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Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE

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## Balochistan Govt, NBP Sign MoU to Provide Subsidised Electric Scooters

### News Desk:

The Government of Balochistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) to provide electric scooters to students, working women, and the general public on easy, subsidised instalments.

The agreement was formalised at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in

Quetta in the presence of Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Provincial Minister Mir Sadiq Umrani, senior provincial officials, and top representatives of the National Bank of Pakistan also attended the ceremony.

Calling the initiative a major step toward public welfare, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that access to safe, affordable,

and respectable transport, particularly for students and

working women, is a key priority of the provincial government. He noted that rising fuel costs and limited transport options have made daily commuting difficult for many families, and this electric scooter scheme is designed to ease that burden.

The chief minister highlighted that the project will not only reduce travel expenses but also promote eco-friendly and low-cost alternatives to conventional fuel-based trans-

port.

"Electric scooters are a practical solution for urban mobility. They are economical, environment-friendly, and well-suited to the daily needs of our people," he said.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to people-centric development, Mir Sarfraz Bugti stated that Balochistan will continue to roll out welfare-oriented projects that deliver direct benefits to citizens. He added that em-

powering youth and women through practical initiatives remains central to the province's development agenda.

The subsidised electric scooter financing scheme is expected to enhance mobility, support working women and students, reduce dependence on fuel, and contribute to cleaner and more sustainable transportation in Balochistan, marking another step toward inclusive and people-friendly governance.

### Three dead, Several Injured in Traffic Accident in Wadh

#### WADH:

Three people lost their lives while several others sustained serious injuries in a traffic accident at the Drakhala area of Wadh. According to local sources, the accident occurred when a car attempted to save a motorcycle rider, lost control, and overturned after colliding with another vehicle. As a result, three passengers died on the spot.



The injured were shifted to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, where they are receiving medical treatment. Hospital officials said the condition of some of the injured is critical.

Police reached the site soon after the incident and started an investigation, while traffic flow in the area was temporarily affected due to the accident.

### LHC disposes of NAB's pleas against PM Shehbaz, Punjab CM Maryam

#### NEWS DESK:

The Lahore High Court on Monday disposed of petitions filed by the National Accountability Bureau against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz after declaring them infructuous.

A two-member bench headed by Justice Amjad Rafiq heard the petitions.

During the hearing of NAB's petition against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, NAB Prosecutor Waris Ali Janjua informed the court that

Shehbaz Sharif had been acquitted in 2023 in both the Ashiana Housing Reference and the Ramzan Sugar Mills Reference.

He submitted that, in light of the acquittals, NAB's petition had lost its relevance.

### 5.8-magnitude earthquake jolts parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, KP: PMD

#### NEWS DESK:

An earthquake of magnitude 5.8 jolted parts of Pakistan on Monday, including Gilgit-Baltistan, Peshawar and adjacent areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the Pakistan Meteorological Department said. According to PMD, the earthquake struck at 11:21am at a depth of 10 kilometres, with its epicentre in Northwestern Kashmir. According to the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC), which uses the Moment Magnitude scale, a 5.7-magnitude earthquake struck northwestern Kashmir at a depth of 31 km.

It said that the quake was recorded 58 km north-west of Barishal in Pakistan.

Earlier this month, a 5.8-magnitude earthquake jolted parts of the country. Tremors were felt in Islamabad and parts of KP.

Pakistan falls on three major tectonic plates — the Arabian, Euro-Asian and Indian — which create five seismic zones under the country. The intersection of multiple fault lines means that tectonic movements remain a frequent occurrence in the region.

## Balochistan Faces Severe Climate Threats, Govt Launches Emergency Measures

#### Staff Reporter: Quetta:

Balochistan is facing severe and growing impacts of climate change, including a sharp decline in rainfall, rising temperatures, acute water shortages, and the degradation of agricultural land, Provincial Adviser for Environment and Climate Change Naseem Rehman Khan Malakhel said on Monday.

Highlighting the gravity of the situation, he stated that the Government of Balochistan has initiated urgent measures to mitigate environmental risks and protect the province's fragile ecosystem.

Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti termed the province environmentally sensitive, stressing the need for immediate action to avert future disasters.

"Balochistan is highly vulnerable to climate change. We must act today to prevent greater losses tomorrow," he said.



The provincial adviser emphasized that afforestation, conservation of water resources, and the promotion of clean and renewable energy are among the government's top priorities.

He added that climate change impacts are intensifying across the province,

prompting the launch of the 'Green Balochistan' campaign, which focuses on large-scale tree plantation, pollution control, and environmental education.

To ensure sustainable environmental protection, the government is actively engaging the public, civil society organizations, and the media. "Improving the environment is not solely the government's responsibility; it is a collective duty," Malakhel noted.

He further revealed that environmental committees are being established at the district level to identify local issues and develop practical solutions while raising public awareness about climate challenges.

The Government of Balochistan has also called for a fair share of climate financing at the federal level, stating that adequate financial support is essential for the province to effectively confront climate change and safeguard its future.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

## A Step Forward, But Transparency Must Become the Rule in Balochistan



## Editorial:

The recent initiatives taken by the Government of Balochistan toward transparency and reform deserve appreciation. Whether in climate governance, environmental planning, or administrative decision-making, the intent to move away from opaque practices sends a positive signal to a province long plagued by mistrust and institutional weakness.

Acknowledging challenges openly and taking the first steps to address them is not easy—especially in a region facing climate vulnerability, limited resources, and decades of governance deficits. Efforts such as structured planning, public engagement, and an emphasis on accountability reflect a growing recognition that business as usual is no longer sustainable.

However, appreciation must be accompanied by honesty. While these measures mark progress, a great deal still needs to be done to ensure true transparency and merit-based decision-making, particularly in the appointment of public servants across Balochistan.

For years, public perception has been shaped by allegations of favoritism, political influence, and non-merit appointments. These practices have not only weakened institutions but also eroded public trust and discouraged capable, educated youth who seek fair opportunities to serve.

If transparency is to become more than a slogan, it must be institutionalized across all departments, not limited to isolated initiatives. Recruitment, promotions,

postings, and policy decisions should be governed by clear rules, digital systems, and independent oversight. Only then can merit truly replace influence. Good governance is not built overnight. It is a continuous process that requires political will, administrative reform, and public vigilance. Balochistan stands at a critical point where small but sincere steps must now evolve into systemic change.

The people of the province do not expect perfection—but they do expect fairness. Strengthening transparency and merit in public service appointments will not only improve governance but also restore confidence in the state itself.

This is the path toward a stronger, more credible, and more hopeful Balochistan.

## A Billion Dollar, Million Jobs Opportunity : Why Pakistan Must Recognize NGOs as an Economic Industry

by Gul Hassan Durrani  
Pakistan today faces a convergence of serious challenges: rising unemployment, fiscal pressure, climate vulnerability, and widening social inequalities. While the state continues to pursue foreign investment in traditional sectors such as energy, mining, and infrastructure, a powerful and already existing engine of inclusive growth remains largely overlooked—the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and social development sector.

Globally, NGOs are no longer perceived merely as charitable entities. In advanced economies and developing countries alike, they function as professional service providers, innovation hubs, and major employers in education, healthcare, humanitarian response, climate adaptation, and social protection. If properly recognized and regulated, Pakistan's NGO sector alone has the potential to attract over one billion dollars annually in foreign funding and generate more than one million jobs nationwide, with transformative implications for underserved regions such as Balochistan.

In Pakistan, NGOs play a critical role in complementing government services, particularly in remote and marginalized areas where state capacity is limited.

They operate schools, health facilities, vocational training centers, disaster response systems, and climate resilience programs.

Through social mobilization, community engagement, and awareness raising, NGOs enhance ownership of public initiatives, strengthen accountability, and ensure sustainability at the grassroots level.

These functions are not peripheral; they are central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to estimates from the United Nations and development partners, Pakistan receives more than USD



1 billion annually in foreign NGO assistance, making the sector a significant contributor to the national economy. Beyond funding inflows, NGOs are major employers. They provide direct jobs to teachers, doctors, nurses, field mobilizers, researchers, data analysts, engineers, and climate specialists, while indirectly supporting local suppliers, trainers, and entrepreneurs.

