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First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

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# QUETTA VOICE

Rs. 10.00 Vol. VII: No. 125

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Tuesday 03, February, 2026



## Chief Minister Balochistan Reviews Progress on Activation of Trauma Centers

**News Desk:**  
Quetta: Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, chaired a high-level review meeting to assess progress on the activation of trauma centers across the province and the enhancement of emergency healthcare services.  
The meeting was attended by Provincial Minister Bakht

Muhammad Kakar, Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, Secretary Health Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Panizai, Secretary Finance Lal Jan Jaffar, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Imran Zarkoon, Secretary Communications and Works Babar Khan, Managing Director Trauma Center Arbab Kamran Kasi, along with other relevant officials Quetta Local Events.  
During the meeting, the Sec-

retary Health briefed the Chief Minister on the newly constructed modern trauma center at Spini Road, Quetta.  
The briefing highlighted that the facility's capacity has been significantly enhanced, with advanced emergency treatment services introduced to ensure immediate medical response in critical situations.  
It was further informed that the clinical network of the trauma

center has been expanded, while additional workforce requirements and budgetary provisions for the center were also discussed in detail.  
Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti directed that the newly constructed trauma center be made operational immediately, emphasizing that merit must be strictly ensured in the recruitment of new staff. He stated that public service, particularly the im-

provement of healthcare facilities, remains a top priority of the provincial government.  
The Chief Minister noted that the activation of the new trauma center would enable the provision of timely and high-quality emergency medical care, thereby helping save precious human lives. He also instructed that the completion of the trauma center at Sheikh Zayed Hospital be expedited at the earliest.

**ATC issues non-bailable warrants for Aleema Khan in Nov 26 protest case**

**NEWS DESK:**  
A Rawalpindi anti-terrorism court on Monday issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Aleema Khan, the sister of incarcerated former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan, after she failed to appear in a case linked to the November 26 protest.  
The court rejected Aleema Khan's request for exemption from appearance, summoned her guarantors and issued notices to them. The case is registered at Saddiqabad Police Station and relates to a protest held at D-Chowk in Islamabad on November 24, 2024.  
The protest followed a "final call" by Imran Khan for nationwide demonstrations demanding restoration of PTI's electoral mandate, the release of jailed party leaders and reversal of the 26th Constitutional Amendment, which he said had empowered a "dictatorial regime".  
Supporters from across the country gathered at D-Chowk. The government ruled out negotiations and launched an operation against protesters, prompting PTI leaders to flee.

## Internet Shutdown Enters Third Day In Various Parts Of Balochistan

**Syed Ali Shah:**  
Internet services remained suspended for the third consecutive day in Balochistan on Monday as authorities imposed heightened security measures following a deadly attack claimed by the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).  
Officials said mobile data and broadband services were shut down as a precautionary security measure, affecting daily life across Quetta and other sensitive districts.  
The prolonged internet outage has disrupted online education, digital businesses, banking transactions, and routine communication, adding to public frustration.  
Security across the provincial capital was placed on high alert, with additional checkpoints established, patrols intensified, and law enforcement personnel deployed at key locations. Several major roads inside Quetta were blocked, causing traffic congestion and restricting movement against protesters, prompting PTI authorities to also sus-



ended train services connecting Balochistan with other parts of the country due to security concerns.  
The halt in rail operations

has left passengers stranded and delayed the transportation of goods.  
Law enforcement agencies said the measures were temporary

and aimed at preventing further attacks and ensuring public safety. However, residents and business owners have urged the government to restore internet

and transport services at the earliest, warning that extended shutdowns are hurting economic activity and deepening public hardship in the province.

## Senate adopts resolution condemning terrorist attacks in Balochistan

**NEWS DESK:**  
The upper house of Parliament on Monday unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the spate of terrorist attacks in Balochistan, while also urging the government to ensure a transparent investigation into the incidents.  
The resolution urged the government to ensure a transparent, swift and conclusive investigation into the incidents, and bring the perpetrators, facilitators, and local and international sponsors of terrorism to justice in accordance with the law. It also called upon the federal and provincial governments to further strengthen intelligence coordination, border security, and counter-terrorism mechanisms, with a special focus on Balochistan.  
The resolution condemned the attacks and offered condolences to the families of the martyrs. It also lauded the courage and sacrifices of the security forces and law enforcement agencies, and reiterated the nation's resolve to foil terrorist attempts. "The unity of the state and the will of the people will prevail over all forces of violence, extremism, and terrorism," the resolution said. It also reaffirmed the Senate's commitment to peace, development and political inclusion in Balochistan, recognising that "sustainable security is inseparable from socio-economic progress, good governance, and respect for constitutional rights".  
As many as 92 terrorists were killed on Saturday as security forces repulsed coordinated attacks by members of banned organisations in parts of the provincial capital and around a dozen other cities and towns across Balochistan, the military's media wing said.  
In a statement, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said terrorists belonging to Indian-sponsored Fitna al Hindustan "attempted to disturb peace of Balochistan" by conducting multiple terrorist activities around Quetta.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

### SBKWU Teacher Recruitment Scandal Raises Alarms for Pakistan's Education System



**Editorial:** Serious questions have emerged over the secondary teachers recruitment process conducted by Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU), triggering widespread concern about merit, transparency, and accountability in Balochistan's education system. It is essential to clarify a point that has caused public confusion: the advertised posts were NOT for SBKWU itself. The university was only assigned the responsibility of conducting tests and interviews for Secondary School Teacher recruitment across Balochistan. According to initial findings, hundreds of candidates who had failed were allegedly declared successful during the teacher recruitment process.

Given the scale of the exercise, involving thousands of applicants for secondary teaching positions across the province, such irregularities cannot reasonably be described as clerical mistakes. The magnitude strongly suggests organised manipulation, carried out with the involvement of influential individuals rather than the actions of a single official. This issue strikes at the heart of education governance in Balochistan. Secondary school teachers shape the academic foundation of students, and any compromise on merit directly damages learning outcomes. In Balochistan, where literacy rates remain among the lowest in the country, flawed teacher recruitment further deepens an already critical education

crisis. Reports that deserving candidates were sidelined only intensify public frustration and mistrust. All anti-corruption and accountability institutions must take immediate notice. A transparent, independent, and time-bound investigation is necessary to identify those responsible for manipulating the recruitment process conducted under SBKWU's authority. Accountability must reach every individual involved, regardless of status or influence. This is not merely an administrative controversy; it is a matter of justice and the future of Balochistan's education system. If credibility in teacher recruitment collapses, public trust in institutions will collapse with it. Balochistan cannot afford silence where integrity is at stake.

## Balochistan's education sector, implementation of article 25-A



Improving the education sector has always been the hallmark of all successive governments in Balochistan. Every government has allocated substantial funds to improve the education sector and quality of education to enable students to compete on national and international level. Health and education, all successive governments declared their priorities. Former Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch led nationalist government allocated around 24 percent budget to bring the province at par with other parts of the country. Dr. Baloch's government also declared emergency and announced implementation of article 25-A of the constitution to enroll all out of school children in Balochistan. The number of out of school children in Balochistan is currently over 1 mil-

lion. However, independent sources put the number high as compared to the official data. There are conflicting figures about the exact number of out of school children in Balochistan. To be precise, positive strides were made during Dr. Malik Baloch led government to improve the education sector. For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools. Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transpar-

ency in the recruitment process. This has ruined the entire education sector. Dr. Malik Baloch, the then adviser on education Sardar Raza Muhammad Bareech led rallies against cheating to create awareness among the people regarding the curse of cheating in educational institutions. After the removal of Sardar Raza Bareech as an adviser on education and transfers of senior bureaucrats Ghulam Ali Baloch and Saboor Kakar, no effective step was taken to improve the quality of education in Balochistan. Now again the portfolio of education has been awarded to Sardar Yaqub Muhammad Rind who belongs to Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI). Mr. Rind has made announcements to bring what he claimed

