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CM Sarfraz Bugti says: Balochistan ends sale of government jobs, merit-based recruitment becomes reality

Paperless, digital hiring process completed for the first time in Finance Department under fully transparent system

Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has declared that the era of buying and selling government jobs in the province has come to an end, stating that the successful completion of a fully merit-based recruitment process is clear proof

of the government's resolve to enforce transparency and fairness.

Addressing a ceremony held on Sunday at the Finance Department for the distribution of appointment letters to successful candidates for Sub-Accountant posts, the chief minister said that there was a

time when people in Balochistan had almost lost hope that merit could ever be implemented. "Today, we have practically demonstrated that if intentions are strong and the system is transparent, merit can not only be enforced but sustained," he said.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti

noted that for the first time in the history of the province, recruitment for Sub-Accountant posts in the Finance Department was carried out through a completely paperless, digital and online system. He said that the entire process —

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QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti addressing the appointment order distributing ceremony amongst successful candidates of Sub-Accountant posts advertised by Finance Department.



Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan Chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai addresses media at Karachi Press Club during All Parties Conference.

TTAP demands 'independent probe' into Feb 8 elections

Monitoring Desk

KARACHI: The opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz-i-Ayeen Pakistan (TTAP) has demanded an "independent probe" into the alleged rigging in the February 8, 2024, election and "punishment for those responsible for it under Article 6 of the Constitution", as they held an All Parties Conference (APC) in Karachi on Sunday.

The TTAP delegation, led by the chairperson and the newly-appointed opposition leader in the National Assembly, Mahmood Khan Achakzai, has arrived in Sindh for four days. The visit is part of the mobilisation efforts for a nationwide 'street movement' called by the PTI, scheduled for February 8.

TTAP members also announced observing "Black Day" and nationwide strike on Feb 8, to commemorate the second anniversary of the last gen-

eral elections in Pakistan, which they claimed were rigged.

According to the TTAP's manifesto, "Democracy rests on the foundation of transparent elections; therefore, restoring public trust in the transfer of power is possible only through fair elections."

The manifesto demanded "the immediate appointment of an impartial chief election commissioner and the holding of transparent elections under a new election commission."

It further called for an independent investigation into the alleged rigging in the Feb 8, 2024, general elections, the identification of those responsible, and their punishment under Article 6 of the Constitution, which corresponds to high treason.

"Through the 26th and 27th constitutional amendments, the independence of

the judiciary has been undermined by keeping the sword of judges' transfers hanging over their heads," it said.

"Conscientious judges, including Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Athar Minallah, and Justice Shams Mahmood Mirza, have been sidelined."

"The TTAP manifesto said it "strongly condemned" the recent actions against Justice Tariq Jhangiri, terming his disqualification the "latest example of an attack on the judiciary".

It further condemned the "false cases and convictions" against PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife.

"TTAP demands the immediate release of all political prisoners, including former prime minister Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Senator Ejaz Chaudhry, Dr

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Parliamentary delegation to visit China from Jan 19-21

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level parliamentary delegation led by Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq is scheduled to visit the People's Republic of China from January 19 to 21, 2026, on the special invitation of the Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China, Mr. Zhao Leji. The visit marks the first state-level and maiden official visit of the Pakistani Parliament in 2026 to the friendly country of China, underscoring the importance both sides attach to parliamentary diplomacy and bilateral cooperation, said a news release.

The visit coincides with the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, a historic milestone symbolizing the enduring, time-tested, and all-weather friendship between the two nations.



High Commissioner Syed Zahid Raza attended a reception hosted by Foreign Minister Ritesh Ramful. Hon. FM briefed about Mauritius' diplomacy during year 2025 and shared forthcoming international events in Mauritius Office of the Spokesperson, Mofa Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad

US President invited Shehbaz to become part of Gaza Board of Peace

WASHINGTON (INP): United States President Donald Trump has invited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to become part of the Gaza Board of Peace, a body being formed to address the ongoing crisis in the Palestinian territory.

The Foreign Office spokesperson confirmed that Pakistan has formally received the invitation to join the peace board established for Gaza.

Responding to media queries, the spokesperson said that Pakistan will continue to play an active role in global initiatives aimed at promoting peace and stability in the region.

He emphasized that Pakistan remains in close contact with the international community to support efforts for lasting peace

in Gaza, adding that a just and durable solution to the Palestine issue must be achieved in line with United Nations resolutions.

Pakistan, he said, will continue backing diplomatic efforts to ensure long-term peace in the Middle East.

According to international media, the White House has already announced the names of several members of the Gaza Board of Peace, which has been created under President Trump's peace initiative.

The board is intended to coordinate on security arrangements, humanitarian assistance, and reconstruction efforts, while also encouraging reforms within the Palestinian Authority and governance structures.

President, PM express grief over Gul Plaza fire in Karachi

KARACHI (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have expressed profound grief over the tragic Gul Plaza fire incident in Karachi.

In their separate statements, they extended their condolences over the loss of precious lives and conveyed heartfelt sympathy to the families of the victims.

The President and Prime Minister directed the Sindh government and authorities concerned to provide immediate and comprehensive assistance to the affected individuals and traders.

They emphasized that

every effort should be made to ensure the injured receive the best possible medical care.

On the other hand, Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the tragic loss of lives and significant financial damage caused by the massive fire at a shopping plaza on MA Jinnah Road.

Chairman Bhutto Zardari offered heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the fire, stating that he shares in the grief of the affected families during this difficult time. He also conveyed his best wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured.

Farha dubs Balochistan separatists as handful of peace deteriorators

KARACHI (APP): Member of Balochistan Assembly (MBA) and Provincial President of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) Farha Azeem Shah on Sunday lambasted at the Balochistan separatists and termed them as a handful of peace deteriorators.

While addressing a press conference at Karachi Press Club here on Sunday, she said that terrorism acts had been witnessed in Balochistan for the past 10 to 15 days, which were against the province.

She said that the media had the responsibility to show the face of positive Balochistan and avoid the separatists to be shown

on the media channels.

Farha Shah said that they would show the positive image of the Balochistan the world over, where lived the sports personalities, dancers, and professionals.

She said that Pakistan successfully retaliated India in May. She said that Pakistan shot down their aircrafts and defeated her.

Farha said that the father of the nation Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah created Pakistan and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir saved her.

She said that Pakistani media reported with responsibility and Indian media released fake news.

Gul Plaza blaze still burning as 56 remain missing, death toll rises to six in Karachi

Sindh govt sets up helpline for information on Gul Plaza fire

KARACHI (INP): As many as 56 people remain missing after a massive fire broke out late Saturday night at the Gul Plaza shopping mall on MA Jinnah Road in Karachi. The blaze has so far claimed six lives, including that of a firefighter, and left at least 20 others injured, said officials.

Firefighters are continuing efforts to fully extinguish the fire, while authorities are compiling data on those who remain untraced. Officials said details of 56 individuals have been collected so far in connection with the incident.

A massive fire tore through Gul Plaza on Karachi's MA Jinnah Road, leaving at least six people including a fireman Furqan burnt alive and more than

20 others injured as firefighters continued to struggle for control even after ten hours.

According to rescue officials, the death toll rose to six as teams recovered more bodies from the smoke-filled building.

The number of injured surpassed 20, while personnel from KMC Rescue, 1122, and Pakistan Navy remained stationed at the scene as the operation entered its extended phase.

More than 20 fire tenders, three snorkels, and two water bowlers were deployed in the ongoing firefighting effort, with additional water supplies being delivered through tankers.

Thick smoke continued to billow from the upper portions of the build-

ing, and officials said it was too early to estimate when the blaze would be fully contained.

Lieutenant Commander of Pakistan Navy said rescue efforts were being led by Captain Farhan Sheikh and himself, with five Navy fire tenders and 70 personnel actively participating in the operation.

Pak Navy's Lieutenant Commander Ifthikhar Ahmed confirmed that more people were believed to be trapped inside the structure.

He added that one body had been recovered by the Navy team during the night, while other rescue units had retrieved four more.

Rescue officials fear

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KARACHI: Smoke rises as a blaze continues to engulf from Gul Plaza. Authorities have confirmed six deaths so far, including a firefighter, after the fire erupted at the mall located at MA Jinnah Road.

Governor leaves for Umrah, Ghazala to assume acting Governor Balochistan role

QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhel is scheduled to depart for Saudi Arabia on Monday i.e. January 19, 2026 in order to perform Umrah, with a planned return on January 26, 2026. During his absence, Deputy Speaker Provincial Assembly Ghazala Gola will assume the responsibilities of the acting governor.

Wave of violence shakes Kohat, one killed, police officer martyred

KOHAT (APP): A series of disturbing incidents has rocked different areas of Kohat on Sunday, raising serious concerns over public safety and law and order. In Muslimabad, an unidentified assailant opened fire, killing a man identified as Mukhlis. Police have launched an investigation and are working to trace the attacker and determine the motive behind the killing.

Meanwhile, on Double Road in Dihari, two women were allegedly harassed inside their home and deprived of their gold jewelry by unidentified persons. The alarming incident has created fear among local residents, particularly women, and highlighted growing concerns about the security situation in residential areas.

Balochistan CM expresses deep grief over shopping center fire in Karachi

Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has expressed profound sorrow and heartfelt condolences over the tragic fire at a shopping center in Karachi's Gul Plaza area, which resulted in the loss of precious lives and significant financial damage.

In his statement, the chief minister described the incident as deeply distressing, noting that it has left not only the affected families but the entire nation mourning. He extended his sincere sympathies to the bereaved families, praying that Allah grants the departed souls a place in

Jannat and provides patience and strength to those left behind.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti also prayed for the swift and full recovery of the injured. He emphasized that he stands in complete solidarity with the victims, their families, and the affected traders during this painful time, sharing in their grief and assuring them of his moral support. The chief minister described the incident as a heart-wrenching tragedy and urged all relevant authorities to ensure necessary measures are taken to provide relief and assistance to the affected families and mitigate further risks.