In low-employment provinces such as Balochistan, this job creation potential is especially critical. Pakistan's development landscape already offers strong examples of NGO impact. Organizations such as the Edhi Foundation operate the world's largest volunteer ambulance network, while the Indus Hospital and Health Network delivers high-quality healthcare free of cost.

The Akhuwat Foundation has empowered millions through interest-free microfinance. Rural Support Programs including NRSP, BRSP, PRSP, SRSP and KRSP have transformed livelihoods through community-driven development. Advocacy and governance institutions such as Transparency International Pakistan, CPDI, SPO, and ROZAN

have strengthened democracy, accountability, and civic engagement. Women- and youth-focused organizations, including Today's Woman Organization (TWO) and the Christian Study Centre, have promoted peacebuilding, inclusion, and social cohesion.

Despite these contributions, the NGO sector continues to face systemic challenges. The regulatory environment is fragmented and opaque, involving multiple federal, provincial, and district authorities. Lengthy registration and renewal processes, overlapping mandates of regulators, arbitrary NOC requirements, and sudden funding suspensions discourage legitimate organizations and deter investment. Law-abiding NGOs are often treated with suspicion rather than as development partners.

Financial sustainability is another major constraint. Most Pakistani NGOs remain heavily dependent on short-term foreign funding, leaving them vulnerable to policy shifts and donor fatigue. Local philanthropy mechanisms remain underdeveloped, corporate social responsibility spending is inconsistent, and NGO endowment models are rarely supported. This structure limits long-term planning, professionalization, and employment growth.

To unlock the sector's full potential, Pakistan must adopt a reform-oriented, industry-based approach. First, the government should establish a One-Window Digital NGO Authority, such as a National NGO Regulatory Authority (NNRA), with online registration, reporting, and renewal systems. Time-bound approvals, automatic renewals for compliant organizations, harmonized laws, and risk-based oversight would reduce bureaucratic friction while strengthening transparency and accountability.

Second, financial sustainability must be addressed. The government should expand tax incentives for individual and corporate donations, mandate CSR spending for large corporations, and establish federal and provincial NGO endowment funds. NGOs should be allowed to adopt social enterprise models, generating a portion of their income through training institutes, micro-services in health and education, and impact products. In parallel, Government-

NGO Service Contracts should be introduced, where NGOs deliver verified outcomes in education, health, nutrition, and climate services, and are compensated accordingly.

Third, a clear categorization framework is essential. NGOs should be classified as international, national, provincial, and local organizations, with proportional compliance requirements and funding thresholds. Such categorization would improve regulation, prevent monopolies, enable grassroots organizations to access funding directly, and support evidence-based planning by federal and provincial governments.

Public trust and transparency must also be strengthened. Mandatory disclosure of audits, governance structures, and project outcomes through a national online portal would allow citizens and donors to distinguish credible organizations from weak ones. Investment in digital transformation—mobile monitoring, shared service centers, and national impact data systems—would significantly improve efficiency and performance, especially for community-based NGOs.

Ultimately, strengthening Pakistan's NGO sector is not charity; it is sound economic and social policy. Development challenges today are too complex for any single actor to address alone. A tri-sector partnership model—combining public financing, private sector expertise, and NGO implementation—offers the most effective path forward.

If treated as a regulated, professional, and growth-oriented industry, Pakistan's NGO sector can become a billion-dollar contributor to the economy, a major source of employment, and a cornerstone of inclusive development. For Pakistan, and especially for Balochistan, this opportunity can no longer be ignored.

## Addressing Poverty and Inequality: A Call for Sincere Leadership and Perpetual Reforms

By Amjad Rashid:  
Poverty and inequality, much like man-made disasters, afflict societies worldwide, including Pakistan. These are not natural phenomena but rather systemic issues rooted in human actions and policies. To eradicate this disease, national governments must craft comprehensive strategies aimed at safeguarding future generations from its scourge.

In Pakistan, the onus lies heavily on our political elite, spanning all parties, to recognize the gravity of the situation and redirect their efforts towards combating this man-made affliction. Without a collective awakening and a shift in approach, the cure will remain elusive. Moreover, at the international level, institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and the UN must prioritize social and cultural rights over neoliberal agendas, especially as the global order undergoes significant decay.

The challenges of poverty alleviation, malnutrition, stunted growth, inadequate sanitation, and unemployment are pervasive across South Asia and Africa. Collaborative efforts between these regions, bolstered by partnerships



with nations like China, hold promise in addressing these issues.

However, reliance on the failing

neoliberal order is futile; instead, a paradigm shift towards sustainable solutions is imperative.

In Pakistan, the

establishment of robust local governance structures with financial decentralization is

paramount. Political elites pos-

sess a window of opportunity to empower local bodies and enact pro-poor policies.

The Chinese model serves as a

beacon of inspiration, demonstrating the efficacy of such strategies when implemented effectively.

Regional connec-

tivity, underpinned by a long-term vision, emerges as a viable solution. It necessitates moving beyond the romanticized no-

tions of democracy and socialism towards pragmatic approaches that address our unique challenges. Special economic zones,

coupled with initiatives for youth development and the expansion of remittances, offer short-term relief while perpetuating reforms to broaden the tax base and reduce dependency on electoral politics.

South Asia, in particular, requires a concerted effort towards regional connectivity, resource exploration, harnessing youth potential, and fostering transparent governance free from corruption. The path forward does not demand extraordinary intellect but rather sincere leadership committed to implementing existing solutions.

The concept of Basic Democracy warrants reevaluation, with a focus on strengthening local bodies to eradicate poverty and pursue enduring prosperity through perpetual reforms.

It is incumbent upon all stakeholders responsible for the nation's development to prioritize this agenda and steer Pakistan towards a brighter future.





## Jailed Pakistan PTI leaders seek early hearings from CJP, LHC CJ in May 9 cases

**NEWS DESK:** Incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders on Monday once again approached Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi, seeking early fixation of their appeals against convictions in the May 9 cases. The letter has been sent to CJP as well as the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court by jailed PTI leaders Dr. Yasin Rashid, Mian Mehmodur Rashid, Ijaz Chaudhry and Omer Sarfaraz Cheema through their legal team PTI Insaaf Lawyers Forum Convenor Intizar Panjutha confirmed that the letter had been dispatched to both chief justices.

He said the first letter was written by Dr. Yasin Rashid to the

Chief Justice of Pakistan on December 14, 2024. A second letter was sent on May 2, 2025, titled "Justice Delayed Is Justice Denied", in which she stated that cases were not being taken up effectively due to political interference. She also pointed out that her election petition had been pending for a long period.

A third letter was submitted on September 9, 2025, by Dr. Yasin Rashid, along with three other leaders, through their counsel Rana Madassar Umar, to the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, raising concerns over what they described as "grave miscarriage and mala fide political victimisation through abuse of anti-terrorism proceedings".

According to Panjutha, the latest letter has now been submitted by Dr. Yasin Rashid, Senator Ijaz Ahmed Chaudhry, Omer Sarfaraz Cheema and Mian Mehmodur Rashid to the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, seeking early fixation of their appeals, particularly those related to party workers. Many PTI leaders were booked under various charges after the violent protests that erupted on May 9, 2023, following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan from the premises of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in a corruption case.

provided. During the hearing earlier today, Judge Majoka expressed displeasure over why the accused had not yet been arrested. He directed the NCCIA officials to obtain a search warrant for the accused's residence from a magistrate and ordered them to present Mazari and Chhattha in court by 11 am. When the hearing resumed, National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) officials, police officers, and special prosecutors appeared before the court. The court was informed that the arrest had not yet been made. NCCIA officials and police sought further time to submit a report regarding the arrest. Judge Majoka then adjourned the hearing till 2 pm, warning that "whoever's report is unsatisfactory, action will be taken against them".

On Saturday, the court reissued non-bailable arrest warrants against Mazari and Chhattha for their repeated absences from trial proceedings. In the certified copies of court orders dated January 17, Judge Majoka noted that earlier warrants could not be executed despite repeated attempts by law enforcement and the NCCIA.