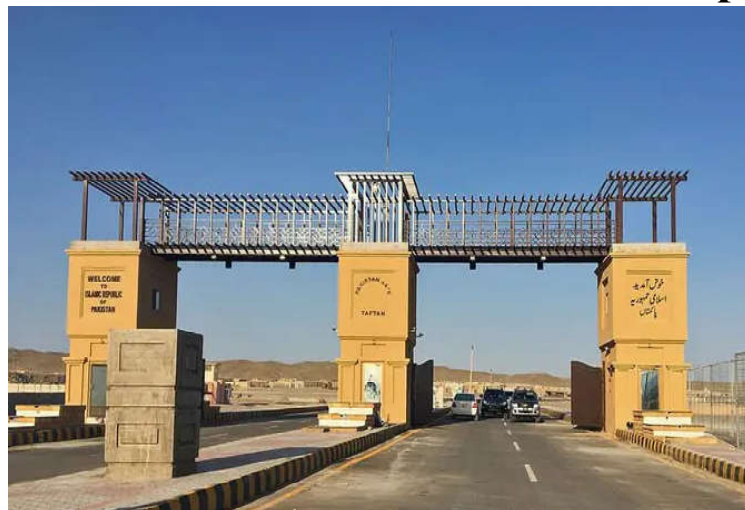
revolutionary changes. However, improvement in education sector, enrolling out of school children in schools and improving quality of education needs a multi-pronged strategy. Senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ali Baloch who had already served as secretary education has again been posted. Mr. Baloch is taking a number of initiatives to improve schooling and trace out ghost schools and teaches across the province. However, political speed breakers appear to be major obstacles in his way. Despite being the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan spends over 70 billion rupees on primary, middle, secondary and higher education in the province. The province spends thousands of rupees per month on a student. Unfortu-

nately, neither the quality nor the education standard meet national standards what to speak about international standards. Poor quality of education is the result of poor capacity of teachers that needs to be improved to compete on national and international level. The Balochistan government has announced to enroll 70000 kids in government run schools in the province. However, ground realities negate claims of the provincial government. So far, the government has not been able to mobilize the civil society, media, political parties and tribesmen to make sure maximum enrollment of kids in educational institutions of the province. Coordinated efforts and combined strategy by all segments of society can ensure implementation of article 25-A of the Constitution.

## Taftan border and Balochistan Govt's response

### Quetta Voice Analysis

The sudden arrival of thousands of Zaireen at Pak-Iran border Taftan posed a serious challenge for government of Balochistan to make sure their screening and conduct medical tests in the aftermath of outbreak of COVID-19 in neighboring Iran. The federal government closed the border with Iran at Taftan on February 23rd to halt the spread of deadly corona virus. All of a sudden over 4,000 Zaireen, students, tourists and traders gathered at Taftan, Pakistan's bordering town with Iran. The poorly equipped health officials that too less in number tried to conduct screening and tests of those entered from Iran. However, many managed to flee from the administration and used their own means of communication to reach Quetta on way to their home provinces. The drivers were paid heavy fares by those fleeing the quarantine centers at Taftan. Perhaps, in the beginning, the Balochistan government and Islamabad did not realize the gravity of situation. A wind-blowing tent quarantine center was established to keep the



Zaireen and others to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, the laboratory to diagnose the deadly disease and conduct tests of novel corona virus could not be arranged at the border soon after the closure of border. The National Institute of Health (NIH) dispatched machinery

and laboratory to conduct the diagnosis 10 days after the closure of the border. Before installation of the laboratory, the health officials used to send tests of suspected patients to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi for diagnosis. Though, it was imperative to install laboratory soon after

the closure of the border to make sure proper screening and diagnosis of the people. Apart from corona virus, the Balochistan government appeared to be concerned about the security of Zaireen as well. In the past, Zaireen were fre-

quently targeted by terrorists on Quetta-Taftan highway. Since then, the Balochistan government has been providing security and law enforcers escort long convoys of buses from Quetta to Taftan all the time. The Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has been closely monitoring the

unfolding situation and all the time directing the concerned quarters to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, loopholes in the system caused the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. Although, the Chief Minister issued statements, precautionary measures through print, elec-

tronic and shares videos on social media to sensitize the people about the deadly virus. Nevertheless, the virus penetrated and made its way from Taftan to Sukkur prompting the Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah to say that Zaireen were not properly screened at Pak-Iran border

Taftan. Opposition political parties in Balochistan in general and the Balochistan National Party ideological, Sanaulah Baloch have strongly criticized the Jam Kamal led government for what they call its failure and incompetency to contain the corona virus. Political parties, members of civil society and legal fraternity had also objected over the establishment of quarantine center at Mian Ghundi area of Quetta. They feared spread of deadly virus after establishment of center near the city rather they demanded of the government to shift the Zaireen to their home provinces directly from Taftan. To be precise, the virus has already penetrated and now it is time for all political parties from left to right and religious to nationalists to join their hands to contain its spread. The government needs to take all stakeholders including political parties, media, civil society and lawyers to evolve a combined strategy in the province to tackle the situation. It is not alone the job of government rather every individual to play his/her role to contain the virus before it is too late.

# Pakistan, Arab states strongly condemn Israel's Gaza ceasefire violations

**NEWS DESK:** The foreign ministers of eight Muslim nations, including Pakistan, have strongly condemned Israel's repeated violations of the ceasefire in Gaza, which have resulted in the killing and injury of more than a thousand Palestinians.

A joint statement issued by Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar said that Israel's actions risk escalating tensions and undermining efforts aimed at consolidating calm and restoring stability, at a time when regional and international parties are working collectively to advance the second phase of US President Donald Trump's peace plan and to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2401.

It added that these repeated violations



constitute a direct threat to the political process and hinder ongoing efforts to create appropriate conditions for transitioning to a more stable phase in the Gaza Strip, both

in terms of security and humanitarian conditions. The statement stressed the necessity of full commitment to ensuring the success of the second phase of

President Trump's peace plan. It also called on all parties to fully uphold their responsibilities during this critical period and to exercise the utmost restraint in

order to preserve and sustain the ceasefire. The nations urged all sides to refrain from any actions that may undermine the current process and to create favorable con-

ditions to move forward toward early recovery and reconstruction. They further stressed advancing the just and lasting peace grounded in the Pales-

stinian right to self-determination and statehood, in accordance with international law, relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

A day ago, Israel carried out its heaviest airstrikes in Gaza in weeks, killing 30 people,

including three children, in attacks on a police station, houses and tents, Palestinian health officials said, Reuters reported.

Hamas, which retains control of just under half of Gaza, said Israel violated the truce.

It did not say whether any of its members or sites were struck in the attacks.

Violence has repeatedly shaken the ceasefire. Israeli fire has killed over 500 people, most of them civilians, according to Gaza health officials.

Reuters reported that Hamas is seeking to incorporate its 10,000 police officers into the new US-backed Palestinian administration for Gaza, a demand likely to be opposed by Israel.

## Trump voices hope for Iran deal

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump said on Sunday he remained hopeful of striking a deal with Iran, even as Tehran warned that any American military attack would ignite a regional war, deepening tensions already strained by weeks of unrest inside the Islamic Republic.

Trump's remarks came after Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, accused the United States of fueling recent anti-government protests and cautioned that a US strike would provoke a far wider conflict.

Speaking to reporters, Trump brushed aside the warning but left the door open to diplomacy. "Hopefully, we'll make a deal. If we don't make a deal, then we'll find out whether or not he was right," he said.

Khamenei described the protests as a "coup", alleging that demonstrators attacked police stations, government buildings, banks and mosques. "The Americans should know that if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war," he said.

He urged Iranians not to be intimidated by Trump's rhetoric. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said mistrust of Washington remained deep but signalled cautious openness to talks if the US pursued what he called a fair and equitable deal focused on preventing nuclear weapons.

The crisis has rever-

berated beyond bilateral ties. The EU has designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organisation, prompting Iran's parliament to retaliate with similar labels against European armies.

Iran protests Iran has been rocked by the biggest protests in years, followed by a heavy security crackdown that residents and rights groups said turned deadly in multiple places. As the unrest spread, the reporting notes competing casualty estimates from officials and outside groups, alongside accounts of mass detentions and a clampdown that eventually appeared to quiet street mobilisation in some areas.

Donald Trump openly encouraged protesters to keep demon-

strating and claiming "help" was coming. He paired that messaging with threats of sweeping "secondary" trade penalties on countries doing business with Iran, and kept the possibility of military action in the mix as the crackdown unfolded.

