

## 'Takes two to tango': Govt offers PTI parliamentary committee to continue talks

Islamabad (News Desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that the government was ready to form a parliamentary committee to continue talks with the PTI as against the party's demand to constitute a judicial commission to probe the protests of May 9, 2023, and November 26, 2024.

After more than a year of heightened tensions between the government and the PTI, the two sides commenced negotiations 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. Last week, PTI decided to boycott the fourth round of talks (which were scheduled to take place on Jan 28) with the government, a day after it announced that party founder Imran Khan issued directions to call off negotiations due to a delay over the formation of judicial commissions.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting today, PM Shehbaz said, "We are ready to form a House committee. The committee that was formed in 2018 should also complete its probe, and a House committee should be formed to investigate the February 2024

elections to bring the facts to the forefront." Regarding the Nov 26 protest, he said that a House committee should probe that, as well as the months-long sit-in staged by the PTI in Islamabad in 2014, when it was in the opposition. "It takes two to tango. This dialogue should move forward so that the country can progress, instead of bearing more harm due to their violent protests," the premier said.

Recalling the negotiation process, the premier said, "We genuinely accepted their offer, constituted a committee, and initiated dialogue with the help of the [National Assembly] speaker."

"The committee asked the PTI to present their demands in writing and the government also agreed to present a response in writing," he said. "A meeting was supposed to be convened on the 28th of this month, but they refused the talks and ran away." He further said, "Our members told them that the [government] was ready to present a response in writing, and invited them to come to the table again." The premier referred to the parliamentary committee formed in 2018 under the former government to finalise the terms of reference (ToRs) to investigate the election rigging allegations.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif speaking during a cabinet meeting in Islamabad on January 30.

## Second mpox case of 2025 detected at Peshawar airport

Peshawar (News Desk) The second mpox case of the year was detected on Thursday when a five-month-old infant with the disease arrived in Peshawar from Qatar, health authorities said.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Adviser Ehtesham Ali confirmed that the case was detected at Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport, bringing the province's total to 11 since 2022.

"The Public Health Reference Lab has confirmed the presence of the mpox virus in a five-month-old infant. The child had recently arrived in Pakistan at Peshawar Airport with her parents from Qatar," the health adviser said as he provided details of the case.

Following the confirmation of the case, the health department initiated screening for the infant's parents to ensure their health and safety.

Furthermore, a letter has been sent to the airport authorities, requesting passenger details for those who traveled near the patient to ensure comprehensive surveillance.

The adviser emphasised that swift measures are being taken to prevent the spread of the virus and safeguard public health.

## 2 soldiers martyred, 6 terrorists killed in KP operation: ISPR



Peshawar (News Desk) Two soldiers were martyred and six terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the North Waziristan district, the military's media wing said on Thursday.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said: "On January 29-30 2025, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District on [the] reported presence of khwarij.

"During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly six khwarij were sent to hell," ISPR said, using the term designating members of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

It added that Major Hamza Israr, 29, a resident of Rawalpindi district, and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem, 26, a resident of Naseerabad district "fought gallantly" during the intense exchanges of fire and were martyred. Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists, ISPR said.

## Justice Rizvi asks if May 9 offences more serious than terrorism incidents

Islamabad (News Desk) Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi wondered on Wednesday whether crimes committed during violent nationwide riots on May 9, 2023, were more serious than terrorist incidents as the Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench heard a case on military trials of civilians arrested over the incident.

The case pertains to the military trials — and recent sentencing — of civilians for their role in attacks on army installations during the riots that followed ex-premier Imran Khan's arrest on May 9, 2023. On December 13

last year, the constitutional bench conditionally allowed military courts to pronounce reserved verdicts of 85 civilians who were still in custody for their alleged involvement in the riots. On Dec 21, military courts sentenced 25 civilians to prison terms ranging from two to 10 years for their involvement in violent attacks on military installations during the riots. A week later, another 60 civilians were handed jail terms ranging from two to 10 years for their involvement in the riots. Justice Rizvi's remarks came as the bench resumed hear-

ing intra-court appeals (ICAs) challenging an October 23, 2023 ruling by a five-judge bench that had unanimously declared that trying the accused civilians in military courts violated the Constitution. The seven-judge Constitutional Bench was headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan and also included Justices Afghan, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Musarrat Hilal, Shahid Bilal Hassan and Rizvi. The bench has questioned in recent hearings why the accused were "specifically" tried in military courts instead of anti-terrorism courts,

with Justice Mandokhail observing that "the executive cannot play the role of judiciary". During today's hearing, Advocate Khawaja Haris appeared as the defence ministry's lawyer and continued his arguments that while courts were mentioned in the Constitution under Article 175, military courts were not. "Military courts are formed under a separate law which is recognised," he said. Justice Mandokhail remarked that the powers of the courts formed under Article 175 were extensive, while the jurisdiction of any court formed under a specific law was limited.



A photo of Supreme Court Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi.

## Islamabad sessions court sentences 2 to death for blasphemy

Islamabad (News desk) Two men were sentenced to death by an Islamabad district and sessions court on Thursday for "proliferating blasphemous content" online.