Kohistani urges Achakzai to prioritize country's interest over loyalty, play positive role

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Religious Affairs Khail Das Kohistani on Sunday called on opposition leader Mahmood Khan Achakzai to take an active role in dialogue under the constitutional framework, stressing that NFC-related reforms can only be introduced with the backing of all opposition parties, notably the PPP.

While speaking to a local news channel, the state minister said that Opposition leader

Mahmood Khan Achakzai should rise above personal loyalty to Khan Sahib and play a constructive role for the welfare of the country. Kohistani further emphasized that Achakzai needs to focus on real issues facing the nation, which required cooperation and consensus from all parties.

He emphasized the importance of putting the nation's interests first and contributing positively to dialogue and consensus-building.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar addressing during the oath taking ceremony to the Pakistan Federal Union of Columnist and creators (PFUCC) at Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Foundation.

Unity vital to defeat hostile designs against Pakistan: Speakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Ulema and religious scholars on Sunday underscored national unity, religious harmony and collective resolve alongside the armed forces as essential to defeating hostile designs against Pakistan at a Paigham-e-Pakistan conference held in Rawalpindi.

The conference, themed "Pulpit and prayer niche: a violence-free society, religious harmony, victory of the Battle of Truth, national unity and the promotion of Paigham-e-Pakistan," was presided over by Chairman, Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, Maulana Syed Abdul Khabir Azad.

Addressing the gathering, Maulana Azad said Pakistan, founded on the Kalima Tayyaba, required unity, stability and national cohesion to safeguard its security and future. A source of national pride, he said the entire nation stood shoulder to shoulder with its armed forces for the country's defence and pro-

tection.

He said the armed forces, under the leadership of Field Marshal General Syed Asim Munir, had achieved decisive success in the Battle of Truth, adding that the outcome had enhanced Pakistan's honour and standing across the world. The success, he added, was not only Pakistan's achievement but a victory for the entire Muslim Ummah.

Maulana Azad said the nation remained united for Pakistan's security, defence and sovereignty, and paid tribute to the enduring sacrifices of the armed forces.

He said the trust reposed by Muslim leaders in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Pakistan's military leadership reflected confidence in Pakistan and affection for the country across the Muslim world.

Referring to regional and international develop

Continued on page 2

Pakistan ‘to review’ T20 World Cup participation if BCB’s concerns persist

Sports Desk

LAHORE: Pakistan is expected to reassess its participation in the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 in India-Sri Lanka, following increasing concerns related to the Bangladesh cricket team, sources told.

The Bangladesh government has reached out to Pakistan for support over its decision to skip travelling to India for the tournament, citing security concerns, sources said.

They added that Pakistan supports Bangladesh’s legitimate concerns, emphasising that they should be addressed and acted upon.

Pakistan has also stressed that no country should face pressure or threats from India, assuring Bangladesh of its full support on the matter.

On January 11, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) expressed its willingness to host

Bangladesh’s matches in the T20 World Cup after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided against travelling to India over security concerns.

PCB sources confirmed that Pakistan formally communicated its interest in hosting Bangladesh’s fixtures should venues in Sri Lanka be unavailable.

They added that all Pakistani venues are fully prepared to stage World Cup matches and highlighted Pakistan’s successful hosting of major ICC events, including the Champions Trophy 2025, and the ICC Women’s Qualifier.

Meanwhile, in another development, Cricket Ireland (CI) clarified that the International Cricket Council (ICC) will not move Ireland’s group-stage matches out of Sri Lanka, dismissing reports of a possible group swap with Bangladesh.

This follows claims that the BCB had requested a group exchange due to concerns over travelling to India. “We’ve received definitive assurances that we won’t move from the original schedule. We’re definitely playing the group stage in Sri Lanka,” a Cricket Ireland official confirmed.

Under the current schedule, Bangladesh are in Group B with West Indies, England, Nepal, and Italy, playing their matches in Kolkata and Mumbai. Ireland is in Group C alongside co-hosts Sri Lanka, Australia, Zimbabwe, and Oman, with all fixtures in Sri Lanka.

The BCB reportedly discussed the possibility of a group swap with ICC officials in Dhaka on Saturday to minimise logistical challenges, though the proposal received little support from the ICC or Cricket Ireland.



Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) senior leader Dr. Farooq Sattar meets senior Journalists Bachal Leghari and Irfanullah Khan in Karachi.

Aysha Ayaz shines with gold as 8th Ranking Taekwondo Championship concludes in Swat

ISLAMABAD (APP): Aysha Ayaz clinched a gold medal in the 45kg category as the eighth Ranking Taekwondo Championship concluded in Swat, with the Swat National Team securing overall first position in the two-day event. The championship was recently held by the Regional Sports Office (RSO) Malakand Division, Swat, under the directives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government and the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in collaboration with the district administration.

Aysha Ayaz delivered an impressive performance

in the 45kg weight category to secure the gold medal, emerging as one of the standout athletes of the championship.

Talking to APP after her victory, Aysha Ayaz said that winning a gold medal at a ranking championship was a proud moment for her. She said consistent training, discipline and the support of her coaches and family played a vital role in her success. She expressed hope to represent her region and Pakistan at higher-level national and international competitions in the future.

Aysha Ayaz is regarded as one of Pakistan’s

promising young taekwondo athletes. She has won a total of 11 international medals, including four gold, three silver and four bronze medals, in various international competitions. Her international appearances include events held in Dubai (2020), Thailand (2022), Qatar (2023), Malaysia (2025) and Indonesia (2025). She has also received more than 150 awards in recognition of her sporting achievements, including government awards, HBL PSL Hamra Heroes Awards, National Youth Awards, Pakistan Star Awards and Women Power Awards.

TTAP..

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Yasmin Rashid, Umar Sarfaraz Cheema, Mian Mahmood ur Rashid, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, Hassan Niazi, Ali Wazir, Haji Abdul Samad, Wali Mohmand, Dr Mahrang Baloch, and the detainees of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee,” the manifesto said.

Moreover, it called for an end to restrictions on meetings of party leaders and family with Imran.

Referring to the PECA law, the manifesto termed it a move to “silence critical voices and curtail media freedom”. It labelled the legislation as “black law” and demanded its “immediate revocation”.

The manifesto also demanded that the ongoing military operation in the Tirah Valley be “stopped immediately”, urging that the “federal government should take the provincial government into confidence on all matters”.

“All issues with Afghanistan should be resolved diplomatically,” the manifesto read, further asking the “unanimous demands” of the Jirga held in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly be immediately accepted.



ISLAMABAD: A view of a railway track near Margalla Railway Station as garbage and debris are seen dumped along the sides in the federal capital.



SINGAPORE: High Commissioner Rabia Shafiq attending the inaugural exhibition of renowned Pakistani-American artist Anila Quayyum Agha at Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

NZ register first ODI series win in India despite Kohli ton

Sports Desk

MUMBAI: New Zealand overcame a valiant 124 by Virat Kohli to down India by 41 runs and seal their first-ever ODI series victory on Indian soil on Sunday.

Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips guided New Zealand to 337-8 with a fourth-wicket stand of 219 after the tourists slipped to 5-2 and 58-3 in Indore.

Mitchell made 137 and Phillips hit 106 off 88 balls.

The Black Caps then bowled out India for 296 in 46 overs despite Kohli’s 54th ODI century and clinched the three-match series 2-1.

The in-form Kohli, who plays just the 50-over format after retiring from Test and T20 international cricket, threatened to pull off the chase in a 99-run seventh-wicket partnership with Harshit Rana, who made 52.

New Zealand left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox returned figures of 2-42 from his 10 overs after captain Michael Bracewell left the field with a calf injury and did not return.

Mitchell led the team in Bracewell’s absence, which also left New Zealand a bowler short.

Zak Foulkes and fellow seamer Kristian Clarke took three wickets each.

India slumped to 71-4 before Kohli hit back in an 88-run stand with Nitish Kumar Reddy, who made 53, and then with Rana.

Kohli struck 10 fours and three sixes in his 108-ball knock before he was caught off Clarke and walked back to a rousing ovation after his 85th international century.

Earlier the in-form Mitchell picked up from where he left off after his match-winning 131 not out in the second ODI, which levelled the series at 1-1.

Mitchell reached his ninth ODI ton with a single off Ravindra Jadeja before Phillips also brought up his hundred.

DG FIA reviews immigration operations at I’abad airport

ISLAMABAD (APP): Director General Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Riffat Mukhtar Raja visited Islamabad International Airport to review immigration operations and assess steps aimed at improving passenger facilitation.

An official told APP on Sunday that the DG FIA Riffat inspected immigration procedures and was informed that the airport handles 94 international flights daily, clearing more than 10,000 international passengers every day.

The official said that on January 13, immigration staff cleared 2,400 passengers within a single hour, reflecting heavy pressure during peak hours due to the simultaneous arrival of multiple international flights. Temporary congestion also occurs because of flight delays caused by weather conditions and technical issues.

According to the briefing, the FIA Immigration at

the airport operates in three shifts, with 15 immigration counters for departures and 13 counters for arrivals currently functional to manage passenger flow.

During the visit, the DG Riffat directed officers to ensure the provision of the best possible immigration services.

He ordered the installation of a queue management system, phased implementation of e-gates, and deployment of additional staff to guide passengers during busy hours.

He also directed that a pre-departure mobile application be introduced at the earliest to further speed up immigration clearance, particularly during peak travel periods.

The DG FIA Riffat emphasized that improving efficiency, reducing waiting time, and enhancing passenger experience remain key priorities of Federal Investigation Agency Immigration.