Militarily, the United States moved a carrier strike group into the region as tensions spiked, while Tehran warned it would retaliate if attacked, including signalling that US bases in the region could be targeted if Washington intervened.

In parallel, Iran issued warnings tied to live-fire activity and drills around the Strait of Hormuz, underlining how quickly the standoff could spill into wider regional and energy-security risk.

Iran's leadership

framed the protests as foreign-stoked and warned an American strike would ignite a broader conflict.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iranians would not be intimidated and that an attack would trigger regional fallout, while Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran was prepared for talks or confrontation, depending on what Washington chose. Trump voiced hope for Iran deal.

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump said on Sunday he remained hopeful of striking a deal with Iran, even as Tehran warned that any American military attack would ignite a regional war, deepening tensions already strained by weeks of unrest inside the Islamic Republic.



## Iranian official says Revolutionary Guards have no plan to hold military exercises in the Gulf

**NEWS DESK:** The naval forces of Iran's Revolutionary Guards have no plan to carry out live-fire exercises in the Strait of Hormuz as reported by some media outlets earlier this week, an Iranian official told Reuters on Sunday.

Iran's state-run Press TV reported on Thursday that the force would carry out the exercises in the Strait of Hormuz on February 1 and February 2.

"There was no plan for the Guards to hold military exercises there and there was no official announcement about it. Only media reports which were wrong," the official said.

EU forces declared "terrorist organizations" Iran's parliament speaker said Sunday that European countries' armed forces are considered "terrorist organizations" under Iranian law, warning that the EU would bear responsibility for the consequences of its actions against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), according to Fars news agency. In remarks during a



parliament session, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said that "under Article 7 of the Law on Countering the Designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a Terrorist Organization, the armies of European countries are considered 'terrorist organizations' under Iranian law."

He added that "the consequences of this action will be the responsibility of the European Union." Meanwhile, Iranian lawmakers wore uniforms of the IRGC during the parliamentary

session in response to what they described as the EU's "hostile action" in designating the IRGC as a terror group.

Ghalibaf criticized what he described as the EU's "irresponsible move" to label the IRGC a "terrorist organization," saying the decision was taken "in line with the directives of the US president (Donald Trump) and leaders of the (Israeli) Zionist regime."

The remarks came after EU foreign ministers reached a political agreement on Thursday

to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, a move announced by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas.

who said the decision was taken in response to what she described as repression by Iranian authorities.

Tensions have escalated between Tehran and Washington in recent weeks, following US President Trump's statements that a "massive armada" was moving toward Iran, alongside his call for Tehran to "come to the table" for negotiations.

## Russian drone strike kills 15 miners in Ukraine



**NEWS DESK:** Fifteen people were killed and seven wounded after a Russian drone struck a bus carrying miners in Ukraine's southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, energy firm DTEK and government officials said on Sunday.

The attack came hours after President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that a second round of US-brokered trilateral talks between Ukraine and

Russia would take place next week.

DTEK said in a statement that Russian forces had carried out a "massive terrorist attack" on a company mine in the region, and that all the dead and wounded were its employees returning from a shift.

"Today, the enemy carried out a cynical and targeted attack on energy sector workers in the Dnipropetrovsk

region," energy minister Denys Shmyhal wrote on the Telegram app.

Strike on maternity hospital Police said the attack took place in the city of Terenivka. Footage posted by the State Emergency Service showed a charred bus with shattered windows that had veered off the road.

Earlier on Sunday, regional officials said at

least nine had been wounded in Russian strikes on a maternity hospital and a residential building in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia.

Sunday's strikes also follow remarks by Zelensky earlier in the day that Russia — which said it had agreed to stop attacking Ukrainian energy infrastructure until Feb 1 — was still targeting logistics in Ukraine.

## China's Spring Festival travel rush begins ahead of Lunar New Year holiday

**NEWS DESK:** China's annual Spring Festival travel rush, 40 days commonly referred to as the world's largest annual human migration, kicked off on Monday ahead of an extended Lunar New Year holiday.

This year's Lunar New Year, ushering in the Year of the Horse in the Chinese zodiac, falls on February 17 and will be accompanied by an extra-long nine-day public holiday in China, running from February 15 to 23.

It's hoped a longer holiday (last year's break was eight days long) might prompt Chinese consumers to boost spending by spending more on travel, meals and more during this festival period.

curity. This said, a state planning official said last week that China expects a record 9.5 billion passenger trips to be made during the travel period, surpassing the 9.02 billion trips made last year.

"Why do I feel it's even more stressful to buy tickets this year compared to last year? For example, the flight back to my home is already sold out," said 32-year-old Liu, a traveller flying out of Guangzhou airport on Monday.

"If you don't buy early, the price range fluctuates a lot, and can even double." Major travel platforms reported Lunar New Year bookings for 2026 already surpassing last year's levels.

According to data from Flight Master, as of mid-January, bookings for domestic flights during the holiday exceeded 4.13 million, up about 21% year-on-year.

Popular outbound destinations are concentrated in Southeast Asia, with those flights accounting for nearly 50% of the total, and Thailand is among the leading destinations.

Following a geopolitical spat between China and Japan late last year, routes to Japan have dropped sharply, down over 40%, according to Flight Master.

Domestically, culturally rich "intangible heritage towns", such as Huangshan in Anhui, Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, Quanzhou in Fujian, Foshan in Guangdong and Zigong in Sichuan have emerged as popular destinations, according to data from online travel agency Qunar.

Many Chinese consumers have been shaken by the country's uncertain economic outlook and would rather save than spend.

Homeowners have seen their assets depreciate in a years-long property market slump, while weaker growth momentum since the pandemic has added to job inse-



# Political activity gears up for AJK Presidency

**MUZAFFARABAD (INP):** Following the death of the President of the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, political activity surrounding the

election of a new president has intensified. Various political and social figures have begun lobbying in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad to secure the constitutional post.

Behind-the-scenes contacts and consultations are also underway as political leaders seek to build consensus on a suitable candidate. Former Speaker of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative As-

sembly Chaudhry Latif Akbar is among the prominent names under consideration. Political sources said the name of former Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir Sardar Atiq

Ahmed Khan is also being discussed as a potential candidate. In addition, former prime ministers Raja Farooq Haider Khan, Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan and Saad

Tanveer Ilyas Khan are also included in the race for the presidency. Sources further said that former President of Azad Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan is also

being considered for the post once again. The name of former Foreign Office spokesperson Ms. Tasneem Aslam has also emerged among the possible candidates.



ISLAMABAD: Director General United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Dr. Khalid El-Enany called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## President, PM call for fair implementation of Indus Waters Treaty

**ISLAMABAD (INP):** President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands. On the occasion of World Wetlands Day, being observed on Monday (Feb 2), the President said Pakistan is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention 1971, which promotes the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources for present and future generations.

He said protecting these ecosystems is not only an environmental responsibility but also a matter of public welfare and national resilience. Asif Zardari said Pakistan remains concerned over unilateral actions by India affecting the Indus Basin Treaty of 1960, a legally binding agreement that has governed equitable water sharing in the Indus Basin for decades.

He said the suspension of treaty mechanisms, including the sharing of hydrological data, undermines trust and predictability when climate pressures require greater cooperation. The President said water must never be used as a tool of coercion and the weaponization of water as an instrument of war against Pakistan must be rejected, as the disruption of river flows threatens millions of lives, livelihoods, and food systems in a country reliant on the Indus Basin.

In his message, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan strongly rejects any attempt to use water as a weapon of war, deeming it a serious violation of international law. He said Pakistan, while adhering to international laws, believes in the full and fair implementation of the Indus Water Treaty 1960. The Prime Minister said Pakistan will continue to raise its voice globally for the fair, legal and peaceful use of water resources between countries. Shehbaz Sharif emphasized that our water resources, including lakes and glaciers, inland water bodies and coastal and mangrove biodiversity, are crucial for environmental conservation, climate change mitigation and water management.

