier League draws in that run have left the champions fourth, 14 points behind leaders Arsenal.

"Ideally it's not 11 games unbeaten, it's 11 wins in a row. That is what we aim for," Slot said.

"From where we were, we were four goals against PSV Eindhoven to now - a much better place, but there's still room for improvement."

Slot acknowledged the pressure to secure Champions League qualification, having led

the table early on.

"We have to put ourselves in the most ideal position, especially when you compare to where we were after six games."

Slot praised Andy Robertson's response to his reduced role in the squad.

## Top seeds dominate at National Snooker Championship

**NEWS DESK:** Veteran cueist Mohammad Asif smashed the tournament's highest break as the top seeds delivered commanding performances on the third day of the National Snooker Championship here at the NBP Sports Complex on Thursday.

Asif, a three-time world champion, eclipsed the previous benchmark of 133 with a superb 134 clearance during his 4-0 rout of Aftab Baig. The NBP player, who also crafted a 112 break, affirmed his status as a prime title contender.

The day belonged to the tournament's elite, with defending champion Shahid Aftab maintaining his flawless run. The Punjab potter dispatched Mudassar Yaqoob 4-0, sealing his victory with a 108 break.

Former national champion Asif Iqbal was equally ruthless, firing two century breaks of 127 and 103 in a 4-0 win against Barjeesh Khan.



Their dominance underscored a trend among the favourites. Last year's runner-up Mohammad Sajjad secured a 4-0 win, while 2022 world champion Ahsan Ramzan, 20, also won his match 4-0 against Mohammad Abdullah.

Other players maintained strong form. Abdul Sattar, who held the previous high break, won 4-0 with a 112 break. Ahmar Tariq, Rana Irfan and Aakash Rafique also recorded victories to bolster their knockout

stage prospects.

Further down the order, Ian Matt John and Amir Sohail secured 4-2 victories, while Sheikh Mohammad Mudassar won a tense seven-frame encounter against Ali Raza. Mubashir Raza continued his strong run with a 4-1 win over fellow century-maker Sohail Asad.

The group stage continues on Friday with the final round of matches, determining the 24 players who will advance to the knockout phase.

## Trump says he supports transitional Palestinian panel in Gaza

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he was backing the newly appointed "Palestinian Technocratic Government" in Gaza, where Washington has announced the launch of a second phase in a ceasefire that went into effect in October but remains fragile.

"I am backing a newly appointed Palestinian Technocratic Government,"

the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, supported by the Board's High Representative, to govern Gaza during its transition," Trump said on social media.

Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas signed off in October on Trump's plan, which says the Palestinian technocratic body will be overseen by an international so-called "Board of Peace" that is meant



to supervise Gaza's governance for a transitional period.

In another post,

Trump said the "Board of Peace," of which Trump himself is the chair, was

formed, and its members would be announced shortly. Israel and Hamas

have accused each other of ceasefire violations in Gaza, where, since the

start of the truce in October, over 440 Palestinians, including more than 100 chil-

dren, and three Israeli soldiers have been reported killed.

The ceasefire has also been tested by the failure to retrieve the remains of one last Israeli hostage,

Israeli delays in reopening Gaza's border crossing with Egypt, and Hamas' refusal so far to disarm.

By pressing on with the second phase of the ceasefire, Washington and its mediator partners will need to tackle the vexing challenges of disarming Hamas,

further Israeli withdrawal tied to the disarmament and deploying an international peacekeeping force.

The Palestinian technocratic body will have 15 members and will be led by Ali Shaath, a former deputy minister in the Western-backed Palestinian Authority who

had been in charge of developing industrial zones, according to a statement by mediators Egypt, Qatar and Turkey.

"These Palestinian leaders are unwaveringly committed to a PEACEFUL future," Trump said. Many experts say that Trump being the chair of the board meant to supervise Gaza's governance resembled a colonial structure.

He also said Egypt, Qatar and Turkey will help to secure what he called a "comprehensive demilitarisation agreement" with Hamas.

Israel's assault on Gaza since late 2023 has killed tens of thousands, caused a hunger crisis, and internally displaced Gaza's entire population. Multiple rights experts, scholars and a UN inquiry say it amounts to genocide.

## Taliban leader's speech lays bare 'Kandahar vs Kabul' divide

**NEWS DESK:** A stark message from the Taliban supreme leader, warning of internal threats to the Islamic Emirate, has seemingly laid bare the long-suspected divide between Kandahar and Kabul, BBC News reported.

An audio recording of a speech — delivered by Hibatullah Akhundzada at a semi-annual in Kandahar — contains what some are interpreting as confirmation of differences among top Taliban leaders.

In the leaked clip, obtained by the BBC, Akhundzada can be heard saying that internal disagreements could eventually bring them all

down. According to the investigation by BBC Afghan, two distinct groups have emerged within the Afghan Taliban, each presenting competing visions for how Afghanistan should be governed.

One is entirely loyal to the Akhundzada-led Kandahar faction, who is driving the country towards his vision of a strict Islamic Emirate — isolated from the modern world, where religious figures loyal to him control every aspect of society.

The second faction is made up of powerful Taliban members largely based in the capital Kabul, advocating for an Afghanistan which —

while still following a strict interpretation of Islam — engages with the outside world, builds the country's economy, and even allows girls and women access to an education they are currently denied beyond primary school.

The question was always whether the Kabul group — made up of Taliban cabinet ministers, powerful military leaders and influential religious scholars commanding the support of thousands of Taliban loyalists — would ever challenge Akhundzada in any meaningful way, as his speech suggested.

Then came a decision which would see the delicate tug of war

between the most powerful men in the country escalate into a clash of wills.