## Bushra Bibi's daughter with draws plea seeking meetings with her incarcerated mother

**NEWS DESK:** Mubashra Khawar Maneka, the daughter of Bushra Bibi, withdrew her plea filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC) seeking meetings with her incarcerated mother.

Maneka had filed the plea on January 16, seeking meetings with her mother, who is the wife of jailed PTI founder Imran Khan.

The court registrar's office had, however, objected to the maintainability of the plea, asking Maneka to approach the LHC's Rawalpindi bench instead.

During Maneka's hearing, Justice Farooq Haider sustained the registrar office's objection pertaining to territorial jurisdiction, observing that the plea was not maintainable before the LHC's principal seat.

Maneka's counsel then withdrew the petition, following which Justice Haider disposed of the plea.

The petition, filed through Lahore High Court Bar Association President Malik Asif Nissosha, listed the inspector general of prisons, the superintendent of Adiala jail, Rawalpindi, and others as respondents.

It said the Adiala jail administration had barred Maneka from meeting her imprisoned mother without providing any written reason to the petitioner. Despite Maneka being a close relative of Bushra Bibi and the designated day for meetings, permission had not been granted to the petitioner to visit her jailed mother, the petition said.

The country is ailing like a cancer patient. "Let's comply with the social contract with the people. Injustice breeds disharmony among people. We want the formation of a new Pakistan, where there is no cruelty," he said.

He also said, "We

## Death toll in Gul Plaza blaze rises to 26 as rescue work continues

**NEWS DESK:** The death toll from the blaze in Karachi's Gul Plaza shopping centre rose to 26 on Monday as search operations resumed after the completion of cooling measures.

A statement from Rescue 1122 spokesperson Hassan Ul Haseeb Khan said that the toll had risen to 26 after the discovery of two more bodies with recovery operations underway since the morning. The toll includes a firefighter while dozens still remain missing.

Smoke was still seen rising from the third floor, where a fresh fire had broken out earlier in the day before being brought under control.

Authorities said the second and third floors of the shopping centre suffered severe damage, with the entire front elevation collapsing.

The main search effort remains focused on the basement and ground floor, but access to these areas is still blocked by heavy debris, making rescue work extremely difficult. The operation will later be extended to the second and third floors of the fire-ravaged building.

Sadiq Tunio, in charge of the Karachi Water Board's Hydrant Cell, said about 1.4 million gallons of water have so far been used to extinguish the fire. He said the water was supplied from seven different hydrants across Karachi.

Many PTI leaders were booked under various charges after the violent protests that erupted on May 9, 2023, following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan from the premises of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in a corruption case.

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There is a serious risk of collapse, so firefighting has been stopped and only debris removal is underway," he said.

Firefighters recovered body parts of five more people, including a child, from the affected building since Sunday night. Rescue officials said the death toll has risen to at least 19, while around 54 to 59 people are still unaccounted for.

Police and rescue teams are using mobile phone data to trace missing persons and have contacted families to collect details. DIG South Asad Raza said police had obtained mobile numbers of 59 missing people and traced the locations of at least 26 near Gul Plaza. "Further scrutiny is underway," he said, adding that a police helpline had been set up on the orders of the Sindh government.

Fire rescue officials said dozens of injured people were taken to hospitals after suffering from smoke inhalation or burns.

Firefighters brought the massive blaze at the multi-storey shopping centre on MA Jinnah Road under control after about 36 hours. However, officials warned that the structure is now extremely unstable and could collapse at any time.

The fire broke out late Saturday night and continued through Sunday, causing parts of the building to cave in. Fire officials said the massive fire has been extinguished and cooling operations are underway, though flames were earlier seen on the ground and second floors at the rear of the building. Chief Fire Officer Humayun Ahmed told the media by phone that the central fire had been put out. "The structure is badly damaged and unsafe," he said.

lised?" Afridi said decisions taken behind closed doors and imposed on Tirah would not yield results.

"Decisions are being made without taking the provincial government into confidence. Had we been consulted, the nation would have been taken into confidence and work would have been done through consensus," he said, alleging that the operation was launched through force, coercion and hoodliganism.

During the jirga, elders discussed the law and order situation in Khyber district and the difficulties faced by displaced families. They presented suggestions for restoring peace and ensuring the dignified resettlement of Tirah affectees. The chief minister directed officials to provide all possible facilities to the displaced families.

The senator also mentioned Form 47—an allusion to the alleged rigging in the 2024 general elections—saying that "some people had been given a fake mandate".

He further lamented the "weakening of the three pillars of the country". While he did not specify the "three pillars", this ostensibly was a reference to the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

Abbas said February 8 was a very important day, "when we will show the government the power of the people".

He also highlighted the importance of Pakistan's location and economy, if the "heart of Asia".

## K-PCM vows support for Tirah displaced, questions military operations

**NEWS DESK:** Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Monday vowed that the provincial government would not abandon families displaced from Tirah due to military operations, saying tribal people had made immense sacrifices for the country.

Addressing a jirga of elders and notables from Khyber district in Peshawar, Afridi said there was an organised mindset that did not want Pashtuns, particularly tribal communities, to become part of the national mainstream. "The mindset that has been formed against us for 75 years does not let us move forward," he said. The chief minister said that soon after his election, what he described as misleading and negative propaganda was launched against him. Calling such actions regrettable against an elected chief

minister, Afridi said public support had helped him defeat "every negative narrative".

"I have promised my people to give them the pen instead of the gun," he said. "We will stand in the front line for the defence of the country and will not hesitate to make any sacrifice. When my nation is in a difficult time, I stand with them like a rock."

Afridi credited incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder Imran Khan with creating political awareness among the people, saying he had helped the public distinguish between truth and hypocrisy. He added that the entire nation was united to support those displaced from Tirah.

Read: Tirah operation driven by politics: Afridi

The chief minister said there was consensus among political parties and schools of thought in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa that the operations were not a solution. "We want the elimination of terrorism. We are peace-loving people and want the restoration of peace," he said. "After 22 major and 14,000 small operations, what guarantee is there now that peace can be established?"

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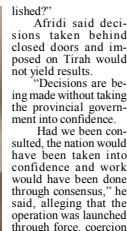
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## Schools reopen after winter break as new timings take effect

LAHORE (INP): All public and private schools across Punjab have reopened today, marking the resumption of academic activities after the winter holidays.

The winter vacation

in Punjab schools had commenced on 20 December, during which students were given a total of 30 days off. The provincial education authorities have rejected reports suggesting any

further extension in the holidays.

Provincial Minister for Education Rana Sikandar Hayat confirmed that all schools have reopened from 19 January.

He said the decision was taken after reviewing weather conditions and temperature trends, following consultations with the Environment Department and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority.

A notification has also been issued announcing revised school timings for government schools across Punjab, which will remain in force from 19 January to 15 April 2020.

Under the new schedule, single-shift schools will operate from Monday to Thursday between 10:00 am and 2:15 pm, while on Fridays classes will be held from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm. In double-shift schools, the morning shift will run from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, while the afternoon shift will operate from 2:15 pm to 4:45 pm. Teachers

have been directed to utilise Monday to Thursday for continuous professional development and academic preparation, while attendance on Saturdays has also been made mandatory.



ISLAMABAD: to Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani presenting souvenir to Mubashir Hassan Executive Director General PIO.

### CM Murad announces Rs10m compensation for each victim's family

KARACHI (INP): Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has announced Rs10 million compensation for each of the families of Gul Plaza fire victims and rehabilitation of all the shopkeepers.

Chairing a special meeting regarding Gul Plaza fire incident in Karachi on Monday, CM Murad Ali Shah said that the Gul Plaza building will now be rebuilt. The chief minister said he wanted to take steps for the rehabilitation of all 1,200 affected because of all they became unemployed overnight.

The operation to remove the debris should be started immediately, he ordered. Sindh Chief Minister formed a committee for the victims of Gul Plaza.