## Basant fever grips Lahore, kite markets buzz

**LAHORE (INP):** The magic of Basant is in full swing across Lahore, with festive colors, kites and celebration filling the air. From inner-city streets to posh neighbourhoods, enthusiasm runs high despite growing concerns over soaring prices. Mochi Gate has turned into the city's busiest Basant marketplace as citizens flock in large numbers to buy kites and strings. Shops are packed, long queues have formed, and people from far-flung areas have also arrived to purchase Basant goods. Windows of kite shops have reportedly broken under the rush, highlighting both the excitement and the pressure on the markets. Citizens have complained that purchasing kites and strings has become a major challenge due to inflation. Many said they were shocked after hearing the rates and appealed to the administration to control prices. According to buyers, one taawa kite is selling for around Rs400,

while one-and-a-half taawa costs about Rs600. Elsewhere in the market, one taawa kite is available for Rs300 to Rs350, while one-and-a-half taawa kite ranges from Rs400 to Rs450. The cost of kite strings has particularly troubled youth and families. Two-piece pinna is being sold for Rs8,000 to Rs10,000, while 200-piece string reportedly cost as much as Rs12,000. Despite the expense, many young Lahoris say they will still fly kites. "No matter how much inflation there is, Basant will be celebrated," some said, adding that the joy of the festival outweighs the costs. Preparations for Basant are in full swing across Lahore, with colorful Basant signboards decorating the city's main highways. Organizers are also in the final stages of preparing what is being described as the largest kite in history, set to be flown at Liberty Chowk. The district administration says efforts are underway to complete all arrangements as quickly as possible. Basant fever has spread from old Lahore to upscale localities, creating a festive atmosphere and a "sky of happiness." Historic Barid Khana Haveli has been painted in Basant colours, while songs are being shot, dupattas dyed and matching jewelry and Basant-themed clothing are in high demand. Singer Mazhar Rahi has also prepared a special Bhangra song to mark the occasion. Mian Yousuf Salauddin said Basant has deep cultural roots, noting that Allama Iqbal was also a Basant enthusiast. He said Iqbal loved lappa kites and even had them specially prepared. According to Salauddin, Basant has a positive impact on the economy, benefiting artisans, traders and performers across the city. Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari said the Punjab government has set clear rules and regulations for Basant celebrations. She said traffic police have

provided one million safety rods, while electric buses, rickshaws and taxis will offer free travel to the public for three days of Basant. She added that an awareness campaign is ongoing to promote precautionary measures and SOPs, with district administration teams strictly enforcing the rules. Bukhari said special QR codes have been affixed on strings, every kite and basket, allowing authorities to maintain complete data of sellers and buyers. Police, district administration and relevant institutions are jointly ensuring implementation of regulations. She urged citizens to take precautionary measures and celebrate Basant responsibly. The minister credited Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for giving people the opportunity to celebrate a beautiful festival like Basant after 25 years. She said "100% credit" for reviving Punjab's culture goes to Maryam Nawaz.

with pride," he remarked. He emphasized that the construction, development and public welfare have always been the foundation of the PML-N politics, adding that politics should be constructive and focused on resolving, but equal attention was also given to the promotion of education in the area. Attaulah Tarar said that the establishment of Khawaja Saad Rafiq Shaheed College for boys and Rabia Basri College for girls on Walton Road clearly reflects the vision and commitment. "When we see educational institutions started alongside improved roads and infrastructure, it fills us

## PM stresses wetlands conservation as key to climate resilience and social welfare

**LAHORE (INP):** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has emphasized that the conservation of wetlands is not merely an environmental obligation to counter climate change, but also a vital guarantee of social welfare at both individual and collective levels. In his message on World Wetlands Day, observed on February 2, 2026, the Prime Minister said the day provides Pakistan and the international community with an opportunity to renew their commitment to the sustainable conservation and management of wetlands. He noted that Pakistan was a party to the 1971 Convention on Wetlands, which under-

scores the importance of the wise use of wetlands for humanity and the protection of their natural resources. The Prime Minister highlighted that wetlands played a crucial role in helping countries confront serious environmental and economic challenges, as they provide protection against droughts, floods, and the impacts of extreme climate change. He said Pakistan's wetlands, including lakes and glaciers, inland wetlands, and coastal and marine ecosystems, were essential for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and effective water management. He further stated that wetlands were a

source of livelihood and an integral part of daily life for millions of Pakistanis. Their degradation, he warned, leads to loss of livelihoods, and increase in food prices at the national level, and greater vulnerability to floods and droughts. Referring to Pakistan's commitment to international obligations, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the country firmly believed in the full and fair implementation of the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960. He added that any attempt to use water as a weapon of war was a grave violation of international law and was strongly rejected by Pakistan. Calling for collective action, the Prime

Minister urged the nation to renew its pledge, both individually and collectively, to recognize wetlands as invaluable national, environmental, social, and cultural assets and to make concerted efforts for their protection. He also stated that at the global level, the Government of Pakistan would continue to raise its voice for the fair, lawful, and peaceful use of water resources among nations. This year, World Wetlands Day was being observed under the theme, "Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Safeguarding Cultural Heritage," which highlights the cultural context and significance of wetlands. Smoking is already recognized by the World Health Organization as the leading cause of preventable premature deaths worldwide, responsible for more than eight million deaths each year. While scientists have long suspected a link between smoking and mental health problems, the biological and social mechanisms behind this connection remain unclear. To explore this further, researchers examined how smoking intensity and the length of time since quitting influenced depression risk. The study involved nearly 174,000 participants aged between 19 and 72, with women making up half of the group. Participants were categorized as never-smokers (around 82,000), former smokers (88,000), and current smokers (34,000).

## Pakistan launches first anti polio campaign of 2026

**ISLAMABAD (INP):** Pakistan has officially launched its first National Polio Eradication Campaign of 2026, marking a renewed nationwide effort to eliminate the virus. The campaign was inaugurated in Islamabad with strong backing from both local leadership and international partners. The inauguration ceremony was held at the Rawal Town Dispensary in Islamabad, where Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Ayesha Raza Farooq, formally launched the campaign. She, along with the Canadian high commissioner, administered polio drops to children, symbolizing the start of the nationwide drive. Addressing the ceremony, Ayesha Raza Farooq said Pakistan is

fighting the "last battle" against polio and emphasized that just two drops of vaccine can save a child's life. She stressed that boosting the morale of frontline teams is essential to achieving complete eradication. Ayesha Raza Farooq highlighted the importance of collective national responsibility, urging parents, teachers, religious scholars and citizens from all walks of life to actively contribute to the campaign's success. She also acknowledged and thanked the Government of Canada for its continued cooperation in Pakistan's anti-polio efforts. This campaign cannot succeed without public trust and participation," she noted, adding that community support remains the backbone of the polio eradication drive.

## Smoking linked to higher risk of depression

**ISLAMABAD (INP):** A major new study from Germany has found that people who smoke or have smoked in the past are significantly more likely to experience depression compared with those who have never smoked. The research, conducted by the Central Institute of Mental Health (CIMH) in Mannheim, analyzed data from the German National Cohort, the country's largest population-based health study. The findings were published in the journal BMC Public Health. According to the study, the risk of depression rises with the number of cigarettes smoked per day. Researchers also found encouraging evidence that quitting smoking can reduce this risk over time, with longer periods of abstinence linked to a lower likelihood of depression.

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MULLAN: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, visited Nishtar Hospital Multan and addressed the media after being briefed by the Administration of the Hospital.

## Educational development always remain commitment of PML(N) alongside major infrastructure projects: Tarar

**LAHORE (INP):** Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar has said that educational development has always remained a long-standing commitment of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), alongside major infrastructure projects. Addressing a political gathering in constituency NA-127 on Sunday, along with former Federal Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique, Attaulah Tarar lauded the development initiatives carried out in the Walton area under the leadership of Khawaja Saad Rafique, terming them a model of constructive politics and dedicated public service. Welcoming

Khawaja Saad Rafique, the minister recalled that Walton was once considered a neglected part of the city. He said it was a significant achievement that not only issues related to streets, water supply, sewage and tube wells were resolved, but equal attention was also given to the promotion of education in the area. Attaulah Tarar said that the establishment of Khawaja Saad Rafiq Shaheed College for boys and Rabia Basri College for girls on Walton Road clearly reflects the vision and commitment. "When we see educational institutions started alongside improved roads and infrastructure, it fills us

with pride," he remarked. He emphasized that the construction, development and public welfare have always been the foundation of the PML-N politics, adding that politics should be constructive and focused on resolving, but equal attention was also given to the promotion of education in the area. Attaulah Tarar said that the establishment of Khawaja Saad Rafiq Shaheed College for boys and Rabia Basri College for girls on Walton Road clearly reflects the vision and commitment. "When we see educational institutions started alongside improved roads and infrastructure, it fills us

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DU BAI: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and HRD, Chaudhry Saif Hussain, meeting with H.E. Rabab Abdullahi-Osaini, Director-General of Kuwaiti's Public Authority for Manpower, on the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue 2026.



