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First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

# QUETTA VOICE

Rs.10.00 Vol.VII:No:115

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Thursday 22, January, 2026



## Police arrest leaders as govt employees' protest intensifies in Quetta

QUETTA:

Tensions in Quetta escalated on Wednesday as police continued a crackdown on government employees on the second day of protests led by the Balochistan Grand Alliance, resulting in the arrest of several leaders and dozens of employees.

Among those arrested were Grand Alliance head Professor Abdul Quddus Kakar, Dr Muhammad Akram Wardag, Khadim Bugti, Haji Yunus Kakar, Qaim Khan Kakar, Rahmatullah Zehri, and members of the alliance's organising and core committees, along with a large number of government employees.

Clashes broke out at Manan Chowk, where protesters and police faced off in a tense standoff. A significant number of female employees were also present. Sources said government employees gathered at the site strongly resisted the arrests.

Police attempted to disperse the protesters using baton charges and other measures, leaving several people injured. The protest is centred on the non-payment of the Disparity Reduction Allowance, demands for equal pay, and other long-standing grievances.

The Grand Alliance had earlier announced a "jail bharo" movement, a pen-down strike and the closure of government offices across Balochistan. These actions have now intensified, with protesters accusing police of using unnecessary force to suppress what they described as a peaceful demonstration, including against women employees. An eyewitness said, "Hundreds of employees, including women, were peacefully seated at Manan Chowk, but the police suddenly launched an operation."

Videos from the scene showed a highly tense situation during the arrests, as protesters continued chanting slogans. Grand Alliance leaders condemned the crackdown, calling it "a misuse of state power by the government."

## Board of Peace: Why Pakistan's Role Matters for Gaza and Regional Peace

WEBDESK:

As global concern over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to grow, the proposed Board of Peace (BoP) is emerging as a serious international effort to push for a lasting political solution. Backed by several influential countries, including many Muslim nations such as Turkey and the UAE, the initiative aims to bring collective pressure and diplomacy to end the violence and restore stability in the region.

At its core, the Board of Peace seeks a resolution to the Gaza crisis in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Its goals include an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the reconstruction of Gaza, and long-

term peace that guarantees the rights of the Palestinian people, including statehood and the right to self-determination. Regional security and stability remain central to this vision.

### Why Pakistan's Participation Is Important

Pakistan's possible inclusion in the Board of Peace is being widely viewed as both historic and necessary.

Diplomats and analysts see it as recognition of Pakistan's growing diplomatic weight and moral standing in global affairs, particularly at a time when the world is deeply polarized and conflict-driven.

Unlike many countries, Pakistan does not follow rigid bloc politics. It maintains balanced re-

lations with major global powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, while preserving strategic autonomy.

This unique positioning gives Pakistan the ability to act as a bridge for dialogue in an increasingly divided world.

Pakistan's foreign policy has also remained consistent on key issues. Its stance on Palestine is clear and unchanged: support for an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with UN resolutions. Similarly, Pakistan continues to advocate for the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute through a fair and impartial plebiscite.

This principled approach strengthens Pakistan's credibility in peace-building initiatives like the Board of Peace.

### From Neutrality to Meaningful Engagement

In today's rapidly shifting geopolitical environment, many experts argue that staying on the sidelines is no longer a neutral choice. For a leading country of the Muslim world with proven diplomatic and military capacity, active engagement is seen as a responsibility. Pakistan's long and respected contribution to UN peacekeeping missions reflects its commitment to peace through action, not just statements. Some voices have attempted to draw comparisons between the Board of Peace and other international security frameworks. However, officials have clarified that Pakistan's approach to global engagements is guided strictly by

national interest, UN mandates, and public consensus. Any such comparisons, they argue, are misplaced.

### A Strategic and Moral Responsibility

As global power dynamics continue to shift, Pakistan's role in the Board of Peace is increasingly viewed as a strategic necessity rather than an option. Participation would not only reinforce Pakistan's commitment to justice and peace for the Palestinian people but also underline its broader role as a responsible and constructive actor in ensuring regional and global stability. For Pakistan, joining the Board of Peace is about standing on the right side of history—using diplomacy, credibility, and balance to help shape a more peaceful future for Gaza and the wider region.

## 30 bodies recovered from single shop following deadly fire at Karachi's Gul Plaza

NEWS DESK:

In a harrowing development, at least 30 bodies were recovered from a gutted shop as rescuers combed through the wreckage of Karachi's Gul Plaza on Wednesday.

Karachi South Deputy Inspector General Syed Asad Raza told Dawn that the remains of 30 humans had been recovered from a shop called "Dubai Crockery" located on the mezzanine floor.

He said that earlier in the day, rescue workers had recovered three more bodies, increasing the toll from 28 to 31. He added that with the discovery of the bodies from the gutted shop, the death toll was estimated to have risen to 61.

However, he cautioned that a final conclusion about the death toll could only be reached after receiving the DNA reports.

He said that the relatives of those missing as well as the shopkeepers had already indicated the possibility of there being a large number of people at the shop.

Raza said that as per the last contact with the victims,

News Desk:

Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, on Tuesday met Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, to review ongoing polio eradication efforts and discuss measures to further strengthen routine immunization across the province.

The meeting was attended by National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Coordinator Anwar-ul-Haq and Provincial EOC Coordinator Inam-ul-Haq. Detailed discussions were held on enhancing the effectiveness of polio vaccination campaigns, improving coordination among concerned departments, and addressing operational challenges, particularly in remote and high-risk districts of Balochistan.

Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq appreciated the Government of Balochistan for its continued commitment to polio eradication and child immunization. She said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, the province has shown improved

## CM Balochistan, PM's Polio Focal Person Review Polio Eradication Strategy



planning, better field coordination, and encouraging progress in vaccination coverage.

She stressed that close co-

operation between federal and provincial authorities remains crucial to achieving the shared goal of a polio-free Pakistan.

Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti reiterated that polio eradication is a top national and provincial priority.

He said the Balochistan government is fully committed to protecting children from preventable diseases through effective vaccination drives. He added that comprehensive measures, including security arrangements, monitoring mechanisms, public awareness initiatives, and health system support, are being implemented to ensure the success of polio campaigns.

The chief minister also emphasized the importance of strengthening routine immunization to build a sustainable public health system.

He reaffirmed that the provincial government will utilize all available resources to ensure that every child in Balochistan has access to life-saving vaccines and to move decisively towards a polio-free future.

Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan also attended the meeting and briefed participants on provincial initiatives, progress in routine immunization, inter-agency coordination, and administrative measures supporting public health and polio eradication efforts.







## January 21 Observed as Basant Bagh Martyrs' Day in Kashmir

**NEWS DESK:** Leader of the Associate Youth Forum for Kashmir, Bilal Ahmed Reki, has said that January 21 is commemorated as Basant Bagh Martyrs' Day, a solemn reminder of one of the most tragic incidents in the history of Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement, he recalled that on January 21, 1990, Indian forces allegedly opened fire on unarmed Kashmiri civilians who had gathered at Basant Bagh for a peaceful protest.

The demonstrators were raising concerns over human rights violations, house raids, arbitrary arrests, and the harassment of civilians. He stated that when the protesters moved towards Gawakadal Bridge, they were met with gunfire, resulting in the killing of dozens of people and injuries to hundreds.

He added that, despite the passage of decades, the incident has not been subjected to any transparent or impartial investigation. Bilal Ahmed Reki said that the Kashmiri people continue to honor the sacrifices of the Basant Bagh martyrs and reaffirm their resolve to pursue justice. He emphasized that the struggle for truth, dignity, and fundamental human rights will continue until the mission of the martyrs is fulfilled.

He said that trees are the primary source of oxygen, which is essential for life and forms part of the fundamental human right to a clean and healthy environment. He cautioned that continued deforestation in the federal capital would have irreversible consequences for climate resilience, air quality, and public health. Recently, trees were cut down in Shakarparian area at a massive level under contesting view, as CDA says only paper mulberry trees were removed while citizens say besides paper mulberry trees of other species were also cut down. In addition to Shakarparian forest.

Trees were cut down in H-8 area during construction of a monument while a large number of grown trees were also felled in Chak Shahzad for the construction of a road for a housing society (with an open public hearing and EIA).

Barrister Zafar rejected the explanation offered by the government that mulberry trees were being cut to address allergy-related concerns, stating that mulberry trees had already been removed long ago and could not justify the current massacre of fully grown trees.

Standing committee on climate change set to take up issue tomorrow.

He stated that, upon examining satellite imagery and Google maps, it was clearly visible that once-green areas of Islamabad had been stripped of the tree cover, lending credence to concerns that this may be linked to housing schemes and commercial interests.

Calling the situation alarming and unacceptable, Barrister Zafar demanded that the government come clean and present a detailed and transparent report before the Senate, explaining who authorised the cutting, which areas were affected, and for what purpose.

He stressed that parliament must be taken into confidence on an issue of such critical environmental and climate importance.

Minister for parliamentary affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, in his response, claimed that the green texture of the federal capital was not being disturbed, noting that only paper mulberry trees had been cut, which carried serious health hazards.

He said that the facts, which he would present before the House, could be checked through the Google imagery and argued that the trees in the lady one or two years could be checked through it.

Water supply restored to Karachi's District West, Keamari after new control gate installed

**NEWS DESK:** Water supply to parts of Karachi's District West and Keamari was restored on Wednesday after the installation of a new control gate on the Hub Canal Reservoir channel.

The project marks a step toward strengthening and modernising the city's water distribution system, said a press release from the spokesperson of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Corporation (KWSC). The development work was carried out on directives of KWSC Chief Executive Officer Ahmed Ali Siddiqui.

The press release added that teams operated continuously to ensure the project was completed on time and with minimal disruption to residents. It said the timely completion reflected the technical expertise and coordination of field teams, engineers and support staff involved in the project.

The newly installed control gate is expected to improve regulation and security of water flows from the Hub Pumping Station. The press release noted that the upgrade would lead to noticeable improvements in water transmission losses.

It added that the project would contribute to long-term water supply stability and reinforce Karachi's broader water infrastructure. Similar development initiatives aimed at improving basic civic services would continue in the future, the press release added.

Siddiqui and KWSC Chief Operating Officer Engineer Asadullah Khan also noted that the primary objective of the project was to enhance efficiency and fairness in water distribution across different parts of the city.

Karachi has been trapped in a water crisis for nearly twenty years yet the much-awaited K-IV mega water supply project remains incomplete due to delays, funding constraints, and a lack of coordination between the federal and Sindh governments.

The project, which promises an additional 260 million gallons of water per day for Karachi, has four major components. Three are currently under construction, while work on the fourth has not begun. Although 2027 has been set as the latest deadline for water to reach Karachi's households, internal assessments suggest that without urgency from both governments, completion could drift to 2030.

Despite chronic water and sewerage challenges that continued to plague Karachi, the city's financial hub throughout 2025, KWSC claimed several achievements during 2025.

On December 31, a one-year performance report was released, listing numerous achievements including the rehabilitation of the old Hub Canal after several decades of neglect, substantial progress on the mega project of the new Hub Canal, and the installation of additional pumps at key pumping stations.

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Section 138 of the Elections Act requires the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette.

The bill passed by the NA today proposes an amendment to Section 138 of the Elections Act, seeking to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the speaker of the assembly concerned or, as the case may be, the chairman of the Senate may, on an application made by a member for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the commission if such publication would pose a serious threat to the life or safety of that individual or their family."

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This time, however, only the PTI opposed it.

During today's NA session, Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs Chairperson Rana Muhammad Sharif Khan presented the committee's report on the proposed legislation, following which it was taken up for consideration by the House and eventually passed.

The bill needs the Senate's assent and the president's approval before it becomes law.

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In August last year, the NA Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs had taken up the bill for discussion but failed to reach a consensus on

it after members from PMJ-N and PTI joined hands to oppose the move tabled by PPP legislators Shazia Marri and Syed Naveed Qamar.

This time, however, only the PTI opposed it.

During today's NA session, Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs Chairperson Rana Muhammad Sharif Khan presented the committee's report on the proposed legislation, following which it was taken up for consideration by the House and eventually passed.

The bill needs the Senate's assent and the president's approval before it becomes law.

NA passes bill seeking amendments to Elections Act for secrecy of parliamentarians' assets

**NEWS DESK:** The National Assembly (NA) passed on Wednesday the Elections Amendment Bill, 2026, seeking secrecy of parliamentarians' assets, amid opposition by the PTI.

Under Section 137 of the Elections Act, all members of the NA, Senate, and provincial assemblies are required to submit to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on or before Dec 31 each year, a statement of their assets and liabilities, including those of their spouses and dependent children.

Section 138 of the Elections Act requires the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette.