During the meeting Sindh CM was briefed by Karachi Commissioner Hassan Naqvi on the fire tragedy. Meeting was informed that 15 bodies have been retrieved

### Nine children dies of suspected pneumonia

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): At least nine children have died and 11 others remain in critical condition due to a mysterious illness in a local settlement of Muzaffargarh over the past month, prompting immediate intervention by the district administration.

According to details, the deaths occurred in Basti Pull Pir As'hab, near Pir Jahaniyan in Mouza Dimpur.

The deceased children aged between one-and-a-half and six years, reportedly developed swelling on the face and high fever before succumbing within one to two days.

The victims included Dilshan (6), Saghair (4), Khan (5), Zaman (6), Naqvi (4), Sajid (4), Saqlain (2) and one-and-a-half-year-old Ahsan.

Three of the deaths were reported during the last three days, raising serious concerns among residents.

Upon receiving information from local journalists,

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Muzaffargarh Usman Tahir Jaffer took immediate notice and directed health authorities to respond promptly.

Following his orders, health department teams led by Deputy District Health Officer Dr Asad, along with staff from DHO Hospital Muzaffargarh, reached the affected area.

The teams compiled medical records of the deceased children and examined other affected minors.

Eleven critically ill children were shifted to DHO Hospital Muzaffargarh, while others are being provided treatment on-site.

Health department sources stated that preliminary findings indicate a viral form of pneumonia as the cause of most deaths, adding that the remaining sick children have also been diagnosed with pneumonia.

### KPCM assures support, dignified resettlement for displaced Tahir families

PESHAWAR (INP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi on Monday assured that the provincial government will not abandon families displaced from Tahir and will ensure their dignified relocation and provision of all basic facilities.

He was addressing an important jirga of elders and notables from Khyber district wherein the law and order situation in the district and the problems faced by families displaced from Tahir were discussed in detail. The jirga reviewed security chal-

lenges and humanitarian concerns arising from displacement.

Addressing the participants, the CM said the KP government stands firmly with the affected families and will take all necessary steps to facilitate their honorable resettlement.

He stated that the tribal people have made countless sacrifices for the country, leaving behind their homes and livelihoods in the national interest.

Sohail Afridi reiterated his commitment to peaceful development, saying he would give the youth pens instead of guns and would stand on the front line for the country's defense without hesitation or sacrifice.

The CM emphasized that he stands firmly with his people in difficult times and called for national unity to support families displaced from Tahir.

He said collective efforts were essential to address their hardships and ensure lasting peace and stability in Khyber district.

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## Commissioner Dera reviews administrative, revenue matters

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (INP): Commissioner Dawood Khan has chaired a high-level meeting to review key administrative and financial affairs of the district in order to strengthen governance and improve public service delivery.

The session examined progress and challenges related to revenue recovery, pending revenue court cases, land record management, and public complaint mechanisms.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan Abdul Nasir Khan, Additional Deputy Commissioner Adnan

Jamil, Assistant Commissioner (Political and Development), Assistant Commissioners, and officers from departments concerned.

During the meeting, Commissioner Dawood Khan stressed the importance of timely and transparent recovery of government dues, noting that enhanced revenue performance remains a top priority of the government. He warned that negligence in this regard would not be tolerated. He further directed officials to ensure swift and merit-based disposal of cases pending in revenue courts, underlining that prompt justice

is a fundamental obligation of the district administration.

The commissioner also reviewed the progress of land record computerization and instructed officials to accelerate the process to ensure greater transparency and ease of access for citizens seeking land-related services.

Land acquisition cases were discussed in detail, with directions to resolve issues faced by affected individuals at the earliest, strictly in accordance with legal requirements.

While reviewing complaints lodged through the Citizen Portal, Commissioner Dawood Khan em-

phasized that effective and timely redressal of public grievances is a key indicator of administrative performance and plays a vital role in building public confidence. He also highlighted the need to further improve task management and service delivery mechanisms.

The commissioner directed all departments to strengthen inter-departmental coordination and enhance efficiency to ensure better public services. Concluding the meeting, he reiterated his resolve to make governance in Dera Ismail Khan Division more efficient, transparent, and citizen-centric.

### Major structural reforms announced as New Era dawns upon HBL PSL

LAHORE (INP): The HBL Pakistan Super League has announced a series of landmark developments ahead of its 11th edition, reinforcing the league's continued growth, competitiveness, and commitment to innovation.

In a historic move after a decade of success, the HBL Pakistan Super League (HBL PSL) will transition to a Player Auction Model, replacing the traditional Player Draft system.

This strategic shift is aimed at enhancing competitive balance, increasing transparency, and providing players' greater earning opportunities.

Each franchise may retain a maximum of four players, limited to one player per category. Previously, every franchise was allowed to retain 8 players from their squad, including a Mentor, a Brand Ambassador and a Right to Match Option

### 11 wanted dacoits surrender with weapons in Rajanpur

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Police achieved a major success against Katcha criminals as Rajanpur Police conducted a far-gated operation in Kacha Umran, Sukhani and Kacha Karachi areas, destroying dacoits' hideouts and bunkers and forcing 11 highly dangerous members of the most-wanted Umran gang to surrender voluntarily, otherwise they would face strict police action.

The DPO warned other criminal elements operating in the Katcha areas to surrender voluntarily, otherwise they would face strict police action.

He added that an exchange of fire between police and criminals was still ongoing in some areas.

Inspector General of Police Punjab Dr Usman Anwar commended the professional performance of Rajanpur Police for compelling the dangerous dacoits to surrender and awarded them commendation. He said that operations against criminal elements would continue indiscriminately across the province under the zero-tolerance policy.

which resulted in the complete destruction of several hideouts and fortified bunkers of the dacoits.

The sustained pressure mounted by police compelled the armed criminals to lay down their arms.

District Police Officer (DPO) Rajanpur Muhammad Imran said that the surrendered



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan addressing on 4th All Pakistan Women Chamber Presidents International Conference. Secretary General UBG Zafar Bakhtawari and President Islamabad Women Chamber Samina Fazil also present.

### Justices Azam Khan, Asif, Minhas take oath as regular IHC judges

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, Justice Kadim Hussain Soomro, session judges, the advocate general, high court officers, bar representatives and a large number of lawyers were present on the occasion, reflecting the significance of the appointments within the judicial community.

The oath was administered by the Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court, Justice Sardar Sarfraz Dogar, during a ceremony attended by members of the judiciary, the legal fraternity and senior government officials.

Commission of Pakistan (CJP) on January 12. The commission, chaired by Chief Justice Yahya Afridi, met at the Supreme Court's conference room to finalise judicial appointments and to examine rules introduced under the 27th Constitutional Amendment.

The session, scheduled for the afternoon, undertook a detailed review of the service records and performance of the members of the judiciary of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) before

unanimously confirming their names for permanent appointment.

On the same day, the commission convened two separate meetings in which it also confirmed the appointment of a judge of the Balochistan High Court (BHC).

In another sitting, members of the commission continued their review of procedural rules framed under the constitutional amendment to strengthen transparency and consistency in judicial nominations.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways' Largest Digitization Initiative: Key Meeting on Railway Advanced Infrastructure Network (RAIN) Project Chaired by Federal Minister Muhammad Hanif Abbasi.





## Translating military success into lasting economic resurgence

**NEWS DESK:** Over the past few weeks, the dominant conversation across Pakistan, and increasingly across the region, has revolved around the country's potential \$13-15 billion defence export and military partnerships pipeline. These discussions are no longer confined to rumours; they are being actively debated and evaluated by both domestic and international media.

The reported deals go far beyond the sale of flagship platforms such as the JF-17 fighter aircraft.

They encompass comprehensive defence partnerships, including training, maintenance, upgrades, logistics, and long-term military support, effectively positioning Pakistan as a full-spectrum defence solutions provider rather than a mere arms exporter.

This raises a fundamental question: has Pakistan's military success in May 2025 created the conditions for a long-term economic resurgence, or will it remain a tactical achievement without strategic economic payoff?

Defence exports: opportunity of a generation. Pakistan's reported defence engagements with Saudi Arabia, potentially expanding into a full-spectrum defence partnership involving Turkey and



Qatar, could alone eclipse headline figures attributed to other contracts.

