

'Govt's unilateral policies causing grave strain on federation': President Zardari warns in joint parliament address

Islamabad (News Desk) President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday warned lawmakers in a joint session of parliament that the government's one-sided way of taking decisions was causing a "grave strain" on the federation. The differences between the PML-N, which heads the ruling coalition, and the PPP have been simmering for months as the key ally has expressed frustration over unfulfilled promises. A meeting in December between the top leaders from both sides, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President

Zardari, seemingly failed to put an end to the disagreements. Even after that meeting, PPP Senator Saleem Mandviwalla claimed that directives issued by the Presidency were not being heeded by the PM's Office. The PPP has also repeatedly voiced concern over the construction of controversial canals in Punjab's Cholistan area. It has called for the immediate meeting of the Council of Common Interests, which has been pending for 11 months, and called for the canal issue to be raised there. The Sindh government claims the new

canals would reduce the province's share of water and may turn the cultivable land barren. Addressing the matter in today's joint parliament session, President Zardari said: "It is ... my constitutional duty as your president, my personal obligation as a patriotic Pakistani, to caution this house and the government, that some of your unilateral policies are causing grave strain on the federation. In particular, the government's unilateral decision to carve out more canals from the Indus River System, despite strong

opposition from federating units." A proposal that I as your president cannot support. I urge this government to abandon this current proposal and work together with all stakeholders to come up with viable, sustainable solutions based on unanimous consensus among the federating units." The president said he would like to invite the attention of the present lawmakers to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to parliament and play their role in nation-building, strengthening institutions and improving governance.



President Asif Ali Zardari addresses the Joint Session of the Parliament at the beginning of the parliamentary year in Islamabad on March 10.

Woman and her infant among 3 shot dead for 'honour' in Mardan

Mardan (News Desk) A woman and her infant son were among three shot dead for so-called 'honour' in the early hours of Monday in the Rustam area of Mardan, officials said.

Rustam Station House Officer (SHO) Mohammad Daud Khan confirmed that the incident took place in the Taja Banda area, saying that a woman, her one-year-old son and her father-in-law were allegedly killed by the cousins of the woman.

SHO Khan said that a first information report (FIR) was lodged at the Rustam police station on the complaint of the woman's mother-in-law, Nasim Bibi.

Bibi told the police that she was asleep at home when she heard the sounds of someone jumping into the house, which prompted her to rush out of her room. "I saw armed men, Abuzar and Bakhtiar, enter the room of my daughter-in-law, wife of Shahi Mulk, and open indiscriminate firing at her. [They] also shot my husband Sher Aman and fled the scene," she told the police in the FIR.

Two KP CTD personnel martyred at Tanda Dam in Kohat



Kohat (News Desk) Two officials of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) were martyred at Tanda Dam in Kohat district in a gun attack carried out by unidentified assailants, officials said on Monday.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terrorist activities over the past year, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

Kohat District Police Officer (DPO) Zahid Khan told Dawn.com, "Two CTD personnel, named Zahid and Mustafa, were martyred in a gun attack at Kohat's Tanda Dam."

He said that the suspects fled from the scene, adding that a heavy police contingent was dispatched to the area. The motive behind the incident was unknown and an investigation was underway, he added. According to KP Inspector General of Police (IGP) Zulfiqar Hameed, authorities have taken notice of the "target killing" of the police officers. "The CTD additional IGP has been directed to form special investigation teams ... to immediately arrest the miscreants involved in the attack and bring them to justice," he said.

Rights watchdog classifies Pakistan as 'repressed'

KARACHI: (News Desk) Pakistan has been added to the Civicus Monitor's human rights watchlist for 2025 due to a narrowing civil space, human rights activists being arbitrarily targeted by authorities, and journalists being clamped down on by draconian laws, according to a statement issued by the monitor. According to Civicus, Pakistan joins the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Serbia, Italy and the United States in this year's watchlist, which "lists countries experiencing rapid declines in civic freedoms". It lists Pakistan's

status as "repressed" on its website. "Pakistan's recent criminalisation of activists, stifling of opposition and minority protests, and digital space restrictions have resulted in the country being added to the Civicus Monitor watchlist," the press release read. Country joins DR Congo, Serbia, Italy and US on Civicus Monitor's watchlist of nations 'experiencing rapid declines in civic freedoms'. The release added that the government brought "trumped up charges" against Dr Mahrang Baloch, the leader of the Ba-

loch Yakjehti Committee, and human rights activist and lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir. The release said that Mahrang "faces multiple criminal charges, including under the Anti-Terrorism Act, for organising sit-ins across the country and attending gatherings". Meanwhile, the release said that Mazari-Hazir was "targeted on terrorism charges for actively supporting legal redress for victims of violence and persecution and advocating for rights of persecuted religious and ethnic communities". Civicus added that

the Anti-Terrorism Act was also used to ban the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement in 2024. "The charges against human rights defenders like Dr Mahrang Baloch and Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir are a political witch-hunt. They are attempts at silencing dissent," said Rajavelu Karunanithi, Civicus' Advocacy and Campaign Officer for Asia. "Civicus calls on the government to drop these fabricated charges immediately and to revoke the ban against the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement," the release added, quoting Karunanithi.

