

Top huddle vows 'no leniency' for violent protesters

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir on Monday held a meeting on key security concerns, including a recent PTI protest in Islamabad in which several lives were lost over the course of demonstrations spanning multiple days. The government did not share details of the meeting, but a source privy to the meeting told Dawn that the huddle discussed the Nov 24 D-Chowk protest and vowed to spare nobody involved in violence and the killing of law enforcers. "It was decided that no leniency will be shown for those who killed security personnel

and destroyed state property," the source said. The meeting, attended by top security officials, also discussed a surge in terrorism, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The huddle also took stock of a renewed threat by KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur about another protest march to Islamabad if the government did not release PTI founder Imran Khan from jail. The source said the meeting also remembered the Army Public School tragedy on the occasion of its 10th anniversary on Monday. Security officials gave a detailed briefing on internal and external security matters. PM Shehbaz Sharif will visit Egypt

from December 18 to 20 to participate in the 11th Summit of the Developing Eight (D-8) in Cairo. Preceding the summit, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar will attend the 21st session of the D-8 Council of Ministers on December 18, the Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement. "At the summit, the prime minister will underline the importance of investing in youth and SMEs for building a strong and inclusive economy; creating jobs; advancing innovation; and promoting local entrepreneurship, the spokesperson added. The PM will express Pakistan's strong commitment to the ideals of D-8, underscore the

importance of fostering partnerships for mutual benefit and prosperity, and promote cooperation in agriculture, food security, and tourism. He will also underline Pakistan's incentives for youth empowerment and financial development, the statement added. The prime minister will also attend the special session of D-8 on the humanitarian crisis and reconstruction challenges in Gaza and Lebanon to deliberate on the situation resulting from Israeli aggression in the Middle East. He would underline Pakistan's principled position on the situation in Palestine and call for peace in the Middle East.



MUFTI Muneebur Rehman and Maulana Fazlur Rehman attend a meeting of the Ittehad Tanzeemat-i-Madaris Pakistan

Notification of new madressah bill demanded

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The Ittehad Tanzeemat-i-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP) — a federation of the main madressah oversight bodies in the country — demanded on Monday night that a gazette notification be issued for the Societies Registration (Amendment) Act 2024, Dawn.com reported.

The bill pertains to the registration of seminaries by the relevant deputy commissioner's office, as it was before 2019.

President Zardari had returned the bill to the National Assembly with certain objections on October 29, before flying to the United Arab Emirates. The bill was approved by the Senate on Oct 20, along with the 26th Amendment. It passed through the National Assembly on Oct 21 and was forwarded to the president on Oct 22.

When the JUI-F chief learnt of the development, he threatened to launch protests against the government to force it to accept the bill. Maulana Fazlur Rehman had said that a meeting would be held with Mufti Taqi Usmani to form a joint stance on the issue. He said the meeting's participants deliberated upon the matter in detail and agreed upon the joint statement after considerable debate.

Judicial Commission of Pakistan should give reasons for ignoring judges'



ISLAMABAD: (news desk) A committee of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) on Monday finalised draft rules for regulating a mechanism or criteria for assessment, evaluation and fitness for the appointment of judges in the superior judiciary.

A source privy to the development told Dawn that these draft rules would be submitted before the JCP for its final approval on Dec 21. The secretariat of the commission will finalise the draft rules in a couple of days and it is expected to be uploaded on the website of the Supreme Court before the final meeting.

This will provide the bar councils and associations an opportunity to come up with objections if they have any on the draft rules.

Officials, industry present differing picture of IT sector

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Persisting internet woes dominated the discourse at the National Broadband Network Forum 2024 on Monday, where the government presented its achievements, while industry stakeholders lamented sluggish broadband speed and other infrastructure issues.

The event, organised by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in collaboration with Huawei, was addressed by Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani and Minister

of State for IT & Telecommunications Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

Mr Gillani called upon the government to close the digital divide between rural and urban areas and implement Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions in all sectors of life.

The Senate chairman said the government should provide high-quality internet and information technology services to the public. "To achieve this, the government has to remove barriers for internet efficiency, and public-private partnerships were needed

to further the digital agenda of the government," Mr Gillani added. He also underlined the need to address challenges like cybersecurity, data privacy and equitable access to the internet. "We are committed to providing comprehensive legislative support for the implementation of progressive policies to enhance efficiencies, remove barriers and encourage investment and innovation in the telecom sector," Mr Gillani said while talking about parliament's role in enabling digital transformation. The speaker

acknowledged that key issues faced by the IT & telecom sector were internet shutdown and throttling and restrictions on certain apps. They warned these issues would "reduce the interest of investors in the 5G". Aamir Ibrahim, the CEO of Jazz, expressed cautious optimism about plans to roll out 5G in Pakistan. He said, "4G for all is better than 5G for few," and added that the mistakes of the previous spectrum auction should not be repeated in the upcoming 5G auction scheduled for April 2025.



