

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif lambastes PTI for ‘politicising’ Jaffar Express hijacking

Islamabad(News Desk) Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Thursday assailed the PTI for “politicising” the recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express train in Balochistan and misinterpreting the situation on social media. The incident occurred on Tuesday afternoon when the train, travelling from Quetta to Peshawar and carrying 440 passengers, was ambushed by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) terrorists. They opened fire on the train and held the passengers hostage, prompt-

ing the security forces to initiate an operation that lasted two days. On Wednesday evening, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry confirmed that the operation had been concluded, with 33 terrorists present at the site of the attack neutralised. The ISPR chief also confirmed that 21 passengers and four Frontier Corps personnel lost their lives in the hijacking, but no hostages were harmed during the final rescue phase. During his

speech today, which went on for over half an hour, Asif noted that the “entire world stood with Pakistan” except the PTI. “I have told you how they are interpreting the Jaffar Express [incident]. They are making it a topic of politics when it is a moment of concern for the 250 million people of Pakistan,” Asif said. “What’s more upsetting is the way PTI’s social media interpreted the situation,” he said. A day ago — when the rescue operation was still underway — the coalition

government, including Asif, maintained an uncanny silence in the NA over the hijacking, despite scathing criticism from Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan, who slammed the handling of the attack that shook the nation. Taking a jibe at Omar Ayub, who is the grandson of former dictator Gen Ayub Khan, Asif said, “Those people mocked us on Form-47 who have had three martial laws, whose elders abrogated the Constitution of Pakistan for the first time.”

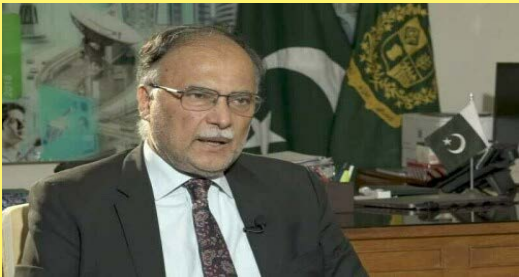


Screengrab of PML-N President Nawaz Sharif speaks to National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in a meeting on Wednesday

Nawaz blames ‘stubbornness’ of PTI for failure of negotiations

LAHORE: (News Desk) PML-N President Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday regretted that the talks between the government and the opposition remained inconclusive due to Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s “inflexible and non-serious approach”. In a meeting with National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the PML-N president said: “You had facilitated negotiations between the government and the opposition as the custodian of the house. However, these talks failed to yield results due to the PTI’s lack of seriousness.” In an indirect reference to the PTI, Nawaz Sharif said people were “not interested in protests and sloganeering”, rather they wanted their pressing issues are resolved. The meeting underscored the importance of “parliamentary supremacy, effective legislation in the public interest, and the strengthening of democracy”. Mr Sharif stressed that a strong parliament was essential for ensuring political stability and people’s welfare.

KP, centre agree on framework to resolve uplift funding issues



PESHAWAR: (News Desk) The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and federal governments have agreed on a framework to resolve the development funds related issues of the province and its merged tribal districts, said adviser to the chief minister on finance Muzzammil Aslam on Wednesday. Addressing a news conference here, Mr Aslam said the chief minister raised the issues related to the merged tribal districts, including delay in the release of the Accelerated Implementation Programme funds, in the meeting with federal planning and development minister Ahsan Iqbal. “We [centre and KP] have agreed on a framework to resolve the issues, with the province sharing information with the federal government,” he said. Minister Iqbal, who was also present on the occasion, said he discussed the development related issues of the province with the chief minister and his aide on finance, and both sides agreed to resolve the issues through a joint mechanism. Gandapur takes up delay in AIP funds release with federal minister Iqbal He said the federal government would support the provincial government’s development programme in all manners.

Balochistan standoff ends after all Jaffar Express hostages rescued

ISLAMABAD / QUETTA: (News Desk) After a dramatic showdown with terrorists who had hijacked the Jaffar Express and taken hundreds of passengers hostage, the military announced the conclusion of its rescue operation on Wednesday night. In separate statements, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry and Information Minister Atta Tarar announced the successful completion of the operation and the recovery of all hostages. In his remarks, Lt Gen

Sharif said that all remaining passengers had been rescued and the train — stranded near the Mashkaf Tunnel in the Bolan range — had been cleared of insurgents, with 33 terrorists killed. Although he noted that there were around 440 passengers on board the train, he did not specify the total number of hostages that had been rescued. However, a senior security official told Dawn that the rescue was carried out in phases. Just over a hundred were freed in the first phase, and 80 more hostages were shifted to Mach after being res-

cued in the second phase. Around a dozen passengers, including two railway policemen, also managed to escape their captors and made it safely back to Quetta. In all, 21 passengers lost their lives, while four FC personnel were martyred, the ISPR DG said. Speaking to Dunya News, the ISPR chief said that army, air force, Frontier Corps and SSG personnel had taken part in the operation. He said the area where the incident took place was quite difficult to access, being located far from road networks and settlements. “The ter-

rorists used hostages, including women and children, as human shields,” he added. A group of armed men was patrolling the train and its surrounding areas, keeping an eye on the large numbers of passengers in their custody. SSG commandos acted carefully to save the lives of hostages, and managed to free around 68 hostages after neutralising the remaining terrorists in a gun battle, a senior security official told adding that almost all operations had been completed and forces were now in the clearance phase.