## The deadly cost of ignoring fire safety

**NEWS DESK:** It was one of Karachi's busiest commercial centres, especially for wedding garments and wholesale goods. No more. Gul Plaza burned to the ground in a few short hours on the night of January 17, 2026. It took with it the lives of at least 73 people.

This is a tragedy that has shaken not just the people of Karachi but all of Pakistan. What makes the catastrophe especially heart-rending is that it was entirely avoidable.

Gul Plaza has brought into sharp focus the issue of building codes in Pakistan, especially as they relate to fire safety. The fact is, contrary to what most people may think, that Pakistan does have a robust fire safety code.

The core document is entitled Building Code of Pakistan - Fire Safety Provisions 2016 (FSP2016). This is Pakistan's national fire safety code, issued by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in the United States.

It is legally binding and applies to all new buildings, all existing buildings (with phased compliance), and all public and private construction.

FSP2016 is closely aligned with the international fire standard



known as NFPA 1. This is the Fire Code published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in the United States.

It is a comprehensive, globally adopted, integrated fire safety code that brings together requirements from more than 130 other NFPA standards to create a single, enforceable

framework for fire prevention, building safety, and hazard management.

Let us look at some of the core requirements covered by Pakistan's FSP2016.

It mandates fire protection systems such as automatic sprinklers, fire hydrants, hose reels, fire extinguishers, fire pumps and water storage, as well as fire alarm

and detection systems. It requires that a means of exiting the building quickly in a fire emergency must be assured.

This includes the number and width of exits, travel distances to the nearest exit, fire-rated staircases, emergency lighting and signage.

It requires standards for building con-

struction such as fire-resistant walls, floors and doors,

compartmentation, and fire barriers around ducts and cables to prevent the spread of fire. It mandates special measures for smoke control, which is how most people died in the Gul Plaza tragedy.

These measures include smoke extraction,

stairwell pressurisation to prevent the ingress of smoke into these vital

escape routes, and automatic shutdown of air conditioning to prevent the system from spreading smoke to other parts of the building.

In the case of Gul Plaza, several overlapping failures turned the fire into one of the deadliest building fires in

Pakistan's recent history.

When you look at the pattern, it is not one single cause - it is a cascade of structural, regulatory and operational breakdowns that left people with almost no chance of escape. Let us look at some of the main causes. The building was a multi-storey vertical trap.

It had narrow inter-

nal corridors, congested shop layouts, limited ventilation and heavy combustible stock such as clothing, plastics and packaging. Once the fire started, smoke quickly filled the upper floors. Most victims died from smoke inhalation, not burns.

Exits were blocked, locked or insufficient. Multiple reports in the press mentioned locked exits and blocked staircases that obstructed escape routes.

This was compounded by the absence of functional emergency fire exits. Blocked exits turn a building into a sealed container. People on upper floors had no viable escape path.

There was no sprinkler system. A functioning sprinkler system would have controlled the fire early, prevented flashover, kept smoke at survivable levels and given people time to escape.

But Gul Plaza, despite being a high-risk commercial building, had no automatic sprinklers. This single factor dramatically increased the death toll. No working fire alarm or early warning system was in place. Survivors reported that there was no audible fire alarm, no evacuation announcement and no coordinated response.

## Gold falls \$215 per ounce as prices slide for third straight session

**NEWS DESK:** Gold and silver prices continued to decline for a third straight session in international and domestic markets on Monday.

In the international bullion market, gold prices fell sharply by \$215 per ounce to \$4,676. In Pakistan's local market, the price of gold per tola dropped by Rs21,500 to Rs490,262, while the price of 10 grams declined by Rs18,433 to Rs420,406.

Silver prices also registered losses, with the price per tola falling by Rs60 to Rs8,504. The price of 10 grams of silver declined by Rs5 to Rs7,205.

Spot silver fell over 6% to \$78.90 an ounce on Monday. It hit a

record high of \$121.64 on Thursday before touching a near one-month low on Friday.

Earlier on Saturday, gold and silver prices recorded a further decline in international and domestic markets, reflecting a sharp downturn in bullion rates. In the international bullion market, gold prices fell by \$255 per ounce to \$4,895.

The decline was mirrored in the local market, where the price of gold per tola dropped by Rs21,862 to settle at Rs438,839. Silver prices also moved lower, with the per tola rate declining by Rs2,063 to Rs8,006, while the price

of 10 grams of silver fell by Rs21,862 to Rs7,211.

On Friday, Pakistan suffered a bloodbath as gold prices dropped over Rs35,000, mirroring a steep correction in international markets where gold, silver and copper tumbled after touching record highs earlier in the week. The downturn was driven by panic profit-taking as investors rushed to lock in gains amid fading expectations of aggressive US

interest rate cuts and a strengthening US dollar. In the local market, the price of gold per tola plunged by Rs35,500 to settle at Rs337,362, while 10-grams of gold dropped by Rs30,435 to Rs460,701, according to rates released by the All-Pakistan Gems and Jewellers Association (APGISA).

The sharp fall marked a dramatic reversal from Thursday, when gold surged to Rs72,862 per tola after a massive single-day gain of Rs2,200.

Silver also came under heavy pressure, with prices declining by Rs1,066 to Rs11,069 per tola, reflecting the broader sell-off across precious metals.

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan is halfway into the ongoing \$7 billion 36-month long Extended Fund Facility (EFF) approved in October 2024 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) board.

This austerity programme like all previous IMF programmes is causing jitters across Pakistan's political and media landscape. Former and current ministers including economic commentators are openly blaming the IMF-mandated policies for being anti-growth and worsening the country's financial health and increasing social distress. Recently, even the SIFC national coordinator said that the country's growth plan was "missing" and that "we have made a mess of our fiscal situation".

This does not come as a surprise to a supply-side economist. Economics is all about incentives and economic policy is about the right policy choices. Anti-growth IMF programmes have always centered on raising taxes and/or

spurring tax rate reductions, balancing the budget at all costs by

setting unrealistic and unachievable tax collection targets, devaluing the currency and increasing interest rates.

These wrongheaded policies delivered with brutal IMF diktats are anti-growth and espouse only slow-growth stabilisation. Macroeconomic stabilisation at the expense of high growth is based on a false premise. Those who advocate stabilisation set a benchmark for debt sustainability, foreign exchange reserves, primary budget surplus and

tax revenue targets.

Pro-growth advocates focus on a set of supply-side economic policies: low tax rates on a broad tax base, govern-

ment spending restraint, free trade, sound money, deregulation and privatisation. These policies are the six pillars of sustainable economic growth. GDP growth has shown to be powerful in improving the lives of all classes of citizens, whereas a low GDP

stabilisation set a benchmark for debt sustainability, foreign exchange reserves, primary budget surplus and

of Pakistan.

Unless and until Pakistan embarks on a supply-side economic growth agenda, we will continue to see this vicious cycle and surely this will not be our last IMF programme. The six pillars for economic growth are the ideal policies for sustainable growth and each has a degree of importance.

Taxation The goal of taxation is to have a tax system that collects the requisite revenue to fund government while doing the least damage to the economy. The best

structure of taxation is to have the lowest possible tax rate on the broadest possible tax base. The lowest possible tax rates provide the least incentives for people and businesses to avoid, evade, or otherwise not report taxable income.

Furthermore, there should be no deductions, exemptions, exclusions, credits and other omissions and preferences (ie. SRBs, etc).

Evidence shows that inherently excessive taxes are not paid. High tax rates inevitably put pressure on the taxpayer to withdraw his capital from business and invest in non-productive assets (ie. property etc). The more taxes increase, the more they undermine the market economy. Every specific tax as well as a nation's whole tax system becomes self-defeating above a certain height of tax rates. Spending restraint Government Expenditure should be limited to provide products and services that the government alone produces more efficiently than the private sector.