ISLAMABAD: Dhirkot Premier League 2026 winning team captain Rehan Mehtab receiving the trophy from the Sardar Imran Aziz President Business Forum.

Balochistan ends..

Continued from page 1

including online tests, interviews, announcement of results and issuance of appointment letters — was completed in a single day, terming it a historic and decisive step towards merit, transparency and institutional reforms in Balochistan.

Recalling his first address in the provincial assembly, the chief minister said he had made a clear promise to the people that the sale of government jobs would be eliminated forever, adding that “today marks the practical fulfillment and continuity of that promise.”

He emphasized that employment opportunities are now being provided strictly on merit, without influence, recommendations or bribery.

The chief minister said that for the first time in Balochistan’s history, candidates from all backgrounds — whether the son of a laborer, a teacher or a minister — appeared in the same examination system, on equal footing, with merit as the sole criterion for success. “This is a true example of equality and justice,” he added.

He announced that the government plans to introduce the same modern and transparent digital recruitment mechanism at divisional, district and tehsil levels to ensure merit at every tier and to restore public trust on a permanent basis. He also pointed out

that thousands of posts have remained pending with the Public Service Commission for years, causing a serious shortage of human resources in provincial institutions.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that comprehensive restructuring, reforms and full digitalization of the Balochistan Public Service Commission would be carried out to transform it into a functional, transparent and one of the best public service commissions in Pakistan.

Congratulating the successful candidates, the chief minister said that their recruitment in Grade-14 purely on merit was a testament to their hard work, competence and public confidence in a transparent system.

He also appreciated Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, Secretary Finance Imran Zarkoon, Principal Secretary Babar Khan, the Finance Department team and the BEMTS team for making the historic recruitment process successful.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief minister distributed appointment letters among the successful candidates. Provincial Minister Sardar Kohyar Khan Domki, MPA Haji Ali Madad Jattak, Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, Secretary Finance Imran Zarkoon, Principal Secretary Babar Khan and other senior officials were also present on the occasion.

PSL governing council backs ‘player auction model’ for season 11

Sports Desk

LAHORE: The Pakistan Super League (PSL) governing council’s working committee held a late-night meeting to discuss key matters for the upcoming season, including the player auction and retention policies, sources told Geo News on Sunday.

According to insiders, the committee agreed to introduce a player auction for PSL 11 and also finalised the rules for player retention.

The committee’s decisions will be sent to PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi for final approval, with the option of convening a full governing council meeting if required.

Sources revealed that the defending champions Lahore Qalandars, along with Quetta Gladiators, Islamabad United, Karachi Kings and Hyderabad, voted in favour of the player auction model.

Peshawar Zalmi and the Sialkot franchise also voted in favour of the ‘drauction’ system, sources said.

It was also confirmed that the five existing franchises agreed on retaining four players each, one in each category, with one player eligible to be brought

into a lower category and designated as a brand ambassador, sources said.

The new franchises, meanwhile, will select their remaining players from the general player pool through the auction system. Two new franchises, however, insisted on zero retention.

“The remaining players will be auctioned, and franchises will pick their players in the auction,” sources said.

The final formula for the PSL 11 auction and retention rules will be submitted to Mohsin Naqvi, with an official announcement expected within the next one or two days.

Sources said there is a possibility that it will not be made mandatory to include a player from the Emerging category in the playing XI.

The PSL auction is likely to be held during the first week of February, sources said.

Earlier, Naqvi advised franchise owners to increase the players’ salary cap as the marquee league enters a new era with the addition of two new teams.

Highlighting the rise in franchise market value, he encouraged teams to adopt the auction model.



TTAP chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai (left) attends a meeting with QAT chief Ayaz Latif Palijo and others at his residence in Hyderabad

Pakistan futsal teams make history with first ever international wins

Sports Desk

BANGKOK: Pakistan’s futsal breakthrough continued at the SAFF Championship in Thailand as the men’s team secured their first-ever international win on Friday, a day after the women recorded Pakistan’s maiden futsal victory.

In the men’s event, Pakistan came back from a 2-0 deficit to beat Bhutan 4-2 at the Hua Mak Indoor Arena in Bangkok, registering their first international victory in futsal.

Bhutan’s Dawa Shering put his side ahead with two quick goals early on, but Pakistan responded through Hassan Zafar, who scored in the 28th minute to cut the deficit.

Asif Ahmed Chaudhry levelled the match in the 32nd minute before Adnan Ashfaq struck in the 34th and 35th minutes to complete the turnaround and seal the win.

Pakistan’s starting five for the match featured Tahir Khan, Hassaan Zafar, Humza Nusrat, Nisar Hussain and Salar Khan, with Abdul Wadud, Humza

Khan, Asif Ahmad, Adnan Ashfaq, Ali Agha, Abdul Hannan, Zaid Khan, Muhammad Elham and Rajab Ali listed among the substitutes.

Pakistan had opened the tournament with a 7-1 defeat to the Maldives in their first match.

In the women’s event, Pakistan defeated Sri Lanka 3-2 on Thursday, with Azwa Chaudhry scoring a hat-trick to deliver the women’s team’s first-ever international futsal win.

Reacting to the landmark results, the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) said on Instagram that Pakistan’s women’s and men’s futsal teams had “created history by winning their first-ever international matches at SAFF Futsal 2026”.

The PFF said the teams delivered the wins “despite a lack of Futsal infrastructure in the country and the challenges”, adding that Pakistan women beat Sri Lanka 3-2 while the men’s team “came from behind to win against Bhutan 4-2”.



HYDERABAD: Kodi Kodi players in action during All Pakistan Horse Riding Competitions as part of Winter Sports Festival 2026.

Gul Plaza blaze still..

Continued from page 1

the presence of additional bodies inside the charred building as the operation progresses.

Authorities declared the blaze a third-degree fire as more than 20 fire brigade vehicles and snorkels were deployed to the scene. Fire tenders were summoned from across the city as flames engulfed multiple floors of the commercial building.

Paramilitary Rangers personnel also joined the rescue operation as the fire spread rapidly through the structure. All shops and warehouses on the ground floor were gutted, officials confirmed, adding that the intensity of the blaze caused deep cracks in the building’s pillars.

A portion of the structure collapsed during the emergency response, and

authorities warned that the entire building could give way at any moment due to severe structural damage.

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari directed the Sindh chief minister to utilise all available resources to extinguish the fire.

Expressing grief over the loss of life and property, Bilawal offered condolences to the families of the deceased and called for an immediate investigation to prevent such incidents in the future.

A spokesperson for the Sindh government said all necessary resources were being provided and the administration was making every effort to bring the situation under control as swiftly as possible. Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab also expressed sorrow over the tragic incident.



QUETTA: Provincial Secretary Finance Imran Zarkoon witnessing the online test of vacant posts of Sub Accountant.

CM Bugti personally contacts successful candidates, reaffirms commitment to merit-based recruitment

Successful applicants praise transparency of online testing process for Sub-Accountant posts in Finance Department

Independent Report
QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti personally contacted the successful candidates of the online test conducted for Sub-Accountant positions in the Finance Department and extended his congratulations on their success. During the telephonic interaction, the chief

minister inquired in detail about the testing process and sought feedback regarding its transparency and fairness.

The successful candidates informed the chief minister that the entire online testing and recruitment process was conducted in a fully transparent, fair and merit-based manner.

Expressing their happiness and satisfaction, the candidates said they could hardly believe that they had secured government jobs without any recommendations or bribery.

They appreciated the transparent recruitment system and thanked Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti for introducing a pro-

cess based purely on merit. The candidates stated that for the first time they felt confident that genuine merit-based employment opportunities were possible in Balochistan.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that the government is fully committed to making the system of govern-

ment recruitment completely transparent and to eliminating the culture of favoritism and corruption. He emphasized that restoring the confidence of youth and providing them with dignified employment opportunities remains the top priority of the provincial government.

Ali Madad Jattak continues grassroots engagement to resolve public issues

Independent Report
QUETTA: Pakistan Peoples Party Central Committee member and Provincial Assembly Member Haji Ali Madad Jattak is actively engaged day and night in addressing public issues, emerging as a true public servant of the people of his Sariab constituency.

At Jattak House in Asifabad, delegations from various localities and prominent community

members met Haji Ali Madad Jattak and briefed him in detail on their grievances, civic issues and ongoing development needs of their areas. The visiting delegations raised concerns related to water supply, electricity, road infrastructure and other basic public amenities. Haji Ali Madad Jattak listened patiently to all delegations and, on the spot, issued directives to concerned departments to

ensure prompt resolution of public complaints. He assured the people that all possible steps would be taken to provide relief and improve basic facilities in the constituency.

Speaking on the occasion, community members appreciated his consistent role as a people-friendly representative, stating that he has always worked without discrimination to address citizens' problems.



QUETTA: Vice Chancellor BUMHS Professor Dr. Shabbir Lehri participating in the launching ceremony of Bolan Journal of Medical and Allied Sciences.

BUMHS launches Balochistan's first-ever medical research journal

Independent Report
QUETTA: Bolan University of Medical and Health Sciences (BUMHS), Quetta — Balochistan's first and only public sector medical university — has achieved another major milestone in its academic and research journey with the formal launch of the Bolan Journal of Medical and Allied Health Sciences. The journal is the first medical research publication of its kind in the province, aimed at promoting quality medical research and strengthening an evidence-based healthcare system in Balochistan.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony as chief guest, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Shabbir Ahmed Lehri said that medical research remains a core priority of Bolan University, as it provides a solid foundation for improving healthcare standards. He noted that within a short span of time, the university has shown remarkable improvement in Higher Education Commission (HEC) rankings and continues to make steady progress in academic, research, and administrative domains.