At Haqqania, Fazl declares killing Muslims 'not jihad'

PESHAWAR: (News Desk) Visiting the Darul Uloom Haqqania a week after it was rocked by a deadly suicide attack, Maulana Fazlur Rehman made a fiery speech denouncing the killing of Muslims and religious scholars as "not jihad, but militancy". Addressing seminary students at the Akora Khattak institute, the chief of his own faction of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) questioned whether playing with the lives of innocent Muslims could be termed 'jihad'. He said that taking up arms against Muslims and religious scholars could be the result of someone's personal vendetta or myopia, or a conspiracy, but it could not be termed 'jihad' by any stretch of the imagination. "It is terrorism," he maintained. "You are murderers, ruthless, criminals. Why are you deceiving yourself," the Maulana asked, referring to the affiliates of banned outfits. Asks students not to allow contradictions to pollute their minds. JUI-S leader Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani was among the six persons perished in the suicide bombing.

KE challenges Nepra over high fuel cost allegations

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) In a rare public spat, K-Electric on Sunday challenged the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) over allegations that its fuel costs were significantly higher than electricity imports from the national grid.

The disagreement follows a special note issued last week by Nepra's technical member from Sindh, Rafique A. Shaikh, who pointed out that K-Electric's own power plants contributed 19 per cent to its energy mix in December 2024, while purchases from other independent power producers (IPPs) and captive power plants (CPPs) accounted for 7pc, and National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC) supplied 74pc of KE's total electricity. "Notably, the cost of generation within the NTDC system is significantly lower at Rs9.60 per kWh (kilowatt-hour), compared to KE's own generation cost of Rs18.63 per kWh," Mr Shaikh said. Says Karachi's power costs could drop if gas quota is restored. With NTDC possessing surplus generation capacity and its facilities situated close to K-Electric, Mr Shaikh emphasised it was crucial for both KE and the transmission company to prioritise and accelerate the interconnection works and studies between their systems to optimise cost-efficiency and improve overall performance.

PM directs ministries to revisit Ramadan package awareness campaign

Islamabad (News Desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday directed relevant ministries to collaborate with the private sector in raising awareness about the procurement of the Rs5,000 Ramadan Relief Package through digital wallets for deserving families, state-run Radio Pakistan reported.

The move comes after the government launched a Rs20 billion Ramadan relief package earlier this month for four million deserving families — about 20 million people — across the country. Today, while reviewing the monitoring mechanism of the Ramadan Relief Package at the National Telecommunication Corporation in Islamabad, the PM directed the relevant ministries to sit with the private sector and revisit the relief package's awareness campaign in terms of its effectiveness and outreach. "The withdrawal from the digital wallets is about 20 per cent, which is because of lack of awareness," the report quoted him as saying. "The families in need of relief are unable to access it due to a lack of awareness," the report said, adding that the PM directed ministries to ask families to call 9999 for the required information about the digital wallets. He also demanded inputs from the relevant stakeholders within a week to further expand the volume of the relief package.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addresses a meeting to review monitoring of the disbursement of the Ramzan Package 2025 at the National Telecommunications Corporation in Islamabad on March 10.

Karachi records first Naegleria death of 2025

Karachi (News Desk) Karachi recorded its first death from Naegleria fowleri as a 36-year-old female died from the disease last month, health officials said on Monday. The woman was a resident of Gulshan-e-Iqbal and died at a private hospital in Karachi on February 23, according to Meeran

Yousuf, media coordinator to the Sindh Health Minister. "The patient began experiencing symptoms on Feb 18 and was admitted to hospital a day later. The presence of Naegleria fowleri was confirmed in the patient on Feb 24, a day after the patient had passed away," he said.

Upon investigation, it was noted that the patient had not participated in any water related activities. Her only exposure was regular use of water to perform ablution (wuzu) five times a day at home. "This is the first death from Naegleria fowleri in 2025," Yousuf said. Popularly known as "brain-eat-

ing amoeba", Naegleria fowleri is responsible for the disease called Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM). The infection is fatal in 98 per cent of the cases. A free-living amoeba, Naegleria, is commonly found in warm fresh water (such as lakes, rivers, and hot springs) and soil.

SBP surprises with hold on key policy rate at 12pc

Islamabad (News Desk) The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) announced on Monday that it has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 12 per cent, assessing the current real interest rate to be adequately positive on the forward-looking basis to sustain the ongoing macroeconomic stability. The central bank's policy rate, after being slashed by 1,000bps from 22pc since June 2024 in six intervals, now stands at 12pc. February inflation stood at a near-decade low of 1.5pc, largely due to a high

base a year ago. A Reuters survey of 14 analysts suggests that the central bank may further reduce rates, with a median forecast for a cut of 50 bps. Of the 10 analysts expecting a rate cut, three estimated its size at 100 bps, one at 75 bps, and six at 50 bps. The rest saw no change. According to a notification issued by the State Bank of Pakistan today, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 12pc, noting that inflation in February turned out to

be lower than expected, mainly due to a drop in food and energy prices. "Notwithstanding this decline, the committee assessed the risks posed by the inherent volatility in these prices to the current declining trend in inflation," the notification said. It said that core inflation was proving to be more persistent at an elevated level, thus, uptick in the food and energy prices might lead to an increase in inflation. "Economic activity continues to gain traction, as reflected in the latest

high-frequency economic indicators," it said, adding that MPC viewed that some pressures on the external account emerged due to rising imports amid weak financial inflows. "The MPC assessed the current real interest rate to be adequately positive on [the] forward-looking basis to sustain the ongoing macroeconomic stability," the notification said. According to the notification, the committee noted that the current account turned into a deficit of



\$0.4 billion in January after remaining in surplus over the past few months. It said that the current account deficit, coupled with weak financial inflows and ongoing debt repayments, led to a de-

cline in the SBP's foreign exchange reserves. It said that large-scale manufacturing output declined during the first half of the fiscal year 2025, despite a substantial increase of 19.1pc in December 2024.