RAWALPINDI: A vaccinator administers polio drops to a child in a katchi abadi during the ongoing nationwide inoculation campaign, on Monday.—Online

Dastardly attacks in KP mar anti-polio efforts

LAKKI MARWAT: (News desk) A policeman was martyred and two health workers were injured in dastardly attacks targeting polio vaccinators in Karak and Bannu districts on Monday. The last polio vaccination campaign of the year kicked off on Monday under the shadow of the rampant virus, which has so far crippled 63 children in 2024. The vaccinators, who go door-to-door to

innoculate children, are frequently targeted by militants, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In Karak, terrorists opened fire at policemen escorting a vaccination team in Shakarkhel area of Banda Daud Shah Tehsil, police and Rescue 1122 officials said. Constable Irfanullah, a resident of Gurgari area, embraced martyrdom in the attack while a vaccinator, identified as Asad

Nawaz, a resident of Chasmi Kotkhel, sustained bullet injuries, officials said. The armed assailants fled the scene after the attack. The body of the slain cop and the injured vaccinator were rushed to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, from where the injured polio worker was referred to a hospital in Peshawar for treatment. After the attack, a large contingent of police, led by District Police Of-

ficer Khan Khel, reached the area and launched a search for the perpetrators. The funeral of the martyred policeman was offered in the Police Lines, and his body was dispatched to the native town for burial with official honours. In the second attack in Bannu, a vaccinator was injured in an attack, but the motive behind the attack has been described as personal enmity by local police.

PIA to increase flights from Quetta to Jeddah

QUETTA: (news desk) The general manager of PIA, Balochistan, Lodhi Muhammad Sadiq, said on Monday that the national carrier will launch more direct flights between Quetta and Jeddah and plans are in the pipeline to connect Balochistan with other big cities. Mr Sadiq said this during a meeting with business leaders and office-bearers of Quetta Chamber of Commerce here on Monday.

"Efforts are under way to link Balochistan with other big cities by launching more flights," the PIA general manager said, adding that from January next year there will be three weekly direct flights between Quetta and Jeddah. The PIA general manager said that flights from Islamabad to Paris will commence from January 10 next year. He said the Memorandum of Understanding between PIA and the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry for travel-related services will also be renewed soon.

Access to cellular services over 91pc: PTA report

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Over 91 per cent of the country's population has access to cellular services, while all areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have been covered with the telecom services, said the annual report of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for 2023-24. The report, released on Monday, said that the broadband subscribers have increased from 127.6 million in June 2023 to 142.3 million in September 2024, with average speeds up by 28 per cent from 15.65mbps to 20.02mbps. About the launch of 5G in the country the PTA said that bridging the digital divide constitutes a significant challenge in the rollout of 5G in Pakistan. While urban areas may quickly benefit from the advanced infrastructure, rural and remote regions risk being left behind due to high costs and logistic hurdles of extending 5G to sparsely-populated areas. The availability of 5G handsets is also a barrier to widespread 5G adoption, ensuring equitable, nationwide access to 5G services is crucial for inclusive economic growth and social development. The report acknowledges the substantial investments and upgrades made by telecom operators pushing telecom revenues to a record-breaking Rs955 billion in fiscal year 2023-24, with an Average Revenue Per User of Rs302 per month in April-June 2024. The authority said that the one-window operation has simplified IP address and Virtual Private Network registration.

BHC warns against hurdles to road project

QUETTA: (news desk) The Balochistan High Court has declared that its October order regarding the Zarghoon Road expansion project and the acquisition of railway land for construction work was final and warned against any attempts to obstruct the construction.

A two-member BHC bench comprising justices Mohammad Kamran Khan Mulakhail and Shaukat Ali Rakhshani, while hearing a petition on the matter, directed the divisional superintendent of Pakistan Railways to ensure that his department refrains from causing any obstructions and instead take legal actions where required.

The petition was filed by Advocate Syed Nazir Ahmed Agha citing the Balochistan government, chief secretary and others as respondents. During the hearing, the additional advocate general and assistant attorney general informed the court that two meetings, led by the Balochistan chief secretary, were held this month. The first meeting, which included the heads of all federal departments, took several key decisions, including instructions to expedite the land acquisition process by the Quetta deputy commissioner. In the subsequent meeting with Qesco officials, an executive engineer (XEN) was appointed as the focal person to develop a comprehensive plan for the relocation and reinstallation of electricity poles in accordance with the proposed design for widening Zarghoon Road.

Interest rate down to 13pc after 200bps cut

KARACHI: (news desk) The interest rate is now at 13 per cent after the central bank slashed it by 200 basis points on Monday — in line with what most financial experts foresaw, but still below industry and market expectations. Aggressive and unprecedented cuts — from 22pc to 13pc, totalling 900bps — were made by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in the second half of calendar year 2024 following an extended period where the interest rate remained

stable in an effort to rein in inflation. Trade and industry circles, however, were calling for a decline of up to 400-500bps to boost economic growth with cheaper money. However, SBP's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) argued that the core inflation is static at 9.7pc, whereas the inflation expectations of consumers and businesses remained volatile. The committee found that headline inflation dec-

lined to 4.9pc in November, a deceleration that was mainly driven by a continued decline in food inflation, as well as the phasing out of the impact of the hike in gas tariffs from last November. Due to higher core inflation and the volatile inflation expectations of consumers and businesses, the committee assessed that the inflation may remain volatile in the near term before stabilising in the target range. Backing its approach of

measured policy rate cuts, the committee also said that growth prospects had somewhat improved and it had managed to keep inflationary and external account pressures in check, while supporting economic growth on a sustainable basis. The committee assessed that the impact of the cumulative reduction in the policy rate from June 2024 was beginning to unfold and would continue to materialise over the next few quarters.



"The real policy rate remains appropriately positive to stabilize inflation within the target range of 5pc-7pc," it said. Inflation For the uninitiated, headl

ine inflation refers to the raw figure that reflects changes in the consumer price index (CPI) throughout the entire economy.