Defence Minister speaks on the recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express train in Balochistan, in the National Assembly, on March 13.

President, PM laud security forces’ bravery in Jaffar Express rescue

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) President Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday paid glowing tribute to security forces for successfully completing the rescue operation and termed the terrorist attack on Jaffar Express a “cowardly act”, saying such acts would not shake

Pakistan’s resolve for peace. Separately, several countries denounced the hijacking of the train by the Baloch separatists. President Zardari expressed his sorrow over the martyrdom of four security personnel and 21 travellers during the rescue operation.

He showered praise on security forces for eliminating 33 terrorists, said a handout released by the presidency’s Press Wing. He reiterated the resolve to eradicate terrorism from Balochistan. In a statement, Prime Minister Sharif lauded the Pakistan Army and security forces for successfully com-

pleting the Jaffar Express operation and rescuing the hostages. In a post on X, the PM said he spoke to Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti who briefed him about the incident. The premier said the entire nation was deeply shocked by the dastardly act and saddened by the loss of innocent lives.

Attack on Jaffar Express cannot dampen nation’s morale: railways minister

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Railways Minister Hanif Abbasi on Wednesday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on innocent passengers of Jaffar Express in Bolan and termed it a cowardly act.

In a statement, the minister said that the attack cannot dampen our morale as the nation is united to defeat such elements.

He said that Pakistani forces and security agencies were protecting every inch of the country including Balochistan.

He said the brave people of Balochistan would not bow down to such elements. “We are grateful to the security agencies and the Balochistan government for their co-operation and prompt response to the cowardly act. The terrorists will be brought to justice and no criminal will be spared,” he said.

In a first, Constitutional Bench invokes power given by 26th Amendment

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) In a first, the Constitutional Bench (CB) of the Supreme Court on Wednesday invoked its authority under the 26th Amendment, transferring to itself all intra-court appeals (ICAs) relating to the imposition of Super Tax pending in the high courts of Lahore and Islamabad. Headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, the five-judge CB invoked Article 186A, which was inserted in the Constitution through the 26th Amendment that empowers the apex court to transfer any case from any high court to any other high court or to itself if it considers it expedient in the interest of justice. The CB had taken up the challenges by different taxpayers assailing the constitutional vires of Section 4C of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. Representing various companies, Makhdoom Ali Khan said the apex court, under the fresh amendment, enjoyed the authority to transfer any pending cases to itself. When Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar wondered whether any written application would be required for transferring the cases, the senior counsel explained that SC can consider the request for the transfer of case even on verbal application. He said the court can transfer the cases even by using its suo motu powers.

Deadline for appointing new CEC passes with no sign of action by govt

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The constitutional deadline for the appointment of new chief election commissioner and two Election Commission of Pakistan members expired on Wednesday, with no action from the government in sight.

The five-year terms of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, Sindh Member Nisar Durrani and Balochistan Member Shah Muhammad Jatui ended on Jan 26, but they will continue to indefinitely hold the offices by virtue of a controversial amendment made in the Constitution in October last year.

The 26th Amendment allowed the CEC and the members to continue till their successors come in. As per Article 215(4) of the Constitution, the appointment of the CEC and members must be completed within 45 days. This deadline expired on March 12, yet no concrete steps have been taken. The parliamentary committee, which is essential for finalising the appointments, has not been formed despite an earlier announcement by the speaker of the National Assembly. Sikandar Raja’s five-year term ended on Jan 26, but he will continue to hold office indefinitely due to a ‘disputed’ constitutional amendment. The government has remained silent on the matter, and no progress has been made towards formation of the parliamentary committee required for these appointments.

Armed groups not ready to talk will face state’s wrath: Bugti

QUETTA: (News Desk) The war in Balochistan has reached every home, and there is dire need to launch coordinated actions to tackle the situation, Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti said on Wednesday. Speaking in the Balochistan Assembly on Wednesday, a day after the Jaffar Express was hijacked en route to Peshawar, he said that they should respond through tribal, Islamic, and con-

stitutional means, but the positions occupied by terrorists through violent means “will be reclaimed through violence”. He congratulated the security forces on successfully completing a highly sensitive rescue operation and expressed concern over the confusion regarding terrorism in the house. He reiterated that the government and the state were ready for dialogue and negotiations, but

stressed that this was not a war of deprivation or rights, rather the separatists are demanding independence. “What should we do if we don’t conduct an operation against armed groups? Terrorism is being funded from neighboring countries,” he said. He recalled the state had repeatedly played the role of a mother and tried to bring Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri back through talks. He

also recalled how Balach Marri was brought back from London and helped to win the elections. He emphasised anyone who advocates for the disintegration of the country and takes up arms will face the state’s wrath. He stated that the government has opened doors for youth at prestigious universities like Harvard and Oxford, while terrorists could not even hold on to any territory for more than four to five hours.



The chief minister asserted that the state is ready, but those fighting against it are not willing to talk. He criticised the people

who declared that Pakistan has lost the war, emphasising that the state has shown restraint. Once a war begins, he said.