The bill passed by the NA today proposes an amendment to Section 138 of the Elections Act, seeking to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the speaker of the assembly concerned or, as the case may be, the chairman of the Senate may, on an application made by a member for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the commission if such publication would pose a serious threat to the life or safety of that individual or their family."

The amendment proposes that this restriction will remain in place for not more than a year and was subject to the submission of a complete and true statement of assets and liabilities to the ECP confidentially.

The bill's statement of objectives and reasons further elaborates: "The proposed amendment is to ensure a balanced approach between transparency and the protection of individual rights."

While the publication of statements of assets and liabilities serves a vital role in promoting public accountability, enhancing trust in public office, and ensuring good governance, it is recognised that unrestricted or excessive disclosure could potentially compromise the personal security and privacy of parliamentarians and their families

## Better sugarcane crop expected this year: Tanveer

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for National Food Security Rana Tanveer Hussain said a better sugarcane crop is expected this year, emphasizing this will help stabilize the prices of sugar in the market.

He told the National Assembly during question hour that last year's sugarcane crop was adversely affected by climate change, causing production to decline to 5.8 million metric tons

from 6.8 million metric tons. He said we imported 1.5 million tons of sugar to stabilize the prices. The Minister for National Food Security assured the house that strategic reserves of

wheat crop will be maintained. He stated that the government would ensure wheat growers receive the support price of thirty-five hundred rupees per forty kloram. He said sufficient stocks of wheat are

available with PASSCO. He said under the wheat policy 2025-26, there will be no issue in the inter-provincial movement of wheat.

Parliamentary Secretary for Industries and Production Shahid

Usman told the house that the government has decided to revive Pakistan Steel Mills. He said a summary in this regard will be moved by the Ministry of Industries and Production. He also mentioned that two pro-

tools have been signed with a Russian company for cooperation in the revival, modernization and restructuring of Pakistan Steel Mills.

Parliamentary Secretary for Railways Muhammad Usman

Awaisi told the house that an anti-encroachment drive has been initiated to retrieve valuable railway land. He said that 781.54 acres of Pakistan Railways land has been retrieved from July 2024 to June 2025.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq led Parliamentary Delegation, met with Chairman CPCC, Mr. Wang Huning at the Great Hall of People in Beijing

### Aurangzeb updates ADB chief on Pakistan's improving economic indicators

DAVOS (INP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb held detailed talks with Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda in Davos on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum on Wednesday.

The meeting focused on Pakistan's economic reform agenda, macroeconomic stabilization, and strengthening the long-standing development partnership between Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank.

The finance minister highlighted Pakistan's improving economic indicators, including declining inflation, easing policy rates, strengthening foreign exchange reserves, and growing investor confidence.

He briefed the ADB president on progress in structural reforms, particularly privatization and private sector participation, and emphasized the government's commitment to sustaining reform momentum.

### Mohsin Naqvi forms committee to address Ulema's issues

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday constituted a committee under the leadership of Minister of State for Interior Iqbal Chaudhry to address issues faced by Islamic religious scholars across the country.

The decision was taken during a meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and a delegation of ulema led by Mufti-e-Azam Pakistan Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman.

During the meeting, the interior minister assured the delegation that concrete steps would be taken to resolve the issues of religious scholars.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid tribute to Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman and other ulema for their role in promoting peace and stability in the country.

Mohsin Naqvi said that the problems being faced by the ulema would be reviewed in detail, and practical measures would be adopted for their resolution.

Under the committee formed by the interior minister, Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman and other prominent religious scholars will also be members. The committee will formulate and submit workable recommendations aimed at resolving the issues raised by the ulema.

He further said that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman has always spoken for unity, consensus and cohesion in the country and enjoys respect across religious and political lines.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of State for Interior Iqbal Chaudhry said that the services of religious scholars for Pakistan were highly commendable.

### Fire tragedy toll might rise as another plaza declared unsafe

KARACHI Jan 21 (INP): A team of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has completed the inspection of Gul Plaza, which was destroyed by fire five days ago, and has decided to immediately place a jack in the portion of the building adjacent to Rimpia Plaza.

Meanwhile, the death toll from the fire has reached 28, while 85 people are still missing and it is feared that the death toll might rise. DC South Javed Nabi Khoso has said that 11 bodies have been identified so far.

The SBCA team has also declared the building of Rimpia Plaza unsafe and has issued notices to the plaza's management as well as shopkeepers. The team has said that the debris falling after fire in Gul Plaza has badly damaged the pillars of Rimpia Plaza as well and affected its two columns.

It has said that the interior of the building has been affected due to the damage caused to its exterior. The Authority officials have said that the management and

shopkeepers of the plaza have been immediately barred from the use of affected portion of the building.

They have further said that the building should not be used until and unless a competent authority declares it safe for commercial and other activities.

The officials have informed that hot water is present in the basement of the building in a large quantity and only when it is drained out that the inspection of columns will be possible. They have also made it clear that legal action will be taken against those not complying with the instructions.

The SBCA officials have said it will be premature to say whether Rimpia Plaza will also come crashing down immediately. On the other hand, out of 21 bodies placed in Edhi mortuary, three have been identified. The deceased have been identified as Muhammad Shehroze (age 33), Maryam (15) and Muhammad Rizwan (26). They were identified through DNA testing.

He also announced Rs15.50 billion grant in aid for the institute's operational matters. CM Murad said that the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (ZABICVD) in Landhi area of Karachi would be the world's largest hospital for the treatment of heart patients.

Some important decisions were taken at the meeting for the protection of the institute's future and continuity of services.

The meeting also approved the immediate appointment of Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the NICVD.

CM Murad said that the NICVD needed an additional grant of Rs3.5 billion in the financial year, 2025-26.

NICVD Executive Director Professor Tahir Sagheer, who gave a detailed briefing to the chief minister, said that so far, the location of Rs10 billion had been approved for the hospital, while it was facing a deficit of Rs4.6 billion.

He added that an increase in administrative and service expenditures led to the funding gap.

CM Murad said that over 200

### KP vaccinates over 108,000 under-immunized children through coordinated efforts

PESHAWAR (INP): Through effective planning and coordinated implementation by the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its district teams, more than 108,000 under-immunized children were vaccinated.

While, this effort achieved over 90 percent coverage in high-risk urban areas and significantly reduced immunity gaps across the province.

The Immunization Roadmap, launched under the leadership of the Chief Secretary KP, has delivered strong and measurable results within its first six months. The initiative marks a major improvement in public health service delivery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by strengthening accountability, modernizing service delivery systems,

and accelerating progress toward universal immunization coverage.