The ceremony commenced with opening re-

marks by Prof. Dr. Rauf Shah. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Aslam Buzdar, Editor of the Bolan Journal of Medical and Allied Health Sciences, stated that the journal would serve as a credible and effective platform for promoting research culture in Balochistan, mentoring young researchers, and encouraging high-quality scientific work.

He further highlighted that from 2023 to 2025, Bolan University successfully conducted MDCAT examinations across Balochistan in a transparent manner.

JUI-F Spokesperson Aslam slams government for denying public relief on petroleum prices

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) spokesperson Aslam Ghauri has strongly criticized the federal government for failing to provide relief to the public by not reducing petroleum product prices, despite a significant decline in global oil rates.

In a sharp reaction, Aslam Ghauri said that the country is already reeling under severe inflation, with the common man facing immense hardships in meeting daily expenses. He al-

leged that rulers imposed through "fake votes" are misleading the nation by projecting a false narrative of economic improvement through the media, while ground realities reflect worsening conditions for the masses. He termed the government's refusal to lower petroleum prices an "anti-people decision," stating that the rulers are shifting the burden of their own expenditures onto ordinary citizens. Ghauri expressed regret that even after a noticeable decrease in

international oil prices, the government has failed to pass on the benefit to the public.

The JUI-F spokesperson warned that maintaining high petroleum prices would further inflate the cost of food items and other daily-use commodities, pushing the poor and middle class deeper into economic distress. He said inflation continues to rise due to flawed economic policies, while the purchasing power of the people has been severely eroded.



QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Health Bakht Muhammad Kakar offering Fataha on the sad demise of mother of General Secretary PPP Rabbani Kakar.

More fun for kids at Gwadar's Model Park as new electronic rides installed

GWADAR (INP): Families and young visitors in Gwadar now have more to enjoy at Model Beach Park, where a new range of modern electronic amusement rides has been installed to expand recreational options for children.

The coastal park, developed by the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) as a dedicated space for women and children, has added attractions including Bike, 4 Bee Rides, Badal New Shape, Banmanus Kingkong, Buggi 2 Horse, Moto Car, Moto Cup, Panda Jahaz, Titanic Ship and Train rides, according to a Gwadar Pro's report.

Officials said the rides have been installed with a strong focus on safety and

quality, offering a comfortable and enjoyable environment for families.

Located along the scenic coastline, Model Beach Park has become a popular family destination in the port city. The park recently served as a hub for community activities during New Year celebrations, which featured cultural programs and fireworks and drew large numbers of women and children.

Another highlight of the park is the Baloch Insight Café, a three-container café that has emerged as a social space for women and families.

The café hosts gatherings and children's birthday celebrations and offers a variety of fast food and refreshments.

Earlier, GDA highlighted improvements to public parks and recreational facilities as part of broader efforts to promote youth-friendly activities, women's access and quality of life in Gwadar.

According to an official statement, the new rides and facilities were introduced on the instructions of Director General Chairman Moeen-ur-Rehman Khan, in line with the authority's ongoing efforts to develop leisure and community spaces alongside urban development.

Residents and visitors have welcomed the additions, saying they have further strengthened Model Beach Park's role as a safe and enjoyable recreational spot for children and families.

Polio-free Gwadar prepares for first nationwide campaign

GWADAR (INP): Gwadar authorities have stepped up preparations for Pakistan's first nationwide polio drive of 2026, underlining the district's importance in maintaining polio-free status.

District officials held a high-level coordination meeting Friday to finalize arrangements for the February campaign, part of the National Immunization Days (NID), Gwadar Pro reported.

The meeting was chaired by Deputy Commissioner Gwadar Naqeebullah Kakar and attended by senior officials from health, administration, law enforcement and partner organizations.

Participants reviewed operational planning, logistics, security and surveillance measures for the drive, which will be the first countrywide polio campaign of the new year. Officials said a target of 35,364 children has been set for Gwadar district.

Representatives of the World Health Organization presented a detailed review of the previous campaign, including updates on suspected cases, environmental samples and demographic trends.

Rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge systems installed at two major educational institutions

Independent Report
QUETTA: Rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge systems installed at two major educational institutions in Quetta have shown promising results amid one of Balochistan's worst droughts in recent years, officials said.

Balochistan received nearly 52 per cent less rainfall than average in 2025, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, intensifying pressure on groundwater resources that supply most of the provincial capital's water needs.

In response to the growing water crisis, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), under the European Union-funded Revival of Balochistan Water Resources Programme (RBWRP), implemented rainwater harvesting and recharge infrastructure at the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIEMS) and the Balochistan Agriculture College (BAC).

The systems were tested during rainfall events in December

2025. On December 20, Quetta received about 5 millimetres of rain, allowing storage tanks at BUIEMS to fill close to capacity without triggering groundwater recharge.

A heavier rainfall of 13 millimetres on December 30-31 fully filled the storage tanks and initiated the recharge process. Monitoring data showed that 4 cubic meters of water were recharged into the groundwater aquifer. Water quality tests recorded Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) at 155 parts per million, meeting standards for

safe recharge.

At the Balochistan Agriculture College, rainfall during the same period filled a 286,500-litre storage pond, while overflow contributed around 1.5 cubic meters to groundwater recharge, highlighting the benefits of larger storage systems.

Apart from rain water the site at BUIEMS also utilizes the overhead tank over flow water for storage which is regularly used for horticulture purpose.

Deputy Country Representative IWMI, Dr. Muhammad

Arshad, Project officials Shamsheer Shah and Mueez Shehzad have said the initiatives aim to capture rainwater for institutional and horticultural use while replenishing depleted aquifers, offering a sustainable approach to water management in arid regions.

They said that the December rainfall events confirmed the operational effectiveness of the systems, which could be replicated across other drought-prone areas of Balochistan to strengthen water security and climate resilience.



QUETTA: MPA Haji Ali Madad offering Fataha on the sad demise of father of senior journalist Shahid Rind.

Khuzdar police intensify anti-narcotics drive, major seizure made in Wadh

Independent Report
KHUZDAR: As part of the ongoing crackdown against narcotics, Khuzdar Police have carried out successful operations in the Wadh Circle, arresting drug smugglers and recovering a large quantity of narcotics.

The operations were conducted on the special directives of SSP Khuzdar Shahzada Umar Abbas Babar and Additional SSP Abdul Qudoos Dehwar. Under the supervision of DSP Wadh Circle Muhammad Ameen Lasi, SHO Wadh Abdul Wahab Salsoli, along with his team, carried out a targeted operation in the Wadh area.

During the action, the police arrested an accused identified as Zameer Ali, who was allegedly involved

in drug smuggling. A total of 36,000 grams of charas were recovered from his possession along with an ATC Mazda truck used for transportation. A case has been registered against the accused, and further legal proceedings are underway.

Speaking on the occasion, SHO Wadh Abdul Wahab Salsoli stated that no leniency would be shown to drug dealers and smugglers, adding that police operations against the drug menace would continue without interruption until this social evil is eradicated.

Khuzdar Police reaffirmed their commitment to pursuing the anti-narcotics campaign with full force to rid society of the scourge of drugs.

DC Loralai takes eco-friendly initiative, gives cash reward to child for watering tree daily

QUETTA (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Loralai Miran Baloch has taken a unique and exemplary initiative to promote tree plantation and protect the environment, under which a cash reward is being given to a child who watered a tree daily.

According to the details, Deputy Commissioner Mehran Baloch has taken this initiative to raise awareness of tree plantation and tree care among children in Loralai district.

In this regard, a child was given a cash reward for regular tree care and daily watering, which is being appreciated in public circles.

Deputy Commissioner Mehran Baloch said

on the occasion that trees are the guarantee of life and encouraging the new generation to adopt eco-friendly habits is the need of the hour.

He said that the aim of this initiative is to instill a sense of conservation of natural resources in children so that the foundation of a green and prosperous Pakistan could be laid in the future.

He also urged parents and teachers to educate children about tree plantation and environmental protection. Citizens commended the

Commissioner's move and expressed hope that it would promote tree plantation in the area.



QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Food Haji Noor Muhammad Dummarr offering Fataha on the sad demise of brother of Sardar Afzal Kibzai.



Traders in Quetta protest warehouse raids with Anjuman-e-Tajran Balochistan President Abdul Rahum Kakar present.

Daily Voice of Masses Independent

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Gaza second phase

More than three months since the ceasefire in Gaza took effect, the second phase of President Donald Trump's peace plan for the occupied Palestinian territory has been launched.

Among the features of this phase is the announcement of the so-called Gaza 'Board of Peace', which the American leader will head. Other luminaries serving on this body include his son-in-law Jared Kushner, administration staffers Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff and former British prime minister Tony Blair, among others. In Mr Trump's own words, this "is the Greatest and Most Prestigious Board ever assembled".

Meanwhile, a serving American general has been named to head the International Stabilisation Force, which is supposed to oversee security and disarmament in Gaza, while Ali Shaath, an ex-Palestinian Authority official, is to head the Gaza governance committee.

All the hyperbole notwithstanding, it remains to be seen whether these interim governing structures will succeed in addressing the still dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, and stopping Israel from committing more slaughter in the Strip.

While Tel Aviv had butchered over 70,000 Palestinians since Oct 7, 2023, more than 400 people have been murdered in Gaza by Israel since the ceasefire took effect. Moreover, Israel continues to occupy the Palestinian territory.

There are also questions about how much liberty the Palestinian committee will have in running Gaza's affairs. There are genuine fears that the foreign-led Board of Peace — in true colonial fashion — will be making the actual decisions that matter, with little to no Palestinian input, seeking to protect Israel's interests over all else.