The role of government is to spend its revenues in a way that produces more than the private sector. The role of government is to spend its revenues in a way that produces more than the private sector.

## KSE-100 rebounds after early sell-off to close over 800 points up

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's benchmark index, KSE-100, rebounded late afternoon on Monday after a dip in early intraday trading to close in the green, up 0.48 per cent from its last close.

The index closed at 185,057.83 points, an increase of 893.35 points from its previous close of 184,174.48 points. Trading volumes remained healthy at 215.8 million at a value of Rs28,594 billion.

The index had been down 0.18 per cent from its previous close of 184,174.48 points at 11:20am, rebounding slightly to 183,840.03 points. However, by 3:00pm, KSE-100 had recovered to the 185,135 level, up 960 points (advancing 0.52pc) from last week's close.

The early drop came on the heels of a particularly turbulent week for Pakistan's equities market.

The index lost over 6,000 points last Thursday after the

State Bank of Pakistan kept interest rates unchanged.

The index had rebounded slightly to close in the green on Friday.

On Monday, the top active stocks were led by First National Equities Limited, with a volume of 191,182,675, down 6.78pc to Rs1.65, followed by Hasco Petroleum Limited with a volume of 51,506,799, down 2.15pc to Rs25.92, and K-Electric Limited, with a volume of

38,314,192 up 0.14pc to Rs7.11. Earlier, Shoab Memon, executive vice president of equities at AKD Securities, said the reaction of the central bank's decision to maintain the key policy rate at 10.5pc should have a "short-term" negative reaction, and that even within US-Iran geopolitical tensions, "positive sentiment" would prevail.

According to a technical analysis from brokerage firm Arif Habib Limited, last week's setup sets a "renewed attempt to break above the recently established resistance zone of 184,570-185,625 points".

The firm also noted that a breakout above this band would open the door for a test of the next major resistance area at 186,125-186,700 points.

Additionally, "immediate support is seen between 183,700 and 182,200" and "a clear breach below this range would reinforce bearish pressure and could lead to further declines".

## NFC hits pause as working groups fail to meet

**NEWS DESK:** After its inaugural meeting almost two months ago amid much fanfare, the National Finance Commission (NFC) has seemingly gone into hibernation as its second session, originally scheduled for the second week of January, is still not in sight.

Informed sources told that NFC's eight technical working groups have also failed to get off the ground. Only two of these groups have met just once over the past two months, while the remaining six have yet to convene at all, since their official notification in the second week of December.

Following the conclusion of the first meeting on Dec 4, representatives from the Ministry of Finance and the provinces had announced that the second NFC meeting was scheduled to take place between Jan 8 and Jan 15, which was meant to kick off a series of regular monthly meetings until the commission finalised its recommendations for the 11th

NFC award after a gap of more than 15 years.

These sources said the only group that started quickly after its notification was the one focused on the merger of ex-federally adminis-

tered tribal areas (Fata) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and how that merger affects the province's share in the NFC award. Led by KP's Finance Minister Muzammil Aslam, the group, acting on a demand from the Punjab government, asked the federal finance secretary to provide working details showing how the ex-Fata share would cut into the share of other provinces. More than

seven weeks later, the technical group is still waiting for those details before it can call its second session.

Another group — on divisible pool taxes — led by Finance Min-

ister Muhammad Aungzeb, met once in the final days of January for initial discussions. That group is tasked with formulating recommendations on whether to include any new tax in the divisible pool of resources or exclude any existing one from the pool. The centre has been looking at the legal and constitutional reasoning for removing customs duty from the list of taxes that are

shared with the provinces on the argument that international trade is a purely federal subject.

None of the six other groups have held any interaction so far, reflecting little enthusi-



# 'Not an ideal situation': Cricketers, politicians react to Pakistan boycotting India match in T20 World Cup

**NEWS DESK:**The government of Pakistan on Sunday gave the nod to the cricket team for participating in the upcoming T20 World Cup 2026, but said team will not play its match with arch-rivals India, scheduled to be held on Feb 15 in Colombo.

The development came after uncertainty loomed over the country's participation in the tournament following Bangladesh's withdrawal amid tensions with India, which is one of the co-hosts of the tournament.

A government source told Dawn that Pakistan had refused to play against India to express solidarity with Bangladesh, which had been dropped from the tournament after refusing to play in India.

According to the government source, the primary reason for boycotting the match with India was the ICC's "biased decision" towards Bangladesh. In response to the development,



even before the official communication from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), the International Cricket Council (ICC), in a statement, mentioned

the position of "selective participation is difficult to reconcile with the fundamental premise of a global sporting event where all qualified

teams are expected to compete on equal terms per the event schedule". Here is what athletes, politicians, and journalists had to say

about the development: Former Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi, in a post on X, termed the development "regrettable" but voiced sup-

port for the government's decision nonetheless. "I've always believed cricket can open doors when politics closes them. It's

regrettable that Pakistan won't play India at the #T20WorldCup, but I stand behind my government's decision", Afridi said.

"This is the moment for ICC to lead and prove through decisions, not statements, that it is impartial, independent and fair to every member," he added.

Former cricketer Muhammad Hafeez also took to X to express disappointment at the development.

He stated that the current tensions began with "no handshake from India" — in a reference to the September controversy where the Indian team refused to shake hands with their rivals at the toss and after an Asia Cup match.

"Not an ideal situation for fans of cricket. Worried," Hafeez added. Former Pakistan batsman Muhammad Yousuf was of the opinion that the government had taken a "tough but necessary stand".

"Principles must come before commercial interests."

The 'selective' influence in world cricket needs to end for the game to truly be global.

## San Siro prepares for last dance with Winter Olympics' opening ceremony

**NEWS DESK:**One of the world's most famous stadiums is set for a last hurrah on the international stage with the opening ceremony of the 2026 Winter Olympics at the San Siro on Friday.

Long considered one of the temples of football, the San Siro will introduce the Milan-Cortina Games to the world with a ceremony featuring an athletes' parade held in all four "clusters" of sprawling Olympics being held across a vast area of northern Italy.

But the iconic old ground is on course to be replaced by a shiny new arena after a century of hosting Inter Milan and AC Milan matches.

In September the local government of Italy's economic capital approved a 197-million-euro (\$229.5 million) sale

of just over 28 hectares (70 acres) of public land, on which the San Siro sits, to the two clubs.

Inter and AC Milan will abandon the iconic ground once their new stadium is built, the idea being that it be finished in time to host matches at the 2032 European Championship to be jointly held in Italy and Turkey.

The two Milan clubs — European football royalty now both owned by American investment funds — are planning the construction of a modern 71,500-capacity stadium to be inaugurated with a derby match between Inter and AC Milan on September 19, 1926 and over the years it has hosted World Cup and European Championship matches, as well as dozens of fixtures for the Italian national team.

Initially owned by AC Milan before being bought by the city in the

1930s, with Inter making it their home in 1947, the San Siro has been renovated several times, with the last major works being carried out ahead of the 1990 World Cup.

That 'restyling', which added a third tier to the stadium, gave the San Siro the futuristic look — with spiralling external columns and a striking red roof — that still catches the eye over three decades later.

The San Siro also doubles up as one of Italy's premier concert venues, where some of the world's biggest pop music stars have strutted their stuff since reggae icon Bob Marley became the first in 1980.

From the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, right up to contemporary superstars Beyonce and Taylor Swift, the stadium attracts massive crowds for summertime performances from international hit machines and local favourites like Grammy-winning rock band Maneskin.

The new stadium should be built as scheduled by the end of 2030, but with a final project a long way from being approved by the city, nothing is certain, especially with local elections coming next year.

Politicians on the local and national stage have repeatedly expressed anger at the idea of knocking down a symbol of Milan and in 2023 succeeded in torpedoing a previous attempt by the clubs to build a new stadium on the same site.



**NEWS DESK:**Novak Djokovic leaves the Australian Open still stuck on 24 Grand Slam titles and with fresh doubts about how many more titles he will have at winning an outright record 25th.

The 38-year-old has consistently dismissed talk of retirement and said he is eyeing the defence of his Olympic gold at the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

But after losing to Carlos Alcaraz in four sets in the final on Sunday, the Serb suggested he may not be back in Melbourne.