It reflects the Government's strong commitment to protecting child health.

A major achievement under the roadmap was successfully reaching communities across the province.

Alongside expanded physical infrastructure and human resources.

Ten pre-fabricated EPI centers were established in underserved union councils, providing immunization services to a population of over 0.3 million.

A province-wide Big Catch-Up activity was also conducted to vaccinate children up to five years of age, further reducing immunity gaps.

The Health Department has also strengthened immunization services by enhancing monitoring systems to track individual performance, which enhanced accountability and operational efficiency.

As a result, community outreach coverage increased from 40 percent last year to nearly 70 percent in December 2025, expanding access to life-saving vaccines across the province.

These achievements represent a major step forward in strengthening the provincial immunization system and protecting children from vaccine-preventable diseases. The Government has appreciated the performance of the Provincial EPI Directorate and district teams, whose dedication and professionalism have translated policy into real public health impact across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Integrated service delivery was reinforced in security-sensitive areas to ensure continuity of essential health services.

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geographically challenging areas.

In addition, 150 female vaccinators were deployed across the province to improve outreach, community engagement, and service accessibility.

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## UNHCR Hands Over 48 Solar-Powered Public Facilities Worth PKR 1 Billion to Government of Balochistan

**News Desk**  
QUETTA: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has officially handed over 48 solarized public facilities worth approximately PKR 1 billion (USD 3.5 million) to the Government of Balochistan, marking a major milestone in renewable energy, public service delivery, and climate-resilient development in Pakistan.

The initiative provides clean, reliable, and cost-effective solar energy to essential public institutions, including schools, universities, healthcare centers, and technical training institutes, with a special focus on refugee-hosting districts of Balochistan. Implemented during 2024-2025, the project addresses chronic challenges such as power outages, unstable grid electricity, and high diesel fuel costs, which have long affected public service delivery in the province.

The project was supported by key international development partners, including Global Affairs Canada, Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Among the flagship facilities solarized under the initiative is the Bolan Medical



Complex, with additional support from UNHCR's private-sector partner, LONGi Green Energy Technology Co. Ltd. The official handover ceremony was held at the Chief Minister's Office

in Quetta and was attended by Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, UN Resident Coordinator Mohamed Yahya, UNHCR Representative in Pakistan Ms. Philippa Candler, Head of UNHCR Quetta Office Mr. Tesfaye Bekele, along with senior government and United Nations officials.

By transitioning critical public infrastructure to renewable solar power, the initiative ensures uninterrupted electricity supply, reduces dependence on the national grid, and significantly lowers recurring operational and energy costs. These improvements are already strengthening the delivery of quality education and healthcare services across Balochistan.

UN Resident Coordinator Mohamed Yahya praised the project's impact and acknowledged Pakistan's 45-year commitment to hosting Afghan refugees, emphasizing the need for sustained international support for both refugee and host communities.

UNHCR Representative Ms. Philippa Candler underscored the importance of energy security in sustaining public services and institutional resilience.

Reliable energy is essential for maintaining vital public services that support both Afghan refugees and host communities. UNHCR remains committed to ensuring dignity, protection, and inclusive access to services for all," she said. The solar-powered public facilities are expected to benefit nearly two million people annually, including students, teachers, healthcare workers, patients, refugees, and local host communities.

In addition to strengthening public service delivery, the initiative contributes to climate change mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on fossil fuels, aligning with Pakistan's national and provincial climate action priorities in one of the country's most climate-vulnerable regions.

## National Commission for Child Rights Holds Provincial Consultation on Child Labor Monitoring in Private Sector



QUETTA: The National Commission for Child Rights (NCR), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pakistan and with the support of the European Union, organized a provincial-level consultative meeting in Balochistan.

The meeting was part of the Huqooq-e-Pakistan Phase II project, which aims to strengthen the monitoring of child labor in the private sector.

Representatives from federal ministries, government agencies, chambers of commerce, civil society organizations, labor unions, and business associations participated in the meeting. Attendees thoroughly discussed the trends of child labor in the province, obstacles in the implementation of

laws, and the lack of institutional coordination.

They also presented future strategies for addressing this issue, aligning them with Pakistan's National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights and GSP+ commitments.

The discussion focused particularly on strengthening the monitoring system in informal sectors, effectively reviewing legal obligations within private sector supply chains, and exploring social protection systems that could aid in the eradication of child labor.

This meeting is part of a series of national and provincial-level consultations, and the outcomes will contribute to the preparation of a national report on child labor in the private

sector. NCR will combine provincial evidence and stakeholder input to draft actionable and evidence-based recommendations to enhance the effective enforcement of laws, hold businesses accountable, and strengthen institutional cooperation.

In his address, Advocate Abdul Hai, NCR Member for Balochistan, emphasized, "Child labor is not only a violation of children's fundamental rights but also a governance challenge that highlights gaps in law enforcement, accountability, and social protection systems. Eradicating child labor is not only Pakistan's international obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals

but also a moral and constitutional duty to protect our children. UNDP Pakistan Consultant, Zainab Mustafa, highlighted the necessity of enhanced coordination and cooperation among stakeholders to address child labor violations effectively. "We hope that this report will serve as a guiding document for all parties working in this sector," she stated.

The National Commission for Child Rights and UNDP reiterated their commitment to continuous collaboration with federal and provincial governments, the Ministry of Labor, civil society, and the private sector, reaffirming their resolve to protect children's rights and eliminate all forms of child labor in Pakistan.

## Over 8,000 unnecessary government vacancies abolished, CM Balochistan

**Staff Reporter**  
QUETTA: The Chief Minister of Balochistan has announced the province's annual budget of nearly Rs 1,000 billion reflects a harsh financial reality, with around 80 percent allocated to non-development expenditures. These expenses largely consist of salaries and pensions for nearly 250,000 government employees, leaving only Rs 200 billion available for the welfare and development of the province's 13 million people.

According to the Chief Minister, to correct this imbalanced financial structure, the government has taken difficult but necessary reform measures over the past two years. These include the closure of ineffective and redundant departments such as



Zakat, Religious Affairs, and Civil Defence, the elimination of 8,000 unnecessary government positions, and strict measures over the past two years. These include the closure of ineffective and redundant departments such as

the Chief Minister emphasized that while the reform process is still ongoing, pressure, protests, or any form of blackmail will not deter the government from protecting the public interest. He made it clear

that no compromise will be made on the interests of the people of Balochistan, and that the drive for financial discipline, transparency, and development-oriented reforms will continue under all circumstances.