Defence partnerships of this nature are rarely capped by nominal deal values; nations spend whatever is required to secure strategic capability, reliability, and deterrence.

Similarly, the reported \$4 billion comprehensive defence package with the Libyan National Army, a \$1.3 billion deal with Sudan, and ongoing negotiations with Iraq, Indonesia,

Bangladesh, Qatar, Egypt and others could cumulatively push Pakistan's defence partnerships into the \$20-25 billion range over the medium term (remember the SIFC's claim of \$100 billion?).

If executed well, this

would position Pakistan as a preferred defence supplier for several developing and Muslim-majority nations. This is undeniably positive news, but only if Pakistan treats it as a strategic inflection point, not a short-term

windfall. Rethinking the nation-building blueprint First, Pakistan must deepen coordination with China to further scale defence manufacturing capacity, ensure technology transfer, and strengthen backward integration. Military self-

reliance is not achieved merely by exporting platforms; it requires indigenous production ecosystems, resilient supply chains, and continuous innovation to protect both national security and export credibility.

contracts should act as anchors for broader economic partnerships. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Nigeria should not only be defence buyers but long-term trade, investment, and industrial partners, creating a regional economic corridor (Pakistan Military & Economic Allies (PEMAs)).

A regional economic corridor, built around energy, logistics, manufacturing, food security, and technology, would lock in geopolitical goodwill for decades rather than years.

Third, proceeds from defence exports must be used with extreme fiscal discipline. The priority should be to build a genuine war-chest by expanding foreign exchange reserves from the targeted \$17.8 billion by June 2026 to \$50 billion by June 2030, keeping current account balanced, reducing debt-to-GDP ratio by 1-2% every year, expanding tax-to-GDP ratio by 1% through widening the tax net and capturing the grey market, demonetisation of Rs5,000 notes, digitalisation of transactions, ending corruption and bribery among institutions, documenting all gold transactions, thereby aligning economic resilience with military strength.

### Backdated CPP gas levy unlawful, rules SHC

**NEWS DESK:** The Sindh High Court has ruled that the collection of a levy imposed on gas supply to industrial captive power plants (CPPs) with retrospective effect was ultra vires (beyond legal authority) the relevant law.

The court also observed that the levy on CPPs could not take effect immediately upon the promulgation of the law, as the ordinance itself never determined the rate of the levy.

A two-judge bench comprising Justice Adnan Iqbal Chaudhry and Justice Muhammad Jaffer Raza further noted that the levy was to be calculated in accordance with the mechanism envisioned under Section 4 of the Off-Grid Power Plants Levy Act, 2025, and could only become operative after the rate had been calculated and duly notified.

The bench made these observations while disposing of 30 identical petitions filed by various industrial units challenging bills issued by Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) for the recovery of the levy on CPPs for periods

prior to the notification of the applicable rate. Court declares levy unenforceable without notified rate.

The petitioners said they were consumers of natural gas and operating CPPs as defined under the Off-Grid (Captive Power Plants) Levy Ordinance, 2025, which was later repealed in July last year after the enactment of the Off-Grid Captive Power Plants Levy Act.

They argued that the levy rate was first notified by the authorities under Section 3 of the Act through a notification issued on March 7, 2025, followed by another notification on July 23 last year.

However, the bills issued to them in May, and in some cases August, sought to recover the levy for February and March under the rate notified in these notifications.

In its judgement, the bench noted that statutory notifications could not operate retrospectively in the absence of express authorisation by the legislature, except where they were beneficial or procedural in nature.

It observed that the notifications in question did not provide for retrospective application and that Sections 3 and 4 of the law did not envisage the levy being imposed retrospectively.

The court further noted that uncertainty regarding the retrospective application of the levy was evident within the Ministry of Energy itself.

It referred to a letter issued on April 11 last year directing agents.

Including SSGC, to recover the levy for February and March, which was withdrawn through another letter issued the same day.

Subsequently, through a letter dated April 18, 2025, the agents were informed that legal opinion had been sought from the law and justice division and the attorney general's office on the issue of retrospective application.

In May, the agents were then directed to collect the levy on the notified rate, the judgement added.

### Cotton supply at ginning factories indicates stagnant production

**NEWS DESK:** The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has released provisional national cotton production figures, showing that by Jan 15, 2026, a total of 5.49m bales arrived at ginning factories across the country.

This is only 7,000 bales higher than the output recorded during the same period last year, indicating near stagnation in cotton production.

According to the PCGA report, 2.58m bales reached ginning factories in Punjab, while 2.91m bales arrived in Sindh. Compared to the same period last year, cotton arrivals in Punjab declined by 4pc whereas Sindh recorded a 4pc increase.

The data reveals that textile mills purchased 4.84m bales from ginning factories while exporters bought 176,000 bales. Around 479,000 bales are still available for sale with the ginning factories.

At present, only 127 ginning factories are operational. Of them 91 are in Punjab while 36 are in Sindh. Ginners call for ban



on sugarcane cultivation in cotton zones; say the challenge has shifted from production to consumption.

The PCGA officials noted that during the past two weeks alone, 46 ginning factories in Sindh and 50 in Punjab became non-operational—far more than market expectations.

The association also reported a sharp upward trend in cotton prices over the past week, with prices rising

by Rs300 per maund to reach around Rs16,500 per maund. The increase has been attributed to the extremely limited availability of quality cotton in the domestic market and rising international prices of cotton yarn and fabric.

Cotton Ginners Forum Chairman Ihsanul Haq says that despite Pakistan's cotton production remaining nearly 50pc below annual targets for several years, the real challenge has

now shifted from production to consumption. He attributes this to the excessive cultivation of sugarcane in traditional cotton zones, which has not only reduced cotton acreage but also caused environmental pollution that had adversely affected cotton quality.

As a result, he says, many textile mills are forced to import high-quality cotton to fulfill orders, putting severe pressure on the country's foreign ex-

change reserves.

He urges federal and provincial governments to strictly enforce crop zoning laws instead of spending billions of rupees on cotton revival projects. He calls for a complete ban on sugarcane cultivation and the establishment of new sugar mills in cotton zones, which can help restore national cotton production to around 15m bales.

Haq warns that record decline in exports, soaring production costs for exporters and highly lenient import policies have pushed the cotton sector to the brink.

More than 150 textile units have shut down completely, many others are operating partially, and hundreds of ginning factories have become inactive, placing the entire cotton industry 'on the verge of collapse'. He cautions that if 'oxygen' is not immediately provided to the cotton sector, the national economy itself can slip into 'coma'. He points out that Pakistan's cotton industry faces some of the highest electricity.

### Struggle for self-reliance

**NEWS DESK:** Among structural reforms, a key issue is unsustainable imports that make it imperative to conserve and earn foreign exchange to minimise external vulnerabilities.

That calls for maximising use of local human and natural resources to boost productivity, competitiveness and diversification of products and markets and cater to the changing overseas demand and domestic consumption.

In a transforming world, it may be noted here that human capital plays a primary role in the growth of the economy. For example, remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis for their families help the middle class and lower-income groups improve their quality of life. When capital crosses the national frontier, it loses its links with national social progress.

While acknowledging that some multinational companies have left Pakistan due to 'high taxes and energy costs', Finance Minister Mohammad Aurangzeb urged them on Jan 14 at a Policy Dialogue to re-



verse business models in line with a changing world economy.

It may be worth noting here that some multinationals in Pakistan have started using local raw materials, replacing costly imported inputs, to cut production costs.

Sustained investment in human development is the only guarantee of a prosperous and stable future for the country.

Balochistan's Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, who is managing the least developed fed-

erating unit — capital starved and hit by insurgency — has recently emphasised that sustained investment in human development was the only guarantee of a prosperous and stable future of the province.

As households rise above the poverty line, the increased consumption will be directed primarily at domestically produced goods — meat, milk, poultry, fruit, and vegetables — rather than imports, says former Sindh governor Dr Ishaq Hussain. He estimates that nearly \$10bn

could be saved annually by substituting imports of food and cotton.