Interestingly, the board's goals include bringing "investment attraction" to and initiating "capital mobilisation" in Gaza. Rather than a humanitarian effort, this sounds more like a business deal.

Also, the inclusion of Tony Blair in the board has raised eyebrows. As UK prime minister, Mr Blair was an enthusiastic supporter of America's devastating invasion of Iraq. It should be remembered that Iraq has yet to fully recover from that disaster.

As for the ISF, its mandate is still unclear. Will the force, led by an American general and consisting of troops from Muslim countries, take Hamas's weapons by force if the Palestinian group refuses to give up its guns? Will Muslim states be willing to participate in such an endeavour? Pakistan, and other states that are mulling sending troops, must consider these scenarios.

The fact is that the plan is a temporary fix at best, and a cover for permanent Israeli occupation at worst. If there is to be lasting peace in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories, then the question of Palestinian liberation must be addressed in unambiguous terms. A clear roadmap is needed, which leads to the end of the Zionist occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Muhammad Amir Rana

Iran's clerical regime seems to have weathered yet another wave of internal resistance, exploited, as always, by its external rivals. But the human losses have left a deep new wound on the Iranian psyche. The immediate threat of a US-Israeli strike has also dispersed. Washington and Tel Aviv, backed by most Gulf capitals, recalibrated their stance after strategic assessments highlighted the danger of a wider regional war and the absence of any realistic plan for a post-regime change scenario.

Inside Iran, resistance against the establishment still struggles to form a unified front or leadership. However, this does not mean the US, Israel or their allies have dropped the goal of political change in Tehran. Instead, they are adjusting their methods. Media reports indicate the regime will not collapse quickly due to a strong security apparatus, loyal institutions, and backing from a sizable segment of the population.

Even so, external ac-

Abbas Nasir

While the US may want regime change in Iran, and Israel the collapse of the established order, internal strife and chaos, it appears that Tehran has stayed safe from US-led military strikes, for the time being at least, because any such action seems less imminent now than it did earlier this week.

Speculation abounds about what made US President Donald Trump change his mind — from entreaties by Gulf friends, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman, to a seemingly bizarre New York Times report that claimed that the apartheid state's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also asked the US leader not to launch military strikes for the time being.

However, in Trump's own words "nobody" made him change his mind and it was the staying of 800 hangings of protesters that Iran had supposedly planned that was the main reason he had called off the strikes and also because the protesters' "killing has stopped".

Whatever led to the pause, temporary or per-

Muna Khan

I believe I manifested this getaway to Islamabad.

For the past three months, life in Karachi has been so frustrating that I have been saying out loud that I want to get out of here. It is difficult to take the state of the roads, people's driving or the complete absence of any road etiquette, besides my own increasing road rage, any longer. And then of course, there is the mess that DHA has turned into. One does not even need to get into the daily struggles that we all face.

I did not realise that by saying 'I need a break', someone would actually grant me one. So here I am, a suitcase filled with everything warm that I own, as well as things loaned by friends and family.

This is not my first time in the capital but it is my first time on my own. You see cities through a different lens when you're a solo traveller. Previously, when planning this visit, everyone had an opinion about my neighbourhood, choice of commute, where to eat, etc, and a lot of it was based on their own experience, but there was also a lot of hearsay parading as fact. One had heard that the food in Islamabad was terrible. It is not. One heard the city was very clean. It is not.

A newcomer might come expecting a utopia and while anything is better than the many DHA Khayabans currently trying to pass off as roads in Karachi, the capital is not without its faults. This isn't going to turn into an 'us vs them' debate. But it does make one think a lot about perception vs reality.

tors, along with internal resistance networks, are unlikely to allow the regime much time to fully recover from this crisis. Pressure is expected to persist, shifting from low to high intensity, to gradually soften the ground for change.

A key indicator that the ground is fertile for such a shift are the visible cracks within the Assembly of Experts (Majles-i-Khobregan-i-Rahbari), the Guardian Council (Shura-i-Neghaban), and disputes within or between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the regular military (Artesh). All these critical institutions are still aligned with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's core strategic worldview, as one Iranian-origin expert noted.

To break the regime's coherence, external actors would not only seek to energise internal political resistance but also exploit other domestic fault lines, including fuelling dormant or active insurgencies.

Analysts speculate that separatist and anti-clerical movements are concentrated in several key regions: Khuzestan province in the southwest, where many Arab Iranians harbour

grievances; the western border areas, including Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan, where Kurdish separatists remain active; and, from a Pakistani perspective, the Baloch districts in Sistan-Baluchestan and parts of the Khorasan region, where anti-regime Baloch insurgent groups continue their operations.

As Vali Nasr explains in his latest book, Iran's Grand Strategy, the clerical regime's doctrine of 'forward defence', projecting power abroad to protect the state at home, can also be turned against Iran. Its adversaries can adopt the same approach to weaken the regime from within. Iran's enemies have already disrupted the Axis of Resistance, the network of Iranian regional proxies built around this forward defence strategy. The next step, as a few analysts suggest, could be the deployment or activation of proxies inside Iran itself.

If this occurs, the primary objective would be to draw the Iranian Revolutionary Guard into a deeper engagement on the internal front. An amalgam of political resistance and armed struggle can strain Iranian

forces, especially when their proxies cannot come to their aid, as Iran's Axis of Resistance is weak and unable to provide any support. These broader trends are now evident on the ground. Although reports suggest that the recent internal resistance has emboldened separatist elements in Arab and Kurdish regions, it is in the Sistan-Baluchestan belt where several militant outfits have reportedly formed a stronger coalition to intensify their campaign against the Iranian state.

Jaishul Adl is a Baloch separatist group operating along the Iran-Pakistan border. It frequently targets Iranian security forces in Baloch-majority regions. The group now calls itself the People's Fighters Front (PFF). Three smaller militant outfits, the Nasr Movement, the Pada Baloch Movement, and the Muhammad Rasul Allah Group, have reportedly merged into this new organisation.

This rebranding is significant. By shedding its overtly religious identity, Jaishul Adl is attempting to project a more accommodative, secular nationalist pro-

file that resonates better with the region's relatively moderate Baloch population. It also aligns the group's ideology with that of other nationalist insurgent movements, such as the terrorist Baloch organisations BLF and BLA and Kurdish groups like PJAK. Such a shift is also likely to make the organisation more eligible for support and funding from the Baloch and Iranian diaspora, as well as other external backers.

Strategically, the makeover aims to make the group acceptable to the West and the Arab world. It mirrors Abdolmalik Rigi's approach. He was the founder of a Baloch militant group in Iran and sought Western backing but failed, as the global war on terrorism was at its peak then.

This is a different time. If separatist groups inside Iran become more active, they might join forces with Baloch separatists in Pakistan, who have sharpened their skills. Some experts are unsure about this, arguing that the PFF has long been seen as Saudi-backed. Since Riyadh maintains strong ties with Pakistan, the alliance seems

unlikely. But if the PFF has gained support from other external players, it could act with more strategic independence. Baloch separatist groups on both sides of the border ultimately subscribe to the idea of a 'Greater Balochistan'. This concept spans regions of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, making cross-border cooperation a possibility.

If turmoil grows in Sistan-Baluchestan, many terrorist actors could get involved. These could include IS elements and militants who have left Ahmed al-Sharaa's networks in Syria. As this region is part of the Golden Crescent, a hub for drug trafficking and human smuggling, the ongoing instability could create a chaotic zone across Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Any significant political shift in Iran will inevitably affect Pakistan with its broad geopolitical and geoeconomic consequences. While certain outcomes may offer limited strategic advantages for Pakistan, escalating instability along the Iran-Pakistan border would raise internal security pressures and could generate serious frictions with the regime in Tehran.

Relief as US puts off strikes

another concern.

In the other scenario, where a central authority collapse would lead to chaos and fragmentation, it would be reasonable to assume that Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province would be one of the regions affected by any such development, which, in turn, would lead to even more issues across our common, often porous, border.

With the same ethnicity straddling the border, you can well imagine the boost the insurgency in our Balochistan could get from the collapse of the central authority in Iran. Israel has enhanced its security through internal strife in Syria. It is the Mossad playbook for all states around it who are not in its pocket.

So, Pakistan can heave a sigh of relief that no further destabilisation has happened on the country's western borders and up the coast, in the short run at least. But Trump's decision to impose another 25 per cent tariff on anyone doing business with Iran will deepen the crisis in the sanctions-clamped nation.

It was the economic crisis, with the rapidly falling value of the Iranian currency and inflation, that triggered the recent round of street protests. There can be no doubt that the Israeli intelligence service Mossad was involved in arming and instigating some of the protesters as the former CIA chief and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo openly tweeted, but the protests erupted due to the economic mess where even purchasing bread is becoming a problem.

This fact was acknowledged by Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who said the government needed to address the legitimate concerns of the protesters who had a right to take to the streets. Now a new budget is expected to be presented before parliament to replace the earlier proposal rejected by it. But then, the protests turned violent and the security services were ordered to crack down.

Some Tehran-based sources say the protests were peaceful till some elements from among the protesters fired at the security forces and also at-

tacked infrastructure. These sources claimed that, of the 2,000 people killed, some 700 were law-enforcement officers. But these claims were impossible to verify independently.

Trump's tariffs on top of sanctions could create further problems for the Iranian leadership as even the thus far recalcitrant India is having second thoughts about doing business with Iran and has pulled out of the Chabahar port project, which it saw as vital to expanding its trade ties all the way to Central Asia.

With the exception of China and Russia, additional US tariffs would be sufficient to discourage the smaller economies from trading with Iran, which would worsen the resource crunch in that country. The oppressive Iranian regime has some serious thinking to do over the coming weeks.

The immediate threat of US-Israeli military action may have receded somewhat but the economic crisis is going to worsen. Iran may consider easing restrictions on how women should be attired and create more space for

peaceful expression of dissent as a means of reducing tensions within its society.