God knows what happens tomorrow, let alone in six months or 12 months," he told the crowd at Rod Laver Arena.

"So it has been a great ride. I love you guys."

Djokovic has won a record 10 Australian Opens and until Sunday had never lost a final there.

But for all his success, Djokovic has not always had an easy relationship with the Melbourne fans.

"I want to just say in the end that you guys, particularly the last couple of matches, gave me something that I have never experienced in Australia," he said.

That much love, support, positivity I tried to give you back with good tennis over the years."

It had the ring of a farewell speech and did not appear to have been just an emotional response to defeat.

He said he had prepared two speeches,

## Novak Djokovic hints at retirement

one for winning and the other for losing.

Djokovic won his 24th Grand Slam title at the US Open in 2023, drawing his level with the Australian Margaret Court at the top of the all-time list.

But age and injuries, plus the emergence of world number one Alcaraz and number two Jannik Sinner, have left him unable to win another.

Before Sunday, his previous Grand Slam final had been in 2024, when he lost the Wimbledon decider, again to Alcaraz.

Last year he reached the semi-finals of all four majors but got no further, with Alcaraz and Sinner sharing the spoils.

He rolled back the years to defeat Sinner — 14 years his junior — in a five-set semi-final marathon in Melbourne.

But after Djokovic

won the first set, the 22-year-old Alcaraz took a stranglehold on the final set to sweep to victory 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

Underlining where Djokovic is now in the pecking order of men's tennis, he admitted he had not expected to reach another major final.

"I always believe" — the former world number one was going to win that elusive 25th, he may reflect that he has seen his best remaining chance come and go.

He is the undisputed king of Melbourne Park and Rod Laver Arena is the court where he has had the most success.

The fourth seed enjoyed two big pieces of luck in reaching the semi-finals.

Djokovic enjoyed free passage through the fourth round when Jakub Mensik pulled out with injury.

He was then facing

defeat at two sets down to Lorenzo Musetti, only for the Italian fifth seed to retire injured.

He rolled back the years to beat Sinner and make the final, but a repeat success so soon after playing five sets was beyond him.

"Overall, for sure it's been a fantastic tournament," he said.

"I knew that I'd probably have to beat two of them (Alcaraz and Sinner) on the way to the title."

"I beat one, which is great, so it's a step more further than I have gone in Grand Slams than last year."

"Very nice, encouraging. But, you know, not enough for me."

So what next for one of the all-time greats?

For whatever time is left, he won't give up on that 25th Grand Slam crown, even if the odds are now stacked against him.



## Arsenal hoist first Women's Champions Cup

**NEWS DESK:**Arsenal's Caitlin Foord struck in extra time to power them to victory in the inaugural Women's Champions Cup on Sunday, defeating Brazil's Corinthians 3-2 in a rain-soaked final at the Emirates Stadium.

Reigning Champions League winners Arsenal looked set to seal the title in normal time, leading 2-1 before Viea-Bouquique converted a 96th-minute penalty to force extra time.

Olivia Smith and Lotte Wubbens-Moy also scored for Renee Slegers' team before Foord beat goalkeeper Lele at her near post in the 104th minute to earn a dramatic winner over the Copa Libertadores champions in front of a crowd that included FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

"It's not often that at Arsenal you can write history because history has been written so many times," Wubbens-Moy told Sky Sports. "We stand on the shoulders of giants. To come to this inaugural competition and win it



and do it with all of our fans here in style — our fans are wonderful and that's who we do it for.

"To win the first silverware this year is a big leap forward. We want more. Stick with us, 2026 has more to come."

As the winners of FIFA's new interconti-

ental tournament featuring champions from all six confederations, Arsenal will collect a \$2.3 million prize.

The one negative on the night was Arsenal's goalkeeper Anneke Borbe being carried off on a stretcher following a collision

with teammate Wubbens-Moy late in extra time.

The timing of the tournament favoured Arsenal, who are in the midst of their Women's Super League season, while Corinthians are in their pre-season and CONCACAF Champions Cup winners

Gotham FC are in their off-season.

Arsenal had thrashed Moroccan champions AS FAR 6-0 in Wednesday's semi-finals, while Corinthians had edged Gotham, of the National Women's Soccer League, 1-0 in the other semi.

## Real Madrid scrape win over Rayo

**NEWS DESK:**Kylian Mbappe stayed calm to roll home a 100th-minute penalty and claim Real Madrid a 2-1 win over nine-man Rayo Vallecano on Sunday in a spicy La Liga derby clash.

Elsewhere Athletic Bilbao struck late to secure a 1-1 Basque derby draw against Real Sociedad and Real Betis rose to fifth with a 2-1 win at Valencia.

Los Blancos cut Barcelona's lead back to one point at the top of the table after the Spanish draw against Real Elche on Saturday.

Vinicius Junior scored early on for Madrid after Jude Bellingham limped off with a hamstring injury which is expected to keep him out for around a month.

Jorge de Frutos pulled Rayo level early in the second half as Madrid fans showed their anger at their team following the midweek Champions League defeat at Benfica.

After Pathe Ciss's red card tilted the game in Madrid's favour, Mbappe netted from the spot at the death for his 22nd La Liga goal this season.

Pep Chavarría was also sent off in the final stages for Rayo, 17th, who took a shaky Madrid to the wire before falling short.

Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said it would take time before the team could become more consistent, having had six games at the helm since replacing Xabi Alonso. "I'm not Gandalf the White," the Madrid coach told reporters, referring to the fictional wizard from Arbeloa and Mbappe ahead of the game.

Vinicius, who was targeted and trolled the hosts ahead in the 15th minute with a fine individual goal.

Los Blancos were in charge but despite taking the lead, their fans were not appeased, Madrid had to play better than other teams to

beat opponents, because of their illustrious name. "This is Real Madrid, and to beat Rayo Vallecano we need to do more than the rest of the teams in La Liga," he continued. The coach said Bellingham would be a "big absence" for the matches ahead after he limped off early, including the Champions League play-off games against Jose Mourinho's Benfica — again.

After the defeat in Portugal stopped Madrid reaching the last 16 directly, the Santiago Bernabeu crowd was in unforfeiting mood and whistled their own players, despite appeals from Arbeloa and Mbappe ahead of the game.

"What I want from my players is what I'm seeing commitment, attitude, mentality, knowing that to win each game quality is not enough, consistency is key... we will work on that."

Arbeloa said Madrid had to play better than other teams to



## Pakistan launches first polio vaccination drive of 2026

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's first polio vaccination campaign of the current year was launched on Monday across the country.

The nationwide drive is being held from February 2 to February 5 in most cities, while Sindh is conducting a week-long campaign until February 8. Strict security measures have been taken in various districts, keeping in view past attacks on polio teams. First Lady Aseefa Bhutto-Zardari, in a post on X, said, "The first nationwide polio vaccination drive of 2026 is underway, with health workers going door to door." This campaign is a vital step towards protecting our children and eliminating polio for good.

The Sindh CM also requested those "who have any kind of influenza or other diseases, such as teachers, elected representatives at the town, municipality, or assembly level, and politicians. The chief minister also requested religious scholars to play their role in showing up public confidence in polio vaccination." The World Health Organisation (WHO) has certified that these drops do not cause any disease.

Murad pointed out, "This disease is so contagious that it can spread from one place to another if not eradicated. That is why the entire world has its eyes on Pakistan and Afghanistan," he added.

The campaign in Sindh will cover 1,490 union councils across 30 districts during which oral polio vaccine drops will be administered to a total of 10.5 million children, including 8.9m children in the province.

CM Murad said 80,000 frontline workers would visit all neighbourhoods and added that they would be supported by more than 21,000 law enforcement personnel, including over 1,000 female police constables.

"It is my request to all parents that they administer polio drops to their children aged below five and save them from this debilitating

disease," the chief minister said.

CM Murad went on to urge parents to visit their nearest basic health unit if a polio team did not come to their house. They could also alert the assistant or deputy commissioner that a team had not visited, he added.

"It is a cause of shame for us that there are only two countries in the world where this disease can be found — Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said.

However, he added, vaccination was the only way to get rid of it.