Water and Power Development Authority says its under-construction projects, on their completion, will add 9.7 million acre-feet to water storage and double the installed power generation capacity from 9,500 MW to about 20,000 MW. Though the government has accorded top priority to these projects, their timely completion cannot be assumed because of indefinite delays in their execution in the past.

### Pakistan, Philippines can boost pharma trade to \$1b



**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan and the Philippines have the potential to expand bilateral trade in the pharmaceutical and biological products sector to \$1 billion, with both countries needing to diversify commerce by focusing on modern medicines, vaccines and medical tools, said Pakistani business tycoon in the Philippines Abdul Razzaq Siddiq.

Talking to the media, Siddiq, who is President of Second World Traders Inc, said pharmaceutical and biological products were among the most promising sectors for trade diversification, adding that cooperation in those areas would significantly strengthen economic and healthcare ties between the two countries. He said a

Philippines-based pharmaceutical firm had opened a subsidiary office in Islamabad to boost trade and healthcare collaboration. Siddiq termed the move a sign of growing investor confidence and highlighted opportunities for supply-chain collaboration with Dow Institute of Life Sciences as well as anti-cancer medicines.

He added that future projects included the production of antibodies serum in collaboration with Dow Institute of Life Sciences as well as anti-cancer medicines.

He revealed that the company plans to initially import 10 million doses of Tetanus Toxoid vaccine to address shortages in Pakistan, followed by gradual localisation of production.



## New Zealand register first ODI series win in India

**NEWS DESK:** New Zealand overcame a valiant 124 by Virat Kohli to down India by 41 runs and seal their first-ever ODI series victory on Indian soil on Sunday.

Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips guided New Zealand to 337-8 with a fourth-wicket stand of 219 after the tourists slipped to 5-2 and 58-3 in India.

Mitchell made 137 and Phillips hit 106 off 88 balls.

The Black Caps then bowled out India for 296 in 46 overs despite Kohli's 54th ODI century and clinched the three-match series 2-1.

New Zealand had lost all seven of their previous ODI series in India, a run dating back to 1988.

The Black Caps registered their first ever Test series win in India with a 3-0 sweep in October 2024, and added another landmark success in this series despite being without sev-



eral key players including Kane Williamson, Mitchell Santner, Tom Latham, Rachin Ravindra and Jacob Duffy.

"We're the sum of all the parts and we really try to work together as a group - that's part of the Kiwi way," captain

Michael Bracewell said. "We're just a small country from the bottom of the world and we try to work together to take on some of the bigger countries in the world."

He added: "We really rally around there as a group and when things come like that, it's

pretty special."

India - the world's most populated nation with 1.4 billion people - are the top-ranked ODI side ahead of New Zealand.

The in-form Kohli, who plays just the 50-over format after retiring from Test and T20 inter-

national cricket, threatened to pull off a remarkable chase in a 99-run seventh-wicket partnership with Harshit Rana, who made 52.

New Zealand left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox returned figures of 2-42 from his 10 overs after Bracewell left the field with a calf injury and did not return.

Mitchell led the team in Bracewell's absence, which also left New Zealand a bowler short. Zak Foulkes and fellow seamer Kristian Clarke took three wickets each.

India slumped to 71-4 before Kohli hit back in an 88-run stand with Nitish Kumar Reddy, who made 53, and then with Rana.

"The way Virat is batting, that's definitely a plus always," said India captain Shubman Gill. "The way Harshit has batted in the series, batting at number eight, it's not easy."

## Australia rest Cummins, Hazlewood, Maxwell for Pakistan T20 series

**NEWS DESK:** Australia will rest five top players, including Pat Cummins and Glenn Maxwell, for a three-match Twenty20 series in Pakistan ahead of the World Cup, selectors said on Monday.

Josh Hazlewood, Tim David and Nathan Ellis will also skip the series starting later this month.

Their absence opened the door to fringe players Sean Abbott, Mahli Beardman, Ben Dwarshuis, Jack Edwards, Mitch Owen, Josh Philippe and Matt Renshaw, who come into the 17-man squad.

Chief selector George Bailey said the five were either returning from injury or having their loads managed ahead of the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka

which begin on February 7. The series is a great opportunity for those on the brink of selection and some young players we rate highly for valuable experience," he added.

"Some are already experienced international players, along with Mahli Beardman who has been with the group a number of times, and Jack Edwards who joined for the last one-day match against India in Sydney last year."

Australia will play Pakistan in Lahore on January 29, 31 and Feb 1, before travelling to Sri Lanka where they are scheduled to open their World Cup campaign against Ireland in Colombo on Feb 11.



## Carrick magic dents Man City Premier League bid

**NEWS DESK:** Michael Carrick made a flying start to life as Manchester United boss against Manchester City on Saturday but Premier League leaders Arsenal missed a chance to pull nine points clear.

Sorry Tottenham slipped to defeat against relegation-threatened West Ham, further increasing the pressure on beleaguered boss Thomas Frank, while Liverpool were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly Burnley.

Carrick's first game of his second temporary spell in charge of the Red Devils could barely have gone better in a dominant 2-0 win at Old Trafford.

The former United

midfielder was appointed as head coach until the end of the campaign following the sacking of Ruben Amorim earlier this month.

The 44-year-old, who was also briefly United's caretaker boss in 2021, said ahead of his first game that there was still "magic" at United, and his team put on a memorable show.

Second-half goals from Bryan Mbeumo and Patrick Dorgu capped an energetic and incisive display by United, who could have won by a far more comfortable margin.

"Great start. No getting away from that," said Carrick. "The boys were fantastic."

"Consistency is the

key to any success," he added. "If you could find that, then you're onto a winner."

Guardiola admitted that his team - winless in four league games this year - were outplayed by Carrick's inspired United.

"The better team won," said the City boss. "We weren't at the level required to win this game."

Arsenal are seven points clear at the top despite being held to a 0-0 draw for the second league game in a row at Nottingham Forest.

A frustrated Arteta, chasing a first Premier League title for the Gunners since 2004, felt that his side should have been awarded a penalty.

believing Ola Aina had handled the ball.

"We created four big, big, big chances and a clear penalty, but we weren't able to win the game," said the Spaniard.

"I've just seen the replays. I think it's a clear intention to clear the ball inside and it's a clear penalty so I don't understand why it's not been given."

Third-placed Aston Villa can close to within four points of Arsenal if they beat Everton on Sunday.

The mood at Tottenham darkened further after Spurs slipped to a 2-1 defeat against West Ham, who had not won a Premier League match since early November.

Spurs fans turned on Frank and chanted "you're getting sacked in the morning" after Callum Wilson struck a stoppage-time winner.

Spurs, 14th in the table, have won just two home league games this season, leaving Frank, in his first campaign in charge, under enormous pressure.

"It's tough to take, it hurts a lot," the Spurs boss told Sky Sports. "The boys put everything in, and that's a sign of a squad that is fighting, doing everything they can to try and win."

Nuno Espirito Santo's West Ham finished the day five points behind Forest, who are just above the relegation zone.



## Juventus title hopes fade in Serie A

**NEWS DESK:** Juventus' Serie A title ambitions are all but over after they suffered a 1-0 defeat at Cagliari on Saturday, in a game where the visitors were unable to make their domination of possession count.

Juventus sit fifth in the standings on 39 points, 10 behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat Udinese 1-0 on Saturday. Cagliari are 15th on 22 points, the win taking them eight points away from the relegation zone.

Cagliari failed to register a shot attempt in the opening half but scored a shock winner when Luca Mazzitelli scored with 25 minutes remaining to end Juve's six-match unbeaten league run.

"You tip your hat to your opponents, who brought home a victory that perhaps they didn't deserve, but snuffed out the opportunity and took it," Juventus manager Luciano Spalletti told Sky Sport.



"Maybe next time we can learn from that and snuff out our chance too. For certain, losing isn't nice, but we wouldn't have been happy with a draw either."

The visitors dominated possession early on without creating any real danger until Cagliari keeper Elia Caprile saved Fabio

Miretti's strike from just inside the area and the game remained goalless after a dour first half.