## Loralai Municipality Launches Extensive Cleanliness Drive for a Cleaner City



LORALAI: The Municipal Committee of Loralai has intensified its cleanliness drive across the city with a series of comprehensive actions aimed at improving sanitation. Under the direction of Chief Officer, Mohiullah Baloch, the municipal cleaning staff has been actively working to clean different areas of the city, focusing on drains, streets, and public spaces.

According to reports, the cleaning teams used tractors, trailers, and Suzuki vehicles to collect waste from various locations across the city.

The staff also carried out thorough cleaning of the drains in Ajab Zone, Levies Line Mohalla Junction, and cleaned large piles of garbage in Khallo Zone, Sultan Tip Levies Line Mohalla Kamran.

Additionally, drains in Saleem Dada Compound, Haidar Mohalla, and Baran Zone, Muhammad Gali were fully cleaned.

The prompt action in removing accumulated waste from various sites has significantly contributed to maintaining a clean and healthy environment for the residents of Loralai. Citizens have expressed their appreciation for the cleanliness drive, showing hope that the initiative will continue regularly in the future. Municipal Committee officials have assured the public of their efforts to make the city cleaner, healthier, and more beautiful will remain uninterrupted.

They also urged citizens to cooperate with the administration to maintain the cleanliness of the city.

## Balochistan Government Rolls Out Comprehensive Investment Policy, Launches Business Facilitation Center in Quetta

QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan has said that the provincial government is moving forward with a comprehensive policy to promote investment and accelerate trade and business activities across Balochistan. He emphasized that innovation in all government sectors is essential for provincial development and improved governance.

He further stated that practical steps are being taken to digitize government and public services in order to enhance transparency, efficiency, and service delivery.

The Chief Secretary expressed these views while addressing the soft launch ceremony of the Business Facilitation Center (BFC), organized by the Balochistan Board of Investment (BoI) at the Sikandar Jamali Auditorium.



secretaries of provincial departments, and other senior officials. Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan highlighted that unemployment remains the biggest challenge in Balochistan, and special emphasis is being placed on boosting investment and commercial activities to address this issue.

He noted that the establishment of the Business Facilitation Center will provide investors and entrepreneurs with all essential services under a one-window operation, making the business process smoother and more efficient.

He also stressed that Business Facilitation Center offices should be extended to divisional headquarters

to further facilitate investors across the province. Terming the initiative as positive and commendable, he appreciated the efforts of the Balochistan Board of Investment.

The Chief Secretary said that Balochistan offers vast opportunities for development in various sectors, particularly fisheries and minerals, and called for enhanced efforts to promote investment in these areas. He described the shrimp farming project in Dam as an important step toward economic growth and diversification.

Addressing the gathering, Bol Vice Chairman Bilal Khan Kakar said that in line with the vision of Chief Minister Balochistan

Mir Sarfraz Bugti, transforming the province into a center of business and economic activity is their mission. He added that since assuming responsibility a year ago, priority has been given to bringing investment projects to Balochistan, which are now showing positive results.

He further stated that the Business Facilitation Center is a key component of the Chief Minister's digitization program, and acknowledged that the guidance of the Chief Secretary Balochistan played a crucial role in its completion. On the occasion, Bol Chief Executive Officer Qaim Lashari gave a detailed briefing on the objectives of the Business Facilitation Center.

**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

The Executive Engineer Roads CWP/PA/Department District Duki invites electronic bids for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates.

Tender Fee (1500/-) - A/C No. C02716.

Venue: The Office of the DC, District Duki

S. No	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	Security %	Bit submission / Tender opening Date
1	CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN NALLA (4x7) STONE MASONRY FROM HADRA MOHALLA TO MULLAH ABULLAH BANDA VIA TALABAN WAPAZ TR-25891M623	Rs. 73,12,358/-	10%	05/02/2026
2	CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN NALLA STONE MASONRY FROM GANJ NALLA REMAINING PORTION TO TALABAN SCHOOL TR-25891M623	Rs. 93,103,206/-	2%	05/02/2026
3	CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK TOP ROAD FROM BACHA WAPAZ CHOWK TO FC PARK ROAD AND FROM MICHEN CHOWK TO FC BOYS HIGH SCHOOL INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM TR-25891M673	Rs. 39,825,886/-	2%	05/02/2026
4	CONSTRUCTION OF BIT ROAD FROM NAZOK CHOWK TO REMAINING PORTION LIVESTOCK HOSPITAL INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM TR-25891M673	Rs. 34,252,284/-	2%	05/02/2026
5	CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK TOP ROAD FROM WAPAZ CHOWK TO EASTERN BYPASS VIA IRRIGATION REST HOUSE & LINK TO EODHA ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM 2. CONSTRUCTION OF LINK ROAD FROM EASTERN BYPASS TO MAIN SUKORABANDA ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM 3. CONSTRUCTION OF DRAINAGE DRAINAGE AND ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM TR-25891M673	Rs. 33,751,676/-	1%	05/02/2026
6	CONSTRUCTION OF BIT ROAD FROM MAIN NASARABAD TO WESTERN BYPASS TR-25891M673	Rs. 24,365,978/-	2%	04/02/2026
7	CONSTRUCTION OF 2 NOS BOX CULVERTS AT CHOWK DISTRICT DUKI TR-25891M673	Rs. 13,368,040/-	2%	04/02/2026

All interested bidders must formally register with the BPPRA Electronic Public Procurement System (EPPS), where key eligibility criteria and complete tender documentation are available on the official website: [www.bppra.gov.pk](http://www.bppra.gov.pk). Proposals are to be submitted electronically via the EPPS portal no later than 10:00 AM, followed by an electronic bid opening at 11:00 AM on the same day. Subsequently, the original bank documents—namely original (CCP) and the original bank challan, the bank's credit line validity the relevant TSE number on the bank's official website in addition of required stamp (papers)—must be delivered in hard copy to the designated address within one hour of the electronic bid opening. Failure to comply will result in disqualification. This procurement is conducted under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules, 2014. For any inquiries, please contact [Pakistanboi@gmail.com](mailto:Pakistanboi@gmail.com).