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## Militant violence surges in January after December lull: PICSS

**NEWS DESK:** After a noticeable decline in violence in December 2025, the first month of the new year witnessed a renewed surge in anti-state violence, leading to higher fatalities among militants, civilians and security personnel, according to official statistics.

Data released by the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) shows that combat-related deaths in January 2026 rose by 43 per cent compared to December 2025.

During the month, 242 militants were killed, while 73 civilians and 46 security force personnel lost their lives. Twelve militants were injured, while at least 71 civilians and 52 security personnel were also wounded.

PICSS reported that January saw 87 militant attacks nationwide, marking a 28pc increase from the 68 attacks recorded in December 2025. Of these, 38 attacks took

place in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 20 in the province's tribal districts (erstwhile Fata), 27 in Balochistan and two in Punjab.

Balochistan emerged as the primary theatre of militant activity as well as security operations. The province reported the highest monthly militant toll since the current wave of militancy began there in 2001.

Although Balochistan experienced relative calm for much of the month, violence escalated sharply during the final two days. Simultaneous attacks by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), on at least 12 locations, followed by intensified security force operations, brought the province into sharp focus.

The month reported at least three suicide attacks, two of them in Balochistan and claimed by the BLA. The province witnessed the deaths of at least 172 terror-

ists, most of them during the final two days of January.

Compared to the previous month, civilian deaths increased by 143pc, militant deaths by 35pc and security force fatalities by seven per cent.

Security forces arrested at least 60 suspected militants during the month, while militant groups kidnapped eight individuals.

Punjab reported only two militant attacks; however, security forces carried out a coordinated crackdown across central Punjab, including Lahore, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Mianwali.

At least 53 suspected militants were arrested, 48 of them from Lahore. Analysts say these arrests likely disrupted a major militant buildup aimed at targeting the city.

No militant attacks were reported in January from Sindh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Islamabad or Gilgit-Baltistan.

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## In meeting with CM Afridi, PM emphasises need for cooperation between Centre, KP govt

**NEWS DESK:** In his first meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Shehbaz Afridi, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday emphasised the need for cooperation between the Centre and the KP government.

The two leaders met at the PM House in Islamabad. During the meeting, which CM Afridi said was held at the premier's invitation, the two discussed issues related to KP's finances and counterterrorism.

According to a statement reported by state broadcaster PTV News, the prime minister stressed the need for cooperation between the Centre and the provincial government for the progress and prosperity of KP's people.

"Close and effective communication between the Centre and the provinces is indispensable for national progress and public service," the premier was quoted as saying.

PM Shehbaz assured CM Afridi of the



Centre's cooperation as per its jurisdiction for KP's development projects, infrastructure improvement, education, health and job opportunities.

The prime minister termed the KP government's cooperation in establishing peace in the province as "unavoidable".

"There is a need to improve the provincial government's efforts to establish law and order," he said, urging the KP government to

strengthen provincial departments to counter terrorism.

Affirming that both the Centre and the provincial government would continue their efforts to combat terrorism, PM Shehbaz said the KP administration should fulfil its constitutional duties to ensure peace and public welfare.

"The provincial government is empowered. Steps should be taken for the health and education of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's people.

The federal government has always been striving for the betterment of the KP's people," he was quoted as saying.

Noting that KP was an "important unit" of the federation, PM Shehbaz assured CM Afridi that the Centre would "continue its full efforts in accordance with its jurisdiction" for the public's prosperity.

Highlighting that the federal government's determination to work with all provinces, the prime minister said, "The

targets of national unity, stability and prosperity can be achieved effectively through mutual consultation and collaboration."

Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanullah and Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Amir Muqam were also present during the meeting. Pending funds among other issues discussed KP CM.

Speaking to the media after their interaction, CM Afridi termed the meeting a "demand of his role". Noting that the premier had invited him, the chief minister said he expressed his condolences over the recent spate of attacks in Balochistan and condemned the terrorist act.

"We have always condemned terrorism wherever it has taken place and we will also condemn it in the future," he asserted. Asked about a "clarity" in his condemnation of the Balochistan attacks, the KP CM affirmed he had always had that clarity.

## A Major Incident Occurred, Yet No One Resigned, Says Mahmood Khan Achakzai

**Dawood Ahmed:**

I S L A M A B A D : Chairman of the Tehreek Tahafuz-e-Aywan Pakistan Mahmood Khan Achakzai, has said that the issue of terrorism in Balochistan will be raised and discussed on the floor of Parliament, stressing the need for accountability after serious security failures.

Speaking on the recent incidents of violence, he expressed concern that despite the gravity of the incident,

no individual in authority has stepped forward to accept responsibility or tender a resignation. According to him, this lack of accountability has further shaken public confidence.

Achakzai emphasized that the deteriorating security situation in Balochistan



cannot be addressed through statements alone.

He called for a comprehensive parliamentary debate to examine the causes of terrorism, institutional shortcomings, and the formulation of a clear and transparent strategy to restore peace.

He further stated that meaningful oversight, political consensus, and openness before the public are essential to ensuring

long-term stability in the province, adding that Parliament must play its due role in addressing the concerns of the people.

## PTI moves SHC against alleged detention of workers in Sindh under MPO, seeks immediate release

**NEWS DESK:** PTI on Monday challenged in the Sindh High Court (SHC) the alleged detention of over 180 party workers during raids in Karachi and other parts of Sindh under the controversial Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance.

On Sunday, the PTI alleged that the Sindh police carried out pre-dawn raids on the houses of its workers and leaders and picked up around 180 of them. The provincial government has denied the allegations of detention.

A two-member constitutional bench comprising Justice Muhammad Saleem Jassar and Justice Nisar Ahmed Bhanbho took up the plea for hearing on Monday. Advocate Ali Tahir appeared as the petitioners' counsel.

However, Justice Bhanbho recused from hearing the case. Subsequently, the bench ordered the registrar's office to fix the hearing for Tuesday as the "counsel pleads urgency," according to a short order available with Dawn.

The case will now be fixed before another two-member bench of the SHC.

The petitioners — PTI Sindh General Secretary Mansoor Ali and Insaf Lawyers Forum President Faisal Mughal — contended that the order issued under the MPO, dated February 1, declared impugned and sought the immediate release of the party



workers.

The petition — a copy of which is available with Dawn — named 14 respondents, including the provincial chief secretary, the additional chief secretary, the inspector general (IG), the Karachi additional IG, the deputy IGs of Karachi's East, West and South zones, and the SSPs of Karachi's East, West, South, Central, Malir, Korangi, and Keamari districts.

The petitioners requested the court to declare the MPO orders "unconstitutional, illegal, without lawful authority, void ab initio, coram non iudice, and of no legal effect".

The party alleged in the petition that law enforcement agencies conducted "hundreds of illegal raids, storming into private homes without warrants, often in the

dead of night, and abducting citizens without due process."

It further alleged that during the raids, police personnel broke down doors, vandalised property, and looted personal belongings "in the 180 'documented cases'".

The petition stated that the orders were given without "any disclosed or lawful decision, approval, or satisfaction of the provincial cabinet", which it said stood in direct violation of Articles 4, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 25 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The petitioners sought that the court declare the "impugned orders constitute a mala fide, colourable, arbitrary and politically motivated exercise of power issued for an extraneous and collateral

purpose, namely the suppression of political opposition and peaceful democratic activity, and not for the genuine maintenance of public order as contemplated by law."

The petition also stated that the PTI, as a registered and recognised political party, is constitutionally entitled to organise, participate in, and carry out peaceful political activity, including meetings, protests, strikes, and political expression."

It further prayed that the court "set aside the impugned orders in their entirety and suspend their operation forthwith".

It added that the respondents should be restrained from taking "any action whatsoever pursuant to, in reliance upon, or in furtherance

of the said impugned orders."

The petitioners also requested the court to direct the immediate release of "all persons who have been arrested, detained, restrained, or otherwise deprived of liberty pursuant to the impugned orders, if not required in any other case."

It further asked that "no fresh detention, arrest, or coercive action be taken against them on the basis of the same allegations, intelligence, or grounds".

The petition prayed that the court declare the actions taken in relation to the orders "illegal, unconstitutional, without lawful authority, and violative of fundamental rights." The petitioners alleged that actions taken against the workers included "warrantless raids."