Side by side, it should consider what price tag it wants to attach to its nuclear programme. With its successful and lethal missile programme, it has already gained a degree of effective defence. Only Iran can tell if stopping its enrichment programme in exchange for lifting of sanctions and economic relief is worthwhile.

If its missile stockpile, particularly of the hypersonic variant, is what prompted many of its Gulf neighbours and, by some accounts, even Israel, to ask the US not to provoke it by attacking, Iran's defence shield seems to be working. Only the decision-makers in Tehran will know if that is enough or whether their pursuit of nuclear weapons is non-negotiable.

Their past experience of doing a deal with the Obama administration in 2015 to cap enrichment is not encouraging. Even then, it's not clear what other options a country facing economic ruin and internal strife can exercise.

Calm vs chaos

In the last six weeks or so, during Decemberistan, I met a lot of people in Karachi who visited Lahore. If you haven't heard the word, Decemberistan, according to actor Adnan Malik, who coined the term almost a decade ago, denotes the time of year "when a false sense of mass euphoria and well-being affects the population of urban Pakistan". Both overseas Pakistanis and friends who had to go to Lahore for weddings told us how well Lahore 'worked' as a city. These aren't the expatriates who bemoan everything that is wrong with Pakistan. They are, admittedly wealthy, Pakistanis who tilt towards one party — they hate this Form 47 government — so to hear them begrudgingly praise Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's administration was a surprise in itself.

We've seen the ads about the projects launched by Maryam Nawaz's administration and it all seems impressive, but how does that translate into real impact? Who is benefiting? I ask because outside this extended circle of mine is the other side that posts pictures of dirty roads, false advertising and what not.

Take the claim Maryam Nawaz made last month at a jalsa that crime was down by 80 per cent in the province. "Punjab is now a safe place," she told the crowds. It echoed what my female friends said about feeling safer in the province and what uncles said about not hearing so much about crime in neighbourhoods. In other words, it sounded right. But a fact-check by a legacy news outlet found that based on the statistics from Punjab Police, crime was only down by 2pc. The most reduction

reported was in cases of gang rape, which were down by 44pc from 2024. Yet Maryam Nawaz's claims resonated with people on both sides of the divide. The roads are better, cleaner, they're planning Basant, hurrah. Who cares about facts?

At the time of writing, no one had fact-checked Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's presentation on Sindh's progress under his party's rule. He did this to negate the naysayers who like to portray Sindh as "a glass half empty" province, he was quoted as saying. He spoke about his party's performance in healthcare, education, poverty alleviation, infrastructure, industry, agriculture and revenue generation. It was all very impressive but I was struggling to believe it, having witnessed only a bleak picture.

Then there's Imran Khan. We've not seen or heard from him; he's not allowed to meet anyone. Yet entire campaigns are run under his name. And they damage his case and create fissures within the party. I'm convinced his social media team doesn't want him out.

The gap between perception and reality in mainstream media has widened so much that I don't know if it can be fixed. Maybe it needs a complete overhaul. It begins with rebuilding trust and that can only happen once we accept that we were deployed to manufacture consent and build narratives — for seths or someone else. We must promise not to do that again. It sounds as naive as the idea that I will not miss Karachi's chaos. But we simply can't afford to live in our own versions of reality far removed from the most glaring one — facts cannot be altered for your comfort.

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

With two vast oceans giving it a sense of security against foreign aggressors, the US could understandably be lulled into believing itself to be inviolable. When the Japanese carried out a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the US woke up, fought back, and emerged as one of the victors of World War II. The next challenge to US supremacy came from the Cold War with the Soviet Union, ending in the dissolution of the latter in 1991. Feeling ultra-secure and confident, the US, now the sole superpower, embarked on extending its outreach to every corner of the globe. Some American analysts started projecting liberal democracy and market economies as the only universal organising principle of governance for all countries.

As the new century dawned, two developments shattered this sense of supremacy. First, Al Qaeda attacked America's iconic buildings in New York and Washington on Sept 11, 2001. Second, China emerged as a global economic powerhouse and a potential military challenge. While 9/11 led America into distant and never-ending wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, China continued its peaceful rise. A multipolar and interconnected world began to shape up. America decided to contain the further rise of China. In 2017, the US National Security Strategy resolved to advance US influence globally and counter rising powers like China and Russia. This was reinforced by the Biden administration's NSS-2022, which focused on out-competing China, constraining Russia, defending democracies and human rights, and build-

ing coalitions with likeminded powers.

However, the policy to out-compete China didn't work. Even the attempt to bog down Russia in Ukraine didn't really go the way the US and Europe had envisaged. At home, US overstretch became costly — debt burden, high unemployment and a deteriorating road infrastructure. America began to review its approach to national security, leading to Trump's NSS-2025, which stipulated that the US would no longer act as the guarantor of the world order it had helped create eight decades ago. The top priority for it now is the Western Hemisphere, a kind of reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) as manifested by the recent US attack on Venezuela, which was another blow to the rules-based order. On global issues, the US opted to engage more selectively (securing Greenland; continued support to Israel; military and economic coercion of Iran; preventing China from achieving unification with Taiwan). The US has also decided to deal with China through trade and tariffs, securing supply chains and next-generation missile defence systems.

Internally, President Donald Trump continues with his America First approach, seeking to boost the domestic industrial base, enhance border security, restrict migration, prevent erosion of traditional American values and prioritise emerging technologies for a competitive edge.

What does America's shrinking footprint on the global stage augur for different regions? For Europe, there is no choice but to decrease its reliance on the transatlantic alliance to secure the continent, spend more on its own regional defence and resolve issues created by liberal migration policies,

which the NSS warns could lead to "civilisational erasure". With shrinking US support, Ukraine is facing defeat at the hands of Russia.

East Asian and Pacific countries are struggling to strike a balance in their ties with China and the US. After the recent retrenchment of America's global footprint, China is being viewed as the leading global power in Asia, albeit with challenges from Japan and India.

As for South Asia, following the May 2025 conflict with Pakistan, India has discovered that its strategic partnership with the US has come under severe strain. While NSS-2017 had predicated America's Asia pivot on a strategic partnership with India, NSS-2025 mentions India only in terms of its commercial relevance to the US and contribution to Indo-Pacific security. India's purchase of Russian oil has also upset the US and Europe. With Russia, India has maintained its traditionally strong ties, though President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to India produced no notable outcome. Border tensions mar its ties with China. India is struggling to strike the right balance in its relations with all major powers, while managing its troubled ties with Pakistan, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries.

Pakistan-US ties are witnessing a reset after a decade-long stalemate, with possible openings for US investment in Pakistan. In NSS-2017, Pakistan was mentioned in the context of transnational terrorism or nuclear security; NSS-2025 does not mention Pakistan. We can debate the impact of America's changing worldview on various global hotspots and China's evolving role later.

KP CM chairs Bajaur jirga, announces relief package

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi on Sunday chaired an important jirga comprising parliamentarians, tribal elders and notables of District Bajaur.

Participants of the jirga expressed full confidence in the Chief Minister and assured their complete cooperation.

The meeting held detailed discussions on the law and order situation in the province, improvement of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, and the overall development strategy.

The Chief Minister announced that the compensation amount for the reconstruction of partially damaged houses due to the recent operation in Bajaur has been increased from Rs160,000 to Rs500,000.

Participants presented valuable suggestions for the establishment of lasting peace.

The Chief Minister said that tribal elders, the public, police and security forces have made great sacrifices for restoring peace in the province.

He said the role of the people and tribal elders of Bajaur in maintaining law and order is commendable.

He said that at the time of the merger of former

FATA, an annual allocation of Rs100 billion was promised, but only Rs168 billion has been released over the past seven years, while Rs532 billion is still outstanding against the federal government.

He added that funds under the Annual Development Programme (AIP) are also not being provided by the federal government.

The Chief Minister directed the authorities to increase the upper age limit for police recruitment in the merged districts, expedite work on the Bajaur martyrs' package, and ensure security for tribal elders who played a role in restoring peace and contributing to national development.

He further said that under the Roshan Tribes Package, existing schools and hospitals in the merged districts would be upgraded to provide quality facilities to the people.

The chief minister praised the people of Bajaur and tribal elders for their role in maintaining peace. Referring to the merger of the former FATA with K-P, he said an annual allocation of Rs100b had been promised at the time, but only Rs168b had been released over seven years, leaving Rs532b outstanding from the federal govern-

ment. He also criticised the non-release of funds under the Accelerated Implementation Programme (AIP).

Afridi directed officials to raise the upper age limit for police recruitment in the merged districts and to accelerate work on the Bajaur martyrs' package. He also ordered the provision of security for tribal elders who have contributed to peace and national development. He further announced that schools and hospitals under the Roshan Qabail Package in the merged districts would be upgraded to improve access to education and healthcare.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has experienced a significant surge in terrorism during 2025, with over 500 attacks reported, marking a 50 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

According to a detailed security assessment obtained by The Express Tribune, the province faced 1,588 terrorism-related incidents, reflecting a rapidly escalating militant threat across both settled and tribal regions. Despite the rise in attacks, security forces managed to prevent 320 major strikes, while 137 police officers and personnel laid down their lives in the line of duty.



HYDERABAD: Sindh Minister for Culture and Tourism, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah addressing during the 11th Hyderabad Literature Festival.

Sindh CM receives report of Gul Plaza blaze

KARACHI (APP): A report of the fire incident at Gul Plaza was presented to the Chief Minister of Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah by the Commissioner Karachi and Deputy Commissioner South, here on Saturday.

According to the report, the fire incident at Gul Plaza occurred between 9:45 pm and 10:15 pm.