PRO No. 3364/21-01-2026

Executive Engineer Roads CWP/PA/Department District Duki





## Cannot be pressurised to play in India, says Bangladesh sports adviser

**NEWS DESK:** Bangladesh government's sports adviser Asif Nazrul on Tuesday reiterated that under no condition would the national team travel to India for the T20 World Cup, despite an ultimatum from the International Cricket Council (ICC) to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on deciding its participation by January 21, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported.

If BCB remains adamant on not travelling to India for the 20-team tournament, Scotland is likely to replace Bangladesh as per current rankings.

"I am not aware that Scotland will be included in our place," Asif told reporters.

"If the ICC bows to pressure from the Indian cricket board and tries to impose the pressure on us by setting unreasonable conditions, we will not accept those conditions."

In the past, there



are examples that Pakistan said that they will not travel to India and ICC changed the venue. We have asked to change the venue on local ground and we cannot be pressurised to play in India by putting

illogical pressure. "The standoff was triggered by the removal of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from Kolkata Knight Riders' roster for this year's Indian Premier League on

Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) instructions for unspecified "developments all around".

Citing security concerns and national pride, the BCB responded by announcing its national team won't travel to India for its group stage games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

BCB wants to play each of its four group-stage matches in Sri Lanka, where the

queen India-Pakistan clash will also be held as per the mutually agreed arrangement for ICC events until 2027.

Australia, Oman and Zimbabwe. Such a move would allow Bangladesh to remain in Sri Lanka for entirety of its group-stage engagements.

While the BCB considers it unsafe for its players to travel to India, the ICC's risk assessment report did not flag any specific or direct threat to the team's participation in the World Cup.

The bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh have deteriorated in recent months, exacerbated by the reported killings of Hindus in Bangladesh.

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal and current Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto have cautioned against a very hard-line approach on the controversial subject, with the former saying that decisions taken today would have repercussions 10 years down the line.

## Alcaraz, Sabalenka, Gauff surge into Australian Open third round

**NEWS DESK:** Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz fended off a series of "bombs" before surging into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday, where he was joined by Aryna Sabalenka and a near-flawless Coco Gauff.

Three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev also stayed alive, but he needed four sets to keep his Grand Slam dream on track at a cooler and overcast Melbourne Park after days of hot weather.

Spanish superstar Alcaraz came through a tough arm-wrestle 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena against hard-hitting German Yannick Hanfmann to take another step towards a career Grand Slam.

But he was put through his paces by a player 12 years older than setting up a showdown with either France's Corentin Moutet or American Michael Zheng.

"To be honest, it was tougher than I thought at the beginning," said Alcaraz, who already has six major titles but has never gone past the last eight in Melbourne.

"I didn't feel the ball that good. You know, the ball was coming as a bomb, forehand and backhand."

If the 22-year-old does win the Australia Open to complete the career Grand Slam of all four majors he will be the youngest man to do so, surpassing compatriot Rafael Nadal.

The unpredictable Medvedev, runner-up in

2021, 2022 and 2024, is trying to keep his emotions in check this year and was on his best behaviour against Frenchman Quentin Halys.

He lost a tight first set but the result was never in doubt as he surged to the finish line 6-7 (9/11), 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

"It was a very tough match, happy I managed to fight," said the Russian, who faces Fabian Marozsan of Hungary next.

American Tommy Paul, Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo and Tomas Etcheverry, Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Russian Andrey Rublev also safely negotiated the second round.

Alexander Zverev is in action in an evening match against France's Alexandre Muller, the latest challenge in the German's decade-long quest for a first Grand

Slam title.

The world number three, runner-up last year to Jannik Sinner, dropped a set in his opening clash but said it was good to be stretched early in the tournament.

"Near perfect" Four-time major winner Sabalenka raced 5-0 clear of qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan, ranked a lowly 702, on centre court before wobbling to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

But the top seed quickly snuffed it out to race home 6-3, 6-1 and set up a clash next with Russian-born Anastasia Potapova, now representing Austria, who dispatched 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu.

"Super-happy to close the (first) set, it gives me confidence that my game is there, my focus is there," said Sabalenka, who is bidding for a third Australian Open title in four years.

The two-time major winner took just 78 minutes to race home 6-2, 6-2 on Margaret Court Arena. It set up a showdown next against fellow American Hailey Baptiste, ranked 70, who downed home hope Storm Hunter in straight sets.

"Near perfect," said Gauff, whose best performance in Melbourne was a semi-final in 2024.



ing its national team won't travel to India for its group stage games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

BCB wants to play each of its four group-stage matches in Sri Lanka, where the

queen India-Pakistan clash will also be held as per the mutually agreed arrangement for ICC events until 2027.

The hosts then had their first shots on target and opened the scoring in the 74th minute when Suarez coolly slot-

ted a low shot past Lucas Chevalier after Catamo's attempt had been deflected into his path.

Five minutes later, Kvaratskhelia, who had come on for Mayulu, unleashed a superb shot into the far top corner from the edge of the box to equalise.

But PSG lacked their usual grit and were punished again in the 90th minute.

Trincão collected a low pass from the left just outside the box and struck first time with his left foot, forcing Chevalier to parry and Suarez nodded the rebound into the far corner to send the crowd into raptures.

## PSG falter as Suarez leads Sporting to victory



**NEWS DESK:** Holders Paris Saint-Germain slipped to a 2-1 defeat at Portuguese side Sporting on Tuesday, jeopardising their bid to qualify directly for the Champions League last 16 after Luis Suarez struck twice, netting the winner in the final minute.

Sporting went ahead through Suarez against the run of play in the second half, despite sustained pressure from PSG.

The French champions hit back quickly as Khvicha Kvaratskhelia levelled with a superb strike, appearing to salvage a point.

PSG, however, struck again in the dying moments to snatch victory for Sporting, leaving both teams level on 13 points and inside the top eight, which assures direct qualification for the

last 16, ahead of PSG's home match against Newcastle United and Sporting's trip to Athletic Bilbao.

Both teams lead ninth-placed Inter by a single point.

"We had too many chances and didn't score - it happens to us too often."

We lacked concentration and made two mistakes. We do what we can, but if we don't convert our chances, we cannot afford to concede goals," said PSG midfielder Vitinha.

Luis Enrique's side dominated the opening stages in Lisbon, with Nuno Mendes forcing Rui Silva into a sharp save from a tight angle and Senny Mayulu more early in the second half, with a dangerous

Trincão cross just denying Suarez in the 52nd minute.

