

Senate's approval of contentious Peca amendments bill triggers protests across country

Islamabad (News Desk) The Senate on Tuesday passed controversial amendments to the country's cybercrime laws — the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) 2016 — triggering countrywide protests by media bodies who fear the changes would be used against journalists. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill, 2025 adds Section 26(A) to Peca, which seeks to penalise perpetrators of "fake news" online. It says anyone who intentionally spreads, displays, or transmits false information likely to cause fear, panic, or unrest in society may face up to three years'

imprisonment, a fine of up to Rs2 million, or both. The bill now awaits the president's assent to become law. Journalists have assailed the legislation as an "attack on freedom of expression", while the opposition PTI has accused the PPP, an ally of the ruling coalition, of hypocrisy, slamming its support for the bill. Following the Senate's greenlight to the widely criticised amendments, journalists across all provinces of Pakistan staged protests, vowing to hold further rallies against the legislation. The Peca bill was moved in the Senate by Minister for Industries and Production

Rana Tanveer Hussain on behalf of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi. As the bill was introduced, journalists present in the Senate's press gallery staged a walkout in protest, recreating scenes witnessed last week when the amendments were passed by the National Assembly. PTI's Shibli Faraz, the leader of the opposition in the Senate, spoke out against it, highlighting that while laws were made to protect people, the Peca amendment aimed to "target a specific political party." "When a new law is introduced, its intent is scrutinised. Whether it's social media or any other medium, it should operate

within specific boundaries," Faraz said. "The purpose of this bill is to target a specific political party." He added: "Laws are made to protect people, not to oppress them. It takes time to craft a law properly." Faraz appeared to be referring to the manner in which the NA rushed the contentious amendments to Peca last week, drawing opposition protests and triggering a walkout by journalists. PPP members had voiced their support during the voting. Meanwhile, replying to Faraz after the bill's passage, industries minister Hussain said that the bill was neither set in stone nor aimed at journalists.



Deputy PM Ishaq Dar pictured with Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong on Jan 28, 2025

Pakistan, China resolve to strengthen bilateral ties as Dar meets Chinese ambassador

Islamabad (News Desk) Pakistan and China reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties as Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong on Tuesday, the Foreign Office said. A day earlier, the FO rejected "baseless and unfounded" allegations targeting Pakistan's commitment to China's policies, stressing that Beijing continued to be Islamabad's "all-weather strategic partner." The development came in response to growing criticism of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's participation in an event sponsored by the New Federal State of China (NFSC), an anti-China group. The FO described the One-China Policy as a consistent cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy, emphasising that the country's stance remains the same. Pakistan has held strong bilateral relations with China which has supported it through many investments and development projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project which was termed as a "lifeline" for the country's economy.

2 soldiers martyred, 5 terrorists killed in foiled checkpost attack in Balochistan's Qila Abdullah: ISPR



Balochistan (News Desk) Two soldiers were martyred and five terrorists were killed in a foiled attack on a security checkpost in Balochistan's Qila Abdullah district, the military's media affairs wing said on Tuesday. A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said terrorists attempted to attack a checkpost of the security forces in the district's general area of Gulistan on the night between Monday and Tuesday. "The attempt to enter the post was effectively thwarted by own troops," the ISPR said, adding that this forced the terrorists to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the post's boundary. It added that five terrorists, including two suicide bombers, were "sent to hell" in the ensuing exchange of fire. "However, during the intense fire exchange two brave sons of soil, Naik Tahir Khan, 39, and Lance Naik Tahir Iqbal, 26, having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced martyrdom," the statement added.

PML-N's Irfan Siddiqui says negotiation process 'practically' at an end amid PTI's absence from 4th round

Islamabad (News Desk) PML-N Senator Irfan Siddiqui said on Tuesday that the negotiation process with the PTI was "practically" at an end after the opposition party skipped today's fourth round of meetings. Talks between the government and the PTI commenced in the last week of December to bring down political temperatures, but despite weeks of negotiations, the dialogue process stalled on major issues — the formation of two judicial commissions and the release of PTI prisoners. Senator Siddiqui, the government committee's spokesperson, had indicated a day ago of ending the dialogue if the opposition skipped today's moot after the PTI called off talks with the government last week, citing a delay in the latter's response to its demands presented in the third meeting. Speaking to the media today outside Parliament House after the PTI skipped today's meeting, Siddiqui said: "Since they (PTI) didn't come, the negotiation process has practically ended. However, our [negotiating] committee is still there and it has not been dissolved." He continued, "If they can approach the speaker by their deadline of January

31 or they think this door should be opened again and this process should resume then they can contact the speaker and our committee will still sit down and talk to them before the 31st or even after that date we can continue this process." "But as far as today I concerned, they decided on their own on the 23rd, five days before the 28th, and unilaterally announced [abandoning the process] giving various reasons for it." "Sometimes they said that first make the commission ... then they said that police raided one of their committee member's house,

all of this was baseless and they just wanted to end the process." He added that PTI must have other priorities, saying: "The process that they started, they themselves have now finished by sabotaging the process." Siddiqui added that the government "took this process forward with a lot of patience as the other side called for civil disobedience ... and did very scary tweets that included attacks on the armed forces, the prime minister was abused but we tolerated that", adding that the onus was on the other side now to approach the speaker to restart the process.

NA body concerned about increasing Aids cases

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The National Assembly Standing Committee on National Health Services (NHS) at a meeting on Monday expressed concerns about the rapidly increasing cases of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (Aids). The meeting was chaired by MNA Dr Mahesh Kumar Malani and attended by lawmakers and officials of the health ministry. Dr Malani said according to his information 72,000 people suffering from Aids in Pakistan. He said the disease was rapidly increasing in Lahore and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Coordinator Common Management Unit (CMU) Dr Qasim Abbas said the government was providing free of cost medicine to the patients. He said over 13,000 new cases of HIV were reported in 2024. However, the prime minister's coordinator on health Dr Malik Mukhtar said the disease had been controlled to some extent but still the situation was worrisome.