Juve had chances before Gianluca Gaetano floated a free kick into the area and Mazzitelli met the ball first time to send a side-footed volley on the turn past Perin.

"A beautiful night that we'll carry with us," Mazzitelli told Sky. "We faced one of the strongest teams, but we gave more than we had. It was a victory that came with plenty of suffering."

Caprile palmed away a scorching effort from Yildiz as Juventus desperately searched for an equaliser and Yildiz sent

a deflected shot off the post late on.

Juventus, who fell to their second loss in 12 league games since Spalletti took charge at the end of October, are now 12th in the table.

Caprile palmed away a scorching effort from Yildiz as Juventus desperately searched for an equaliser and Yildiz sent

## No Venus fairytale as Alcaraz, Sabalenka win Melbourne openers

**NEWS DESK:** Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka launched their Australian Open title bids with straight-sets wins but there was no fairytale for 45-year-old Venus Williams on Sunday.

In a hot Melbourne day in which a ball girl fainted, last year's men's beaten finalist Alexander Zverev dropped a set before easing into the second round.

World number one Alcaraz joined him, the Spaniard beating 81st-ranked home player Adam Walton 6-3, 7-6(7/2), 6-2, on Rod Laver Arena.

Alcaraz, who is desperate to win the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam of all four majors, plays Germany's Yannick Hanfmann next.

"I think this kind of level and the difficulties in the first round is pretty good for me," said Alcaraz, who was pushed all the way in the second set.

"But overall I just happy. I'm pleased about the level that I played today," added Alcaraz, who was playing his first competitive match for nine weeks.

"I just stayed at home," the 22-year-old said of his long break.

"I used to practise the whole morning [and] I took almost every afternoon off to do whatever I wanted - stay with family or friends, play board games, and chilling at home. It's a better way to recharge the batteries, staying at

home with the people you love."

Alcaraz has won the US Open, Wimbledon and French Open, but Melbourne is the one Grand Slam missing from his impressive resume.

The furthest he has gone at the opening major of the year is the quarter-finals and he has made it clear that defeating rival Jannik Sinner as champion is his main aim for 2026.

If he does so, the 22-year-old would surpass compatriot Rafael Nadal to become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam.

Earlier, in steamy conditions approaching highs of 30 degrees centigrade, Zverev threatened to implode in losing the first set to Canada's Gabriel Diallo.

But the 28-year-old German recovered to win 6(1/7), 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 and next meets Australian Alexei Popyrin or Alexandre Muller of France.

Asked how he reset from his first-set wobble, the third seed said: "I was thinking it can't get worse than that."

British qualifier Arthur Fery scored the first big upset by taking down 20th seed Flavio Cobolli of Italy, 7-6(7/1), 6-4, 6-1.

Novak Djokovic, who is chasing a record 25th major title, begins his title assault on Monday, as does three-time runner-up Daniil Medvedev.

Organisers said that a record 100,000 people came through the gates, although there were complaints about long queues in the heat.

Underlining how fierce it was on court, a ball girl collapsed during the match between Zeynep Sonmez and Ekaterina Alexan-drova,

with both players rushing to help her.

But the heat didn't bother the world no 1 as Sabalenka began her bid for a third Australian Open title in four years.

The Belarusian had a patchy start before coming good in the second set. Sabalenka, stunned by Madison Keys in the 2025 final, ultimately had too much power, guile and quality for French wildcard Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajanah.

But the top seed took time to find her touch, making a series of unforced errors before taming the spirited 20-year-old 6-4, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena.

"It's the first match, right? You're always kind of trying to figure out where you are," said the women's top seed. "I didn't really know much about her. I was just struggling to find the rhythm of her shots."



## England, Afghanistan register solid wins in U-19 World Cup

**NEWS DESK:** England and Afghanistan produced solid all-round displays as they bagged big wins against Zimbabwe and West Indies respectively in the U-19 World Cup on Sunday.

Rain forced a share of the spoils between New Zealand and USA but not before Nitesh Sudini lit up the stage with a terrific hundred for USA.

Zimbabwe struggled to get going after being put in to bat by England as both the openers, Nathaniel Hlabangana and Kupakwashe Muradzi, departed just eight runs between them.

Kian Bignaut and Dhruv Patel steadied the ship for Zimbabwe with a 45-run stand. The partnership was followed by the Zimbabwe bowlers.

Patel for another 32 runs before the latter was dismissed. Zimbabwe's partnership was broken by the Zimbabwe bowlers.

Captain Simbarashe Mudzengerere then took the charge and carried his bat through but kept on running out of part-



ners as Zimbabwe just about managed to cross the 200-run mark in their 50 overs, finishing with a score of 208.

Zimbabwe managed to dismiss the English openers, Ben Dawkins and Joseph Moores cheaply but Ben Mayes and captain Thomas Rew took the attack to the Zimbabwe bowlers.

Rew (86) and Mayes (77) both remained unbeaten. England won the game comfortably by eight wickets, chasing down the target in just 28 overs, putting them on

the cusp of qualification for the Super Six stage.

England's final group game is against Scotland on Wednesday while Zimbabwe face Pakistan on Thursday.

Afghanistan opted to bat first after winning the toss and the opening batters, Khalid Ahmadzai and Osman Sadat, justified that decision with a solid 86-run stand. Virel Lawes broke the partnership, making way for a Windies comeback with two more wickets.

Captain Mehboob Taskin then came out to

## High-speed train collision in Spain kills 39, injures dozens

**NEWS DESK:** A high-speed train derailed and was hit by another in southern Spain killing 39 people and injuring more than 120, authorities said Monday, saying the country's worst train crash in over a decade was "extremely strange". It was the deadliest train accident since 2013, when 80 people died after a train veered off a curved section of track outside the northwestern city of Santiago de Compostela.

The crash happened on Sunday evening when a train operated by rail company Iryo travelling from Malaga to Madrid derailed near Adamuz, crossing onto the other track where it crashed into an oncoming train, which also derailed.

The interior ministry said at least 39 people died, raising the toll from 21 given by police late on Sunday.

Another 123 people were injured, including five very seriously and 24 seriously, a ministry spokesperson added.

Transport Minister



Oscar Puente told reporters the disaster took place on a straight part of the track, which was completely renovated.

The first train to de-

rail was "practically new", making the accident "extremely strange", he added.

The death toll is not final, Puente said Monday, indicating it could rise from the current figure.

The death toll has already reached 39 and is not definitive. I want

to express my deepest gratitude for the tremendous work of the rescue teams throughout the night, under very difficult circumstances," he

wrote on X. Rail experts "are very surprised by this accident because it is very strange and very difficult to explain at this

stage," the minister said.

"Hard, tricky work"

Rail operator Iryo said around 300 people were on board its

Malaga-Madrid service.

Renfe, the operator of the second train, has not said how many passengers it was carrying.

Spain has Europe's largest high-speed rail network, with more than

3,000 kilometres (1,800 miles) of dedicated

tracks connecting major cities including Madrid, Barcelona, Seville,

Valencia, and Malaga.

The hundreds of passengers left in the wreckage hampered the

frantic work of emergency services.

"The problem is that the carriages are twisted

so the metal is twisted

and it's very difficult to get people out," he said.

Some of the carriages had tumbled down an embankment of four

metres (13 feet), Sanz said.

"Like a horror movie"

A passenger on the second train, bound for the city of Huelva, who

gave only her first name Montse, told Spanish public television the

train, "with a jolt, came to a complete stop, and everything went dark".

She described being thrown around in the last carriage and seeing

luggage tumble on other passengers.

"The attendant behind me hit her head and was bleeding. There

were children crying," she added. "Luckily, I was in the last car. I feel

like I was given a second chance at life."

Survivor Lucas Meriako, who was travelling on the first train

that derailed, told La Sexta television that

"this looks like a horror movie".

"We have even had to remove a dead person

to be able to reach someone alive. It is hard, tricky work," he added.

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"Like a horror movie"

A passenger on the second train, bound for the city of Huelva, who

## Iraq announces complete withdrawal of US-led forces

**NEWS DESK:** Iraq said on Sunday US-led coalition forces had finished withdrawing from bases within the country's federal territory, which excludes the autonomous region in northern Kurdistan.