According to a first information report (FIR) registered by the Federal Investigation Agency in 2021 — a copy of which is available with Dawn.

com — one of the convicts was arrested in Islamabad for creating and disseminating "blasphemous contents ... in respect of the Holy Prophet [Peace Be Upon Him]" to a WhatsApp group. Two warrants of the commitment of conviction to the Adiala Jail superintendent were issued today for the two convicts by Ses-

sions Judge Afzal Majoka. They said the two were sentenced to death by hanging for violating Section 295C (Use of derogatory remarks, etc, in respect of the Holy Prophet [PBUH]) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). "[The] convict shall be hanged by his neck till he is dead subject to confirmation of death punishment

by honourable Islamabad High Court," both warrants read. The judge noted that both convicts had the right to file an appeal in the Islamabad High Court within 30 days. They were also sentenced to life in prison under 295B (defiling, etc, of the Holy Quran) with a fine of Rs100,000; three years imprisonment.

## Cop martyred in Quetta by unidentified gunmen: police

Quetta (News Desk) A policeman was martyred in Quetta when unidentified assailants shot him dead in the early hours of Thursday as he was returning home from work, police told Dawn.com.

According to Rabia Tariq, public relations officer for the Balochistan inspector general of police, Mehboob Shah, was returning home via the Manu Jan Road when the suspects gunned him down.

"The suspects ambushed him in front of his house, opened fire on him and fled," Tariq told Dawn.com.

"Policeman Mehboob Shah died on the spot. His body was taken to a hospital, before being handed over to his family for burial after funeral prayers at Quetta Civil Lines." She added that the policeman had completed his duty at the United Nations office in a housing scheme in the city. No further details were provided. In September last year, a police officer was martyred in Quetta when unidentified gunmen opened fire on his car.

## SC returns military court docs over 'prejudice' fears

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The Constitutional Bench (CB) of the apex court, on Wednesday, returned sealed envelopes submitted by the government counsel, which outlined the procedures followed during the military trial of civilians involved in the May 9, 2023, attacks on military installations.

Though the judges took a cursory look, they returned the envelopes when Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail suggested that it would not be appropriate to examine the documents, as the matter might reach the high courts and eventually land at the Supreme Court's door in future appeals.

At this, all members of the seven-judge CB preferred returning the documents, except for Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, who expressed his desire to read the procedures for his personal understanding, and returned the documents after going through them.

Justice Musarrat Hilal also asked to read the documents, while Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan endorsed the decision to return them, stating that the case should not be prejudiced.

The seven-judge CB, headed by Justice Khan, had taken up a set of intra-court appeals (ICAs) against the Oct 23, 2023, five-judge bench order nullifying the military court trials of civilians involved in the May 9 violence.

## Govt wants lawmakers, not judges, to review May 9, Nov 26 events

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) After negotiations between the government and PTI hit a roadblock, the former has decided not to form judicial commissions for the May 9 and Nov 26 violent protests, instead proposing alternative options, including the formation of a parliamentary committee to investigate the incidents. Although the government's negotiation team did not submit its replies to National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, who heads the dialogue committee, a source privy to the development told Dawn that the government had consulted legal experts and senior lawyers, who advised that judicial commissions could not be formed for cases that had already been decided or were being tried in courts.

Anticipating the government's position that forming judicial commissions was not feasible, PTI had already boycotted the highly-publicised negotiation process even before the fourth round of talks, which was scheduled for Jan 28.

PTI had made its participation in the fourth meeting conditional on the formation of judicial commissions to probe the May 9, 2023, and Nov 26, 2024 incidents. However, the government decided not to dissolve the dialogue committee until Jan 31 and would wait for the opposition party's return. When contacted, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, the spokesperson for the government's negotiation team, said the government's response would remain undisclosed, adding that it was prepared after thorough deliberations and hard work.

## Pakistan reciprocates US desire for 'improved' economic ties: FO

Islamabad (News Desk) The Foreign Office on Thursday expressed Pakistan's desire to improve economic ties with the United States, a day after a delegation of investors led by Gentry Beach, US President Donald Trump's close aide, met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Pakistan and the US have delicate and complex ties, shaped by shared security concerns and divergent strategic priorities.

In a press briefing today, FO spokesperson Shafiq Ali Khan said, "We want to further improve eco-

nom ic ties with the United States." Responding to queries, Shafiq termed members of the visiting delegation as "good businessmen". He clarified that the visit was not organised through the FO, adding that businessmen touring Pakistan was a "routine" matter.

Shafiq said that further questions about the visit should be referred to the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Beach told a press conference in Islamabad yesterday that Trump believed in economic diplomacy

and that their ongoing visit to Pakistan was part of that effort.

He also said, "We plan on investing billions of dollars in Pakistan across several different areas, including critical minerals and real estate."

Terming Pakistan "one of the biggest global opportunities", the investor vowed to "build some of the most high-end and luxury properties ever seen in Pakistan". He also mentioned energy, technology, artificial intelligence, and other areas that needed attention

and investment. During his meeting with Beach, PM Shehbaz had reaffirmed his government's unwavering commitment to facilitating foreign investors by ensuring a conducive business environment.

Responding to questions yesterday on statements made in favour of ex-premier Imran Khan by Trump's special missions envoy Richard Grenell, Beach had assured the government that the US administration has nothing but respect for the incumbent leadership of



Pakistan.GSP+ 'just one aspect' of Pak-EU partnership. The FO spokesperson also touched upon a recent warning by a European Union official to Pakistan to not take its GSP+ status for granted.

Olof Skoog, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights who is currently on a week-long visit to Pakistan, reiterated the EU's concerns about the trials of civilians in military courts and opposed recent moves to restrict freedom of expression.