The visitors thought they had taken the lead on the half-hour when Warren Zaire-Emery headed in Fabian Ruiz's cross, but the goal was ruled out after a VAR review judged Mayulu had fouled Gery Catamo in the build-up.

Nuno Mendes then had the ball in the net again late in the half, finishing from close range after a Zaire-Emery cross, only for the effort to be disallowed for an offside offence.

Ousmane Dembélé. Sporting offered little in response before the break, but the teams went in level at 0-0 despite PSG's clear superiority with 15 attempts and 69% possession.

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ted a low shot past Lucas Chevalier after Catamo's attempt had been deflected into his path.

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## Sialkot Stallionz unveiled as newest franchise ahead of PSL 11

**NEWS DESK:** The owner of the newly formed Sialkot franchise, Kamil Khan, has officially unveiled the team's name ahead of the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 11), which is scheduled to run from March 26 to May 3.

The announcement marks a major milestone in the league's expansion and has generated strong interest among Pakistan cricket fans.

Khan revealed the franchise's identity on Wednesday through a 3D animated video shared on the social media platform X, confirming that the team will compete under the name Sialkot Stallionz.



The revival of the Sialkot Stallions name carries immense historical significance in Pakistan's domestic cricket. Between 2005 and 2012, the Sialkot Stallions dominated the National T20 Cup, winning a record six titles and registering a

world-record 25-match unbeaten streak. That era established the Stallions as the most successful team in Pakistan's domestic T20 history.

The Stallions' golden period produced several renowned Pakistani cricketers, including Shoaib Malik, who captained the side with calm authority, explosive opener Imran Nazir, dependable all-rounder Harris Sohail, and other notable performers. Their success helped turn Sialkot into a major cricketing hub and built a loyal fan base that the Sialkot Stallionz PSL franchise

will aim to re-engage in PSL 2026 and beyond.

The Sialkot franchise was awarded ownership earlier this month following a high-profile PSL expansion auction held at the Jinnah Convention Centre. OZ Develop-

ers, owned by Hamza Majed, secured the rights to the eighth PSL team with a winning bid of Rs1.85 billion, exceeding the base price of Rs1.70 billion after intense bidding among eight qualified parties. Earlier, the FKS Group had acquired the first expansion franchise with a bid of Rs1.75 billion.

With the addition of Sialkot Stallionz and another new team, PSL 11 will feature eight franchises, ushering in a new era of growth for the Pakistan Super League, Pakistan's premier T20 competition.

**Shoaib Malik announces retirement from HBL PSL**

**NEWS DESK:** Shoaib Malik has announced his retirement from the Pakistan Super League (PSL), bringing an end to a playing journey that has run uninterrupted since the tournament's inception in 2016.

The decision comes ahead of the landmark PSL season 11, marking the close of a decade-long association between one of Pakistan's most enduring cricketers and its flagship T20 league.

Malik confirmed the news via his social media platforms, reflecting on the memories and relationships built over ten seasons of the PSL.

"I cherish every single moment and friendship I have made on and off the field throughout my 10 years of the Pakistan Super League as a player," Malik wrote. "It's time to call it a day. However, my passion and motivation to serve for the betterment of cricket will always stay. Thank you

PSL."

Few players have been as consistent a presence in the league as Malik.

From the early days when the PSL was played in the UAE to its growth into a fully home-based tournament, Malik remained a regular feature, representing four franchises during his career — Karachi Kings, Multan Sultans, Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators.

His final appearance came for Quetta Gladiators in PSL 10, closing the loop on a career defined by adaptability and longevity.

Statistically, Malik departs as one of the most prolific performers in PSL history.

He is the fourth-highest run-scorer in the league, having amassed 2,350 runs in 92 matches at an impressive average of 33.09.

Often deployed in the middle order, Malik was valued for his ability to control innings, finish games and provide balance with his part-time offspin. He also claimed 17 wickets in the tournament, underlining his all-round contribution.

Beyond the PSL, Malik's broader T20 record further contextualises his impact. He is the sixth-highest run-scorer in T20 cricket overall, with 13,571 runs, including 83 half-centuries, at a strike rate of 127.24 — numbers that speak to both durability and consistency across leagues worldwide.

While Malik's playing days in the PSL are over, his statement suggests this is not a farewell to cricket altogether.

As the league enters a new era with expansion and structural changes, it does so without one of its most familiar figures — a player whose experience helped bridge generations and whose influence extended well beyond the scorecard.

# Trump's plane returns to air base after 'minor' electrical issue: White House

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump's plane was forced to return to an air base late Tuesday due to a "minor electrical issue" shortly after departing for Switzerland, the White House said.

Air Force One returned to Joint Base Andrews out of an abundance of caution, Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said. It landed shortly after 0400 GMT.

Journalists traveling with Trump reported that lights in the cabin went out briefly after takeoff.

After returning to Andrews, Trump resumed his trip to the Davos forum early Wednesday.

Trump and his entourage changed planes at Joint Base Andrews and took off again shortly after



0500 GMT, about two-and-a-half hours after his initial departure. With its classic blue and white livery, Air Force One is arguably the world's most iconic plane and an instantly

recognisable symbol of the US presidency. Trump has long

been unhappy with the current Air Force One jets - two highly

customized Boeing 747-200B series aircraft that entered ser-

vice in 1990 under president George H.W. Bush. Last year, Trump said his administration was "looking at alternatives" to Boeing following delays in the delivery of two new 747-8 aircraft. People gather outside Air Force One on the tarmac after returning to Joint Base Andrews on January 20, 2026. — AFP

In May, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth accepted a Boeing 747 that the Gulf emirate of Qatar offered to Trump for use as Air Force One.

The jet - worth hundreds of millions of dollars - has raised huge constitutional and ethical questions, as well as security concerns about using a foreign power for use as the ultra-sensitive presidential plane.

## Japan court sentences ex-PM Abe's assassin to life in prison, NHK reports

**NEWS DESK:** A Japanese court on Wednesday sentenced a 45-year-old man to life imprisonment for fatally shooting former prime minister Shinzo Abe, a broadcaster NHK reported, in an incident that stunned the nation three and a half years ago.

Tetsuya Yamagami was arrested on the spot in July 2022 after fatally firing at Abe with a homemade gun while he was delivering a campaign speech in the western city of Nara. Abe, the country's longest-serving premier, was 67.

A guilty verdict was all but certain after Yamagami admitted to killing Abe in the first court hearing at the Nara District Court in October, and attention had been

on the severity of the sentence. Prosecutors sought a life sentence last month, calling the act an "extremely grave incident that is unprecedented in post-war history".