According to the briefing, more than 1,200 shops were gutted in the Gul Plaza fire.

After firefighting operations 60 to 70 per cent of the fire was brought under control, the Chief Minister Sindh was briefed.

Murad was informed that 6 people lost their lives while 22 were injured.

All the injured were shifted to the Burns Ward of Civil Hospital Karachi. A total of 22 fire brigade vehicles, 10 water bowers, and 4 snorkel vehicles took part in the rescue operation.

Thirty-three ambulances of Rescue 1122 also participated in the operation, the Chief Minister was informed.

The Chief Minister Sindh expressed his deep sorrow over the loss of precious human lives in the Gul Plaza fire incident.

He extended heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of the deceased.

He also expressed his grief over the heavy financial losses caused by the Gul Plaza tragedy.

The Chief Minister of Sindh paid tribute to the sacrifice of the firefighter, who embraced martyrdom while extinguishing the fire.

The firefighters risked their lives to save the lives of citizens, the Chief Minister said.

Murad directed that the injured persons be provided with the best possible medical facilities.

Governor lauds Dera police for successful operation against militants

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday praised the Dera Ismail Khan Police for a successful operation against militants in Kulachi area, paying rich tribute to their bravery and professionalism.

The Governor commended the police team under the leadership of the District Police Officer (DPO) Dera for neutralizing a militant during the operation and recovering a large cache of weapons.

He said that the suc-

cessful action reflects the courage and dedication of the KP Police and added that the entire province takes pride in its brave force.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi congratulated all police personnel who took part in the operation and acknowledged their sacrifices in the fight against terrorism.

He also issued instructions to ensure the provision of the best possible medical treatment to the police official injured during the operation and prayed for his speedy recovery.

Three killed in fatal car collision in Fatehjang

ATTOCK (INP): Three people were killed and another critically injured after a speeding car collided with a vehicle in Fatehjang on Sunday.

According to the report, the accident took place on Kohat Road in the Gagan area of the tehsil.

Rescue 1122 teams reached the site immediately after receiving the alert and shifted the victims to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital.

The deceased were identified as 22-year-old Amir Khan and 26-year-old Rehman, while the identity of the third victim has yet to be confirmed.

Sahulat Bazaars ease inflation, generate employment: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's flagship Sahulat Bazaar initiative is delivering affordable, quality food items to the public, while generating employment opportunities for thousands of people across the province.

According to a briefing given to the Chief Minister, here on Sunday, 46 Sahulat Bazaars established across Punjab have so far provided decent employment to 9,200 individuals, benefiting nearly 55,000 family members. The project has emerged as a dual-impact initiative by easing inflationary pressures on consumers and creating sustainable livelihoods for the unemployed. Officials informed the Chief Minister that more than 85 million people have visited Sahulat Bazaars over the past year, making purchases

worth Rs425 million. Thirteen essential food items, including vegetables and fruits, were being sold at wholesale rates, resulting in cumulative savings of approximately Rs110 million for consumers.

The briefing added that Sahulat Bazaars were currently operational in several cities, including Wazirabad, Chunian, Jaranwala, Chiniot, Khanewal, Bhalwal, Pattoki, Okara and Muzaffargarh, where citizens were being provided quality commodities at affordable prices. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has set a target to complete 30 additional Sahulat Bazaars across the province by June 30. She directed the relevant authorities to expedite efforts to gradually establish convenience markets in every tehsil of Punjab.



Team Mushtaq Sarki leads protest rally against Jamat-e-Islami (JI) to protect Ajrak in Karachi.

Blaze largely under control, cooling process underway: Sharjeel

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has expressed his deep sorrow and grief over the fire incident at Gul Plaza shopping mall on M.A. Jinnah Road.

He said, "This is a deeply tragic incident in which precious lives have been lost. The government stands shoulder to shoulder with the affected families in their grief."

Sharjeel said that as soon as information about the incident was received, the government machinery has been present at the site since the night, and all available resources are being fully utilized to control the fire.

He said that forty snorkels are participating in

the operation. The fire has largely been brought under control and the cooling process is ongoing."

He emphasized that the government will not be satisfied until the cooling process is completed one hundred per cent.

A complete inquiry into the incident is underway to determine how the fire started and what caused it, he added.

A fact-finding report will be prepared regarding the incident, on the basis of which future actions will be taken.

So far, six precious lives have been lost in this tragic incident, including one rescue worker, he confirmed.

Quality completion of PIICIP projects top priority: MPA Faisal

SIALKOT (APP): Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) Chaudhry Faisal Ikram said that the completion of sewerage lines and water supply projects in the city under the Punjab Intermediate Improvement Cities Investment Program (PIICIP) in accordance with approved quality standards is a top priority.

He stated this during an important meeting with local officials of PIICIP and NESPAK regarding the ongoing development projects in the city.

MPA Chaudhry Faisal Ikram pointed out that sewerage lines laid on various roads by PIICIP

contractor ZKB, as per the project design, resulted in several roads sinking by several feet during the rainy season. This situation has raised serious concerns about the construction quality of the project. Chaudhry Faisal Ikram said that the ongoing project was a joint initiative of the Punjab Government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), for which billions of rupees have been allocated. Following questions over quality, an audit of the project is underway, and once the inquiry report is completed, those responsible will be identified and held accountable.



HYDERABAD: Artists perform on stage during the 11th Hyderabad Literature Festival.

CNF foils a major drug smuggling attempt

LAHORE (APP): The Counter Narcotics Force (CNF) has foiled a major drug-smuggling attempt during an operation conducted on M-1 Motorway on the basis of secret information.

According to a handout issued here on Sunday the narcotics were concealed in an oil tanker, which was intercepted and searched near the Burhan Rest Area. As a result, 1,140 kilograms (1.14 tons) of weed and opium were recovered, with a total estimated value of approximately Rs

90 million. According to preliminary information, the narcotics were being smuggled to various cities of Punjab, including Lahore, Sheikhupura, Multan and Faisalabad.

The recovered drugs included 860 kilograms of weed/charas and 280 kilograms of opium.

The suspect involved in the smuggling was arrested on the spot, and a case had been registered under the Punjab Control of Narcotic Substances Act 2025. Further investigation had been initiated.



Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan Chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai speaks at GM Syed's 122nd birth anniversary ceremony in Hyderabad.

Nasir Shah inaugurates New Bus Terminal Rohri

SUKKUR (APP): Provincial Minister for Local Government Sindh Syed Nasir Hussain Shah on Sunday inaugurated the New Bus Terminal Rohri. Deputy Commissioner Sukkur Nadir Shehzad Khan, Regional Transport Officer Sukkur Fayaz Mangi and others were also present on the occasion.

Addressing the ceremony, Provincial Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said that Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's vision is to provide maximum facilities to the people. New Bus Terminal Rohri is a link in this chain. He said that the establishment of New Bus Terminal Rohri will provide

better and organized travel facilities to the people of Sukkur and Rohri.

He said that measures are being taken in collaboration with district administration to reduce traffic issues in Sukkur and Rohri. He said that along with other facilities, boundary wall and additional washrooms for passengers will also be constructed at New Bus Terminal Rohri. Chairman District Council Sukkur will also be requested for cooperation in this regard.

Provincial Minister appreciated the efforts of district administration and positive cooperation of transporters for the formal functioning of New Bus Terminal Rohri.

Two kids die due to heart burst in Abbottabad

ABBOTTABAD (INP): Two children breathed their last due to heart burst in Abbottabad early Sunday morning.

The tragic incident took place in the Lora area of Abbottabad. According to details, the mother and grandmother of the children were in another room of their house to offer Fajr prayers, and both children were alone in the room.

The girl was four year-old and her brother was only two months old. Suddenly, they heard the sound of two children screaming.

When mother and grandmother of the children rushed to the room, they found both children dead.

65 NHMP officers promoted to higher ranks

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) have promoted 65 officers to the higher grades following the approval of the Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC), held at the Central Police Office here. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Inspector General (Human Resource Management) and the promotions were formally endorsed by Inspector General NHMP, Sultan Ahmed Chaudhry, said a press release issued on Sunday. The meeting promoted 54 Sub-Inspectors/Patrol Officers (BS-14) to the rank of Inspector (BS-16) and 11 Inspectors (BS-16) to the Higher Time Scale (BS-17).



Voters participate in Jamat-e-Islami (JI) organized referendum on Punjab Local Government Act in Multan.

Fed Govt spokesperson reviews rescue work at Gul Plaza fire-hit incident site

KARACHI (APP): The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Government of Pakistan) for Sindh Affairs, Raja Khaliq Zaman Ansari, visited the fire-affected Gul Plaza building here on Sunday and reviewed the ongoing rescue and relief operations.

During the visit, he met the affected families and expressed deep sorrow and solidarity over the tragic incident.

Conveying a special message from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Raja Khaliq Zaman Ansari said that the federal government

and the entire nation stand shoulder to shoulder with the affected people in this hour of grief. The prime minister expressed profound sorrow over the loss of precious lives in the incident and extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

The spokesperson said that the prime minister has issued clear instructions to further expedite rescue and relief efforts and directed all relevant institutions to work in close coordination to save more lives and ensure immediate assistance to the affected people.

Commissioner for emergency crackdown on encroachments after public complaints

PESHAWAR (APP): Following a surge of public complaints during an online public hearing, Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mahsud on Sunday ordered a decisive operation against encroachments and directed immediate steps to improve cleanliness across all five districts of the division.

He convened an emergency meeting here to finalize a comprehensive plan for removing illegal encroachments obstructing traffic in major bazaars, main roads, intersections, and other key locations in Peshawar Di-

vision. The operation, which will involve the use of heavy machinery, is expected to begin next week. Measures to ensure long-term improvement in sanitation will also be approved during the meeting.