In late September, Akhundzada ordered the internet and phones to be shut off, severing Afghanistan from the rest of the world. But just three days later the internet was back, with no explanation of why.

What had happened behind the scenes was seismic, insiders said. It was thought that the Kabul group had acted against Akhundzada's order and switched the internet back on. According to one expert, this was nothing short of rebellion for a group that doesn't brook dissent amongst its echelons.



## Iran warns of 'decisive response' to any military aggression at UNSC

**NEWS DESK:** Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations, Gholamhossein Darzi, has issued a stern warning that any military or political aggression against Tehran will be met with a full and decisive response, while condemning international sanctions as a violation of international law. Speaking at the UN Security Council, Darzi criticised the United States for convening a meeting on Iran's internal situation, calling it shameful and an example of political hypocrisy.

Darzi accused Western human rights organisations of advancing an Israeli agenda and claimed that years of sanctions would directly harm ordinary Iranian civilians rather than the government.

The Iranian envoy alleged that protesters in Iran had faced "ISIS-style attacks" and that Iranian security forces had sacrificed their lives protecting citizens. He accused Washington of inciting demonstrators to rebellion, calling it in-



terference in Iran's sovereignty.

Any form of aggression against Iran would be a clear violation of international law and the UN Charter, the Iranian envoy told the council, adding that no justification can be presented for any military operation against Iran.

He described the situation as a critical test not only for Iran but for the UN's credibility and that of the international system as a whole.

While emphasising that Tehran respects the rights of peaceful protesters, Darzi warned that "any external aggression or conspiracy will be met with a forceful response."

Russia and China also criticised the US and opposed the use of force in the matter concerning Iran. Addressing the council, the Russian envoy described the meeting as a "circus," saying it should have been convened for global peace rather than interference in Iran's internal affairs. He said exter-

nal powers are deliberately fuelling the current situation in Iran.

The Russian envoy said Iran has made it clear that it does not seek tension or confrontation; however, in the event of any aggression, a forceful response will be given. He added that the protection of citizens and property is the top priority for the Iranian government, while US statements encouraging the Iranian people to seize institutions are against the sovereignty of any country.

## Venezuelan leader Machado meets US president

**NEWS DESK:** President Donald Trump met Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado on Thursday afternoon, in a high-stakes encounter that could affect how the US leader seeks to shape the South American country's political future.

Machado, who fled Venezuela in a daring seaborne escape last month, was looking for Trump's ear with members of Venezuela's government and seeking to ensure she has a role in governing the nation going forward.

The lunch meeting marks the first time the two have met in person.

"I know the president was looking forward to this meeting, and he was expecting it to be a good and positive discussion with Miss Machado, who is really a remarkable and brave voice for many of the people of Venezuela," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters during a briefing.

She said Trump's earlier assessment of



Machado, in which he said she did not command the respect in Venezuela to govern it, stands. After the US captured Venezuela's longtime leader, Nicolas Maduro, in a snatch-and-grab operation this month, various opposition figures, members of Venezuela's diaspora and politicians throughout the US and Latin America have expressed hope that Venezuela will begin the process of

democratisation. But for now, Trump has said he is focused on economically rebuilding Venezuela and securing US access to the country's oil.

The day after the Jan 3 operation, he expressed doubts that of conversation for Machado had the backing needed to return to the country and govern, telling reporters: "She doesn't have the support within or the respect within the country."

Trump has on several occasions praised Delcy Rodriguez, Venezuela's interim president, saying in an interview on Wednesday: "She's been very good to deal with."

One potential topic against her was Thursday's White House meeting with the Nobel Peace Prize, which was awarded to Machado last month, a snub to Trump, who has long sought the award.

## Pakistan-Saudi-Turkiye defence deal in pipeline, defence production minister says

**NEWS DESK:** Defence Production Minister Raza Hayat Harraj has said that Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have prepared a draft defence agreement after nearly a year of talks, a signal that they could be seeking a 'bulwark' against a flare-up of regional violence in the last two years.

Harraj told Reuters a day ago the potential deal between the three regional powers was separate from a bilateral Saudi-Pakistani defence deal announced last year. A final consensus between the three states is needed to complete the deal, he said.

The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia-Turkiye trilateral agreement is something that is already in pipeline," Harraj said in an interview. "The draft agreement is already available 7th us. The draft agreement is already with us. And we have not signed any agreement. Our President [Yavuz Erdoğdu] is for an inclusive platform that creates wider, bigger cooperation and stability," Fidan said, without naming Pakistan or Saudi Arabia directly.

The development follows a Bloomberg report last week that said Türkiye is seeking to join a defence alliance between Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan, citing people familiar with the matter. The move could pave the way for a new security



gional nations must come together to create a cooperation platform on the issue of security," Fidan said. Regional issues could be "resolved if relevant countries report, the proposed expansion appears to build on a defence arrangement initially signed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in September, under which "any aggression" against one country would be treated as an attack on all. The provision mirrors Nato's Article 5, an alliance in which Türkiye has the second-largest military after the United States.

People familiar with the talks said discussions were at an advanced stage and a deal was likely. They added that the expanded alliance made strategic sense as Türkiye's overlap increasingly intersects with those of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

across South Asia, the Middle East and parts of Africa.

The report said Ankara also views the pact as a means to strengthen security and deterrence at a time when questions have been raised about the reliability of the US and President Donald Trump's commitment to Nato, despite Washington's strong military ties with three countries. Türkiye and Pakistan already enjoy close defence cooperation. Ankara is building corvette warships for Pakistan's navy and has upgraded dozens of Pakistani F-16 fighter jets.

Türkiye is also sharing drone technology with both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and is seeking their participation in its Kaan fifth-generation fighter jet programme, Bloomberg reported earlier.