Although he was no longer Japan's leader at the time, Abe remained a powerful and binding force within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. His absence has left a vacuum within the party, which has since seen two leadership races and, by extension, a revolving door of prime ministers.

Yamagami as telling the court that he held a grudge against the Unification Church after his mother's large donation to it caused financial hardship for their family, and that he took out his

anger on Abe because the former prime minister had once sent a video message to an event held by a group affiliated with the church.

Founded in South Korea in 1954, the Unification Church is famous for its mass weddings and counts Japanese followers as a key source of income.

Yamagami's lawyers, meanwhile, argued that the family's misfortune caused by the donation to the Unification Church should be taken into consideration and limit his prison term to 20 years at most.

While Abe was a divisive figure domestically, he was among the few global leaders to have a strong rapport with US President Donald Trump.

## India to withdraw diplomats' families from Bangladesh, source says

**NEWS DESK:** India will withdraw its diplomats' families and dependents from Bangladesh in the face of security threats as tension rises ahead of a February 12 general election, an Indian official said on Wednesday.

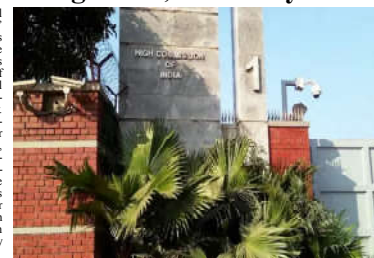
Campaigning begins on Thursday for Bangladesh's election, which has sparked protests and counter-protests. Ties between the South Asian neighbours soured after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India in 2024, following deadly protests.

India's past support for Hasina has frayed relations between the two neighbours since her overthrow.

India's withdrawal move was part of "internal readjustments", the official said, without elaborating.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, pointed to Indian media reports of New Delhi's decision.

It was not immediately clear when the families would return.



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long trial that found her guilty of ordering a crackdown on the student-led uprising in 2024.

The interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly sought Hasina's extradition to Bangladesh, while rejecting New Delhi's concerns over violence targeting members of the minority Hindu community.

Meanwhile, a popular student leader of Bangladesh's 2024 upris-

ing, Sharif Osman Hadi, was wounded in an assassination attempt last month and died after being flown to Singapore for treatment.

He was a senior leader of the student protest group Inqilab Mancha and an outspoken critic of India.

His death set off violent protests with angry mobs torching several buildings, including two major newspapers deemed to favour India, as well as a prominent cultural institution.



## Jamaat-e-Islami gains ground in Bangladesh ahead of February polls

**NEWS DESK:** Long vilified for opposing independence and barred from electoral politics for over a decade, Bangladesh's biggest religio-political party is reinventing itself and attracting new support ahead of parliamentary polls next month, unsettling moderates and minority communities.

Jamaat-e-Islami began its overhaul soon after a youth-led uprising in the Muslim-majority nation of 175 million people toppled Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. With Hasina's Awami League banned, Jamaat is betting on its anti-corruption image, welfare outreach, and what analysts describe as a more inclusive public stance to deliver the party's best-ever performance.

A December opinion poll by the US-based International Republican Institute ranked Jamaat as the most "liked" party and projected a tight race with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for the top spot in the February 12 election.

"We started welfare politics, not reactionary



politics," Jamaat chief Shahiqur Rahman told Reuters, citing its medical camp initiatives, flood relief and aid for families of those killed in the uprising. The UN says as many as 1,400 people lost their lives in the protests.

"The constructive politics, which Jamaat and its associates are doing now, people will put their trust and belief in Jamaat-e-Islami," Rahman said.

The party has its origins in the pan-Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami movement, which emerged in India in the early 1940s and called for a society governed by Islamic principles.

Jamaat opposed Bangladesh's independence, and during Hasina's rule, many of its leaders were executed or jailed in a war crimes tribunal that was criticised by international human rights groups. In 2013, it was barred from elections af-

ter a court ruled its charter was in conflict with Bangladesh's secular constitution.

The electoral ban was lifted last year, and Jamaat's student wing swept the Dhaka University polls, beating the Gen-Z National Citizen Party formed by leaders of the anti-Hasina movement. Months later, it formed an electoral alliance with the NCP, which some analysts say could help soften

Jamaat's image.

India's withdrawal move was part of "internal readjustments", the official said, without elaborating.

The SDF's main ally, the United States, said in a statement that the partnership with the group had changed in nature af-

ter Syria's new government emerged and urged the group to accept.

"During the call, President Erdogan stated that Turkey was closely following developments in Syria, that Syria's unity, harmony and territorial integrity were important for Turkey," the Turkish presidency said in a statement.

It added that Erdogan and Trump also discussed the battle with Islamic State and "the situation of the Islamic State prisoners in the Syrian prisons".

Turkey deems the SDF a terrorist organisation linked with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers

Party (PKK), which has carried out a four-decade insurgency against the Turkish state.

Ankara has been engaged in a peace process with the PKK, under which it says the militant group - and its extensions - must disband and disarm.

Ankara, the main foreign backer of Syria's new government, has praised Damascus' advances against the SDF and repeatedly demanded that the group disband, disarm, and integrate into the Syrian state apparatus.

"Our President said that a Syria that is developing with all its elements, is rid of terror and in peace

will contribute to the region's stability," Erdogan's office said. The two presidents also discussed developments in Gaza, it said, adding Erdogan told Trump that Turkey would continue to work in coordination with its NATO ally, the United States, to achieve peace there.

Erdogan thanked Trump for inviting him to join the Board of Peace, it added.

## Erdogan, Trump discuss Syria ceasefire and Gaza in phone call



**NEWS DESK:** Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan discussed developments in Syria and Gaza in a call with US President Donald Trump, his office said on Wednesday, as Syria's Turkey-backed government announced a ceasefire with US-allied Kurdish forces after days of clashes.

Syria's government this week seized swathes of territory in the northeast and gave the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces four days to agree on integrating into the central state.

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will contribute to the region's stability," Erdogan's office said.

The two presidents also discussed developments in Gaza, it said, adding Erdogan told Trump that Turkey would continue to work in coordination with its NATO ally, the United States, to achieve peace there.

Erdogan thanked Trump for inviting him to join the Board of Peace, it added.

Trump said earlier on Tuesday that he had a "very good call" with Erdogan, without elaborating, after having told reporters during a briefing prior to the meeting that the discussions were going to be "very important".