"We announce today... the completion of the evacuation of all military bases and leadership headquarters in the official federal areas of Iraq," it said in a statement, adding that the coalition's mission was over.

With the withdrawal, "these sites come under the full control of Iraqi security forces," it said in the statement, adding that they would transition to "the stage of bilateral security relations with the United States".

The vast majority of coalition forces had withdrawn from Iraq bases under a 2024 deal between Baghdad and Washington outlining the end of the mission in Iraq by the end of 2025 and by September 2026 in the Kurdistan region. US and allied troops had been deployed to Iraq and Syria since 2014 to fight the militant Islamic State group, which had seized large swathes of both countries to declare their so-called "caliphate".

The jihadist group was territorially defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria in 2019, but contin-

ues to operate sleeper cells.

The vast majority of coalition troops withdrew from Iraq over previous stages, with only advisers remaining in northern Kurdistan region.

Anti-IS operations The military committee said Iraqi forces were now "fully capable of preventing the reappearance of IS in Iraq and its infiltration across borders".

"Coordination with the international coalition will continue with regards to completely eliminating IS's presence in Syria," it added.

It pointed to "the coalition's role in Iraq offering cross-border logistical support for operations in Syria, through their presence at an airbase in Erbil",

the capital of Iraq's Kurdistan region. In December, two US soldiers and a civilian interpreter were killed in Syria in an attack blamed on IS, sparking fears of a resurgence in the country.

The statement added that anti-IS operations would be coordinated with the coalition through the Ain al-Assad base in Anbar province in western Iraq. IS attacks in Iraq have massively declined in recent years, but the group maintains a presence in the country's mountainous areas.

A UN Security Council report in August said: "In Iraq, the group has focused on rebuilding networks along the Syrian border and restoring capacity in the Badia region."

Washington agreed in December to wind down a US-led coalition fighting the militant Islamic State group in Iraq by September 2025, with US forces departing bases where they had been stationed. However, a small unit of US military advisers and support personnel remained.

Iraq Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said that the agreement originally stipulated a full pullout of US forces from the Ain al-Assad air base in western Iraq by September. But "developments in Syria" since then required maintaining a "small unit" of between 250 and 350 advisers and security personnel at the base.

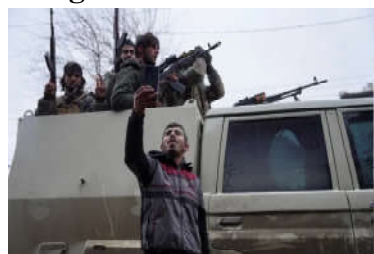


## Fighting ends after Syrian, Kurdish forces agree on ceasefire

**NEWS DESK:** The Syrian president and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced an immediate ceasefire after fierce fighting, which saw the government forces take control of territories held by the Kurdish SDF.

The Syrian army, in its lightning advance towards the key city of Raqqa in the north, captured Tabqa before reaching a ceasefire with the Kurdish forces on Sunday on all fronts. Al Jazeera, quoting the Syrian state media, said that the SDF forces agreed to withdraw to the east of the Euphrates under the agreement.

According to Al Jazeera, the agreement provides for the immediate and complete administrative and military handover of Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates to Damascus. The agreement also allowed the government to assume control of all civilian institutions in the two governorates, and current employees would be reinstated through decrees.



The government promised it would not target the SDF supporters or fighters. The ceasefire granted the Syrian government control over all border crossings as well as oil and gas fields in the region. In addition, all civil institutions in Al-Hasaka Governorate are to be integrated into official Syrian state institutions and administrative structures, while a presidential decree will be issued naming a candidate as governor.

The agreement also stipulated that a list of proposed leaders submitted by the SDF command will be used to fill senior military, security and civilian posts in the central government, while heavy military forces from the city of Ain al-Arab/Kobani will withdraw. Furthermore, it also envisaged a local force affiliate with the Syrian interior ministry besides the creation of a security force drawn from local residents.

The agreement also allowed the integration of the administration in charge of the Islamic State camps into the Syrian state structure.

Syrian army advances Earlier in the day, Reuters reported that the Syrian government troops were entering the outskirts of Raqqa and were advancing deeper into the northeast of the country, the last stronghold of the US-backed autonomous Kurdish-led administration.

## PAF contingent arrives in Saudi Arabia for combat exercise 'Spears of Victory 2026': ISPR

**NEWS DESK:** A contingent of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) arrived in Saudi Arabia to take part in a multinational aerial combat exercise, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a press release on Monday.

The PAF contingent, comprising F-16 Block-52 fighter aircraft alongside dedicated air and ground crew, arrived at King Abdulaziz Air Base, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to participate in the multinational aerial combat exercise "Spears of Victory 2026".

"The exercise is witnessing the participation of fighter jets and combat support elements from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, France, Italy, Greece, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, the United Kingdom and the United

States of America," the ISPR said.

"It offers a robust platform to enhance interoperability, operational synergy, mutual understanding and capacity building among participating air forces, particularly in large force employment, night composite air operations, integrated ISR (Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance), and operations in advanced electronic warfare environments."

Through participation in this multinational, the PAF seeks to enhance interoperability with partner air forces and "validate its operational preparedness in a contested, technology-driven battle space".

The military's media wing elaborated that PAF fighter air-

craft undertook a non-stop flight from their home base in Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, demonstrating the long-range operational reach and expeditionary capabilities of Pakistan Air Force."

"During the conduct of the exercise, PAF pilots flying advanced F-16 Block-52 aircraft equipped with modern avionics and Beyond Visual Range capabilities will be pitched against air crews of participating air forces operating a wide array of sophisticated combat aircraft," it added.

The ISPR further said that the participation of the PAF contingent in the exercise "demonstrates our firm commitment to regional and international military cooperation, but also underscored its 'professional excellence and proven capability to operate effectively in diverse and demanding operational environments alongside leading contemporary air forces'."

In September, Islamabad and Riyadh signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, under which any attack on either nation would be treated as an act of aggression against both.

The two countries have long shared a multifaceted relationship rooted in strategic military cooperation, mutual economic interests, and shared Islamic heritage. These ties have encompassed economic assistance and energy supplies, with Riyadh being a significant source of financial aid and oil for Islamabad.

## Trump no longer feels obliged to 'think purely of peace' after Nobel snub, he tells Norwegian PM



**NEWS DESK:** United States President Donald Trump said he no longer felt an "obligation to think purely of peace" after not receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and repeated his demand for control of Greenland, in a letter to Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre seen by Reuters and Bloomberg on Monday.

A copy of the text of the letter was posted by the foreign affairs and defence correspondent for PBS News, Nick Schifano, on social media platform X, who said he had obtained it from multiple officials. Schifano added that the letter had been forwarded to "multiple European ambassadors in Washington".

"Dear Jonas: Considering your Country

decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped eight Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace," Trump said in the letter. "Although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America."

As Bloomberg pointed out, the Nobel Peace Prize is not decided by the Norwegian government but rather awarded by an independent committee.

"Denmark cannot protect that land from Russia or China, and why do they have a 'right of ownership anyway?' The US president added.

"There are no written documents, it's only that a boat landed there

hundreds of years ago, but we had boats landing there, also."

Trump also called on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) to "do something for the United States" saying, "I have done more for Nato than any other person since its founding".

He added, "The world is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland. Thank you!"

"Regarding the Nobel Peace Prize, I have several times clearly explained to Trump what is well known, namely that it is an independent Nobel Committee, and not the Norwegian government, that awards the prize," Bloomberg quoted Støre as saying in response.

A request for comment sent to the White House was not immediately returned, it added. Trump has insisted he will settle for nothing less than full ownership of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark, threatening tariffs of up to 25 per cent on eight European nations until his purchase of the Danish territory is achieved.

Meanwhile, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado had given her own medal to Trump in recognition of what she called his commitment to the freedom of the Venezuelan people.

However, the Norwegian Nobel Institute has said the prize cannot be transferred, shared or revoked even if the medal is given away.