Many class 9 students may have to sit in exam privately in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The heads and teachers of schools supervised by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) seem to be hiding their alleged negligence, as they did not send admissions of the students who fail in send-ups, encouraging drop outs. Like every year, this year too, many students complained that their schools/colleges had not sent their 9th class admission to Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE), asking them either to repeat their class or submit their admissions as private students. Sources said that schools and colleges have been doing this just to get good results in the FBISE exams to receive appreciations from education ministry and government for producing best results. Interestingly, in many schools, these students had been enrolled from nursery and one class and throughout the school years, they passed annual exams, but now their own schools is treating them failed students. But, there is no accountability of teachers and schools heads, on whom government spent billions of rupees in these years. Parents blame teachers for students' failure to clear send-ups. Action should be taken against principals and teachers for not preparing students well for class 9th board examination.

Punjab digitalises land records system under Pulse project

RAWALPINDI: (News Desk) On the directives of Punjab government, Punjab Urban Land System Enhancement (Pulse) programme, funded by the World Bank, initiated to digitalise land record in Rawalpindi division and in the first phase, it started work to digitalise mass ownership cases. Commissioner Aamir Khattak chaired a meeting along with Director General Punjab Land Record Authority Ikramul Haq regarding Pulse programme and partition of the mass ownership Khewats. He said that the Punjab Urban Land System Enhancement project is the initiative of Government of Punjab in cooperation with the World Bank. He stressed the need to put in all efforts to make project successful, as it will ensure transparency in the land records with digitisation. He said that our land record is not linked to any kind of measuring geographical map; therefore there was a dire need for innovation and digitization, which will be fulfilled through this project. "The PULSE project will digitise the land records of urban and remaining rural areas of Punjab. It will also update those rural areas of Punjab whose records have been digitised earlier," he said. Apart from this, he said that it will compile a full-scale geographical map of Punjab which will not only reflect the ground situation but also link it with the land records. He further stated that in this project, land registry will be made a part of record, as land parcel and parcel map will also be issued along with the registry.



Members of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) shout slogans during a protest against amendments in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) in Islamabad on January 28.

Imran, Bushra move IHC against conviction in £190m graft case

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Former prime minister Imran Khan and spouse Bushra Bibi challenged their conviction in the £190 million corruption case before the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday. The appellants asked the court to set aside their conviction and 14-year and seven-year sentences, respectively, awarded

by an accountability court earlier this month, emphasising the ruling lacked credible evidence and suffered from procedural lapses. The identical appeals pointed to the UK Court of Appeal's judgement dated Nov 26, 2021 and clarified that the funds at the centre of the controversy were neither proceeds of crime nor

linked to any illegal activity. The National Crime Agency (NCA) of the UK had agreed to a £190m settlement with property tycoon Malik Riaz Hussain, specifying that the funds would be transferred to Pakistan Supreme Court's account as part of a legal framework, they stated. Mr Khan's appeal accuses NAB of withholding critical

evidence and failing to present witnesses from the NCA or relevant documents to substantiate its claims. His legal team pointed to the NAB's earlier closure of the case in 2020, following the NCA's settlement agreement, and argued that the reopening of investigation in 2023 was done in bad faith and for political reasons.

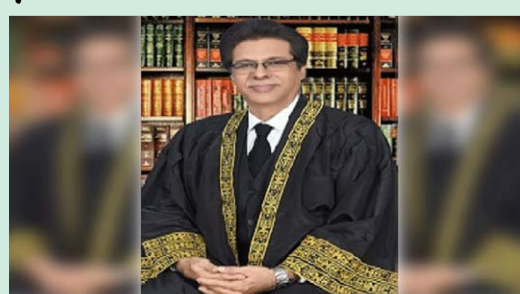
Consider constitutional bench full court, says Justice Mazhar

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The Supreme Court's constitutional bench on Monday commenced proceedings on a set of challenges to the 26th Amendment, telling lawyers representing different petitioners to consider the existing eight-judge bench a 'full court'. "This is not the domain of constitutional bench to constitute full court or refer the matter to Chief Justice of Pakistan after Article 191A [came into being]," Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar explained, adding that

full court could not be formed merely on the wishes of the lawyers. Asking lawyers to consider the constitutional bench a 'full court', the SC judge said lawyers were confused about the issue. He noted that when one of the counsel was requesting for the formation of a full court "through a judicial order", others were demanding that the matter be referred to the full court, indicating that the lawyers were confused about this issue.

Notices issued to respondents as SC takes up pleas against 26th Amendment. However, before postponing further hearing for three weeks, Justice Aminuddin Khan, who was heading the constitutional bench, issued notices to the respondents on the points highlighted by the lawyers ranging from referring the matter to full court and judiciary's independence to arrangements for the livestreaming of the proceedings. Earlier when the hear-

ing commenced, several lawyers, including senior counsel Hamid Khan, surrounded the rostrum to request the bench to refer the matter to full court. The request was also supported by Justice Ayesha A. Malik, also a member of CB in that she conceded about the precedence when full court heard the challenges to 18th Amendment, 21st Amendment and Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023. At one point, Justice Ja



mal Khan Mandokhail asked the counsel if the present constitutional bench was not part of constitution and whether they had not taken oath under the constitution. "We are not sitting here for a tiff," he said. Justice Musarrat Hilali wondered whether the lawyers representing different petitioners were suggesting the bench members were required to take fresh oaths after the passage of the 26th Amendment.