The meeting will be attended by Deputy Commissioners, District Police Officers, and concerned municipal officials from Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, Mohmand tribal district, and Khyber district. Authorities will jointly prepare an implementation strategy to restore traffic flow and improve urban management.

ECP announces new delimitation schedule for LG polls in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has announced a new delimitation schedule for Village Councils and Neighborhood Councils in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ahead of the upcoming local government elections.

According to the ECP, delimitation will be carried out in phases across 24 districts starting in March.

These districts include Peshawar, Mardan, Swabi, Nowshera, Charsadda, Swat, Buner, Kohat, Abbottabad, Haripur, Dir, Chitral, and other areas of the province.

2 killed, 2 injured in motorcycle accident

FAISALABAD (APP): A young woman and her daughter were killed while two others including her spouse sustained multiple injuries in motorcycle accident in the area of Khurrianwala police station.

Rescue 1122 spokesman said here on Sunday that a speedy bus while saving the passersby hit a motorcycle near Adda Gujjar Singh on Sheikhupura Road. As a result, 35-year-old Aqsa Saleem and her 8-month-old daughter Aneza Fatima received serious injuries and died on the spot while Rescue 1122 shifted her spouse Muhammad Saleem (55).

Khurram Schehzad highlights Pakistan's vision on digital assets at 27th ITCN Asia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor to the Federal Finance Minister, Khurram Schehzad on Sunday emphasized the government's evolving role in the digital economy, stating that the primary responsibility of the government was to facilitate innovation and create an enabling environment for emerging technologies.

Khurram was addressing a Fireside Chat titled "Tokenizing the Sovereign Assets-Liquidity ready" at the 27th ITCN Asia held at the Expo Center, Lahore, according to press release issued by finance ministry here.

He noted that the government was actively working on policies aimed at empowering youth, particularly by opening avenues in

modern financial and digital sectors. Highlighting the global context, he said that Bitcoin has a capped global supply of nearly 21 million, making digital assets an important discussion point in today's financial landscape.

Schehzad shared that as per reports, Bitcoin/crypto mining is already taking place in Pakistan, indicating growing domestic engagement with crypto-related technologies.

He also shared that the Ministry of Finance has also planned to tokenize some portion of its domestic debt worth \$2 billion in first phase, primarily tapping retail investors.

Discussing regulatory and institutional develop-

ments, he said that the idea behind creating a dedicated framework or authority is linked to regulating and understanding crypto assets, while acknowledging that Pakistan is still at a nascent stage in this field.

He cited UAE's example, which has already established structured mechanisms for virtual assets, and stressed that Pakistan is learning and moving forward cautiously in this domain.

The session concluded with a discussion on the importance of balanced policymaking, innovation-friendly regulations, and global best practices to ensure that Pakistan can responsibly explore opportunities in digital and sovereign asset tokenization.



LAHORE: Finance Minister's Advisor Khurram Schehzad addressing an event "Tokenizing the Sovereign Assets-Liquidity ready".

Govt implementing reforms in power-sector: Awais

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari says the government has abandoned the procurement of around 8000 megawatts of expensive electricity purely on merit, which will likely to save 17 billion dollars.

Addressing a news conference in Islamabad this afternoon, he said the losses incurred by power distribution companies are borne by the federal government instead of being

passed on to consumers.

The minister said the government is implementing comprehensive power-sector reforms, resulting in a significant increase in recovery and a reduction in losses and circular debt. He said losses were reduced from 586 billion rupees to 393 billion rupees, while circular debt declined by 780 billion rupees last year. He further said recoveries improved by 183 billion rupees.

Sardar Awais Khan Leghari further said there

has been an improvement of 183 billion rupees in the recovery.

Speaking about relief in electricity prices, he said power tariffs have been reduced by 20 percent at the national level in last two years.

Expressing confidence, Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari said electricity prices would be brought at par with international rates within the next 18 months under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Iftikhar Malik says: Pakistan should explore Africa's potential for exports and investment

LAHORE (APP): Former SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SAARC CCI) President Iftikhar Ali Malik on Sunday called for a coherent, Africa-focused trade strategy backed by strong public-private collaboration to tap emerging African markets.

In a statement, Malik said that by diversifying exports, fostering long-term partnerships and engaging Africa as a strategic economic partner, Pakistan can unlock new growth drivers, reduce trade imbalances and build a more resilient economy.

"Africa, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, a rapidly expanding middle class, and growing demand for consumer goods, offers immense potential for Pakistan, which must be fully exploited," he said.

Malik highlighted the African Continental Free

Trade Area (AfCFTA)—the world's largest free trade area by number of countries—as an opportunity for Pakistan to gain preferential access, reduce tariff barriers, and integrate into regional value chains.

He warned that Pakistan's export markets remain concentrated in a few regions, leaving the economy vulnerable to external shocks, whereas African markets are seeking affordable, quality products in sectors where Pakistan has a competitive advantage.

Malik also stressed that Africa offers avenues for investment, joint ventures, and technical cooperation. Pakistani expertise in agriculture, healthcare, education, construction, and small-scale manufacturing can contribute to Africa's development while opening new business opportunities for Pakistan.

Pakistan's engineers set to enter a new phase of intl' participation

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan's engineering workforce is set to enter a new phase of international participation following a Memorandum of Understanding signed here between the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and China Energy International Group Company Limited, Pakistan Branch (CEEC).

The agreement, which was signed on Feb. 14, centers on structured overseas placement of PEC-registered engineers in Energy China's large-scale ventures spanning power generation, renewables, hydropower, transmission networks, transport infrastructure and investment projects across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Energy China's Managing Director Mr. Wang Huihua described the company's global reach, noting that its operations extend across 147 countries.

Punjab govt establishes cell comprising AI, data, software experts

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has, for the first time, established a clear institutional framework for AI and modern technology by creating a dedicated cell comprising AI, data, and software experts.

According to PITB sources, AI has now been formally integrated into government policy to improve governance, with AI/ML engineers and data scientists included in the initiative. Following a reform-oriented approach, the government has approved a central AI model and appointed technology specialists and developers.

Prioritizing institutional capacity over mere technology acquisition, a team of AI experts has been formed within PITB. The provincial government has directed that AI projects address the actual needs of departments, incorporating data engineers and solution architects to ensure practical outcomes.

After previous digital experiments failed, the new governance model will be implemented under the supervision of AI and data analytics experts. Recognizing that systems without institutional ownership do not succeed, program managers and technical leads have been appointed.

Departments will play a central role in decision-making, while the AI cell provides technical support.

Rather than investing in costly new hardware, the government has focused on optimizing existing infrastructure, supported by data and system integration experts. A cost-effective model has been approved, with software engineers and DevOps experts deployed to prevent unnecessary expenses. Feasibility studies, prototyping, and testing are now mandatory for AIU projects, supported by data scientists and QA specialists.

AI projects are designed as long-term initiatives, not temporary experiments, with permanent technical teams assigned and clear responsibilities defined for each expert. PITB's role has been emphasized as one of institutional capacity building, not just project implementation, positioning technology as a supporting force for governance.

The involvement of departments and end-users in AI projects is mandatory, with the AI cell providing technical guidance. A dedicated data engineering team has also been added to embed data-driven decision-making across government systems.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari addressing a news conference.

Jazz delivers Pakistan's best mobile internet experience in 2025, nPerf Barometer confirms

ISLAMABAD (APP): Jazz has been ranked as Pakistan's top-performing mobile network for overall mobile Internet experience in the 2025 Mobile Connections Barometer published by nPerf, an independent global network performance measurement platform.

Based on millions of real-world user tests conducted between January 1 and December 31, 2025, the nPerf Barometer evaluates mobile Internet quality across key performance indicators, including download and upload speeds, latency, web browsing, and video streaming performance. Jazz achieved the highest overall nPerf score among all mobile network operators in Pakistan, reaffirming its leadership in delivering a superior and reliable mobile broadband experience, a press release issued here on Sunday said.

According to the report, Jazz recorded an overall score of 33,369 nPoints, outperforming other operators across multiple experience-based metrics. Jazz

users benefitted from strong average download speeds of 14.99 Mbps, upload speeds of 6.55 Mbps, and the lowest latency in the market at 89.61 milliseconds, enabling smoother video calls, faster browsing, and improved responsiveness for real-time applications.

Jazz also led in web browsing performance, delivering the highest success rate among operators, reflecting faster page load times and a more consistent day-to-day mobile Internet experience for customers nationwide. In addition, Jazz ranked among the top performers for video streaming quality, highlighting its ability to support data-intensive services amid rising consumption of digital content.

The report further notes that Jazz demonstrated the strongest year-on-year improvement, with an 11.2 percent increase in its overall nPerf score, underscoring continued investment in network enhancement, capacity expansion, and service quality improvements.



QUETTA: People buying shoes from a stall at joint road's Sunday Bazaar.



LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Sports and Energy Malik Faisal Ayub Khokhar and MNA Malik Saif ul Malook launching first made in Pakistan Electric and Solar Bike, Car, and Bus Company.

Reforms implemented to strengthen food, agricultural governance: Ministry

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government has started implementing comprehensive reforms to make food and agricultural governance more transparent, digital and publicly accountable, with a focus on curbing corruption, limiting discretionary powers and strengthening import and export systems, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research said here Sunday.

In a statement, the ministry said that 22 out of 31 registrations, licences, certificates and other permits had been fully automated. The digitalisation drive has been implemented across six attached departments dealing with plants, animals and seeds, significantly reducing human intervention, improving traceability and minimising systemic loopholes.

According to the statement, Federal Minis-

ter for National Food Security Rana Tanveer Hussain had specially emphasized a rules-based system, verifiable decision-making and enhanced inter-agency coordination as key pillars of the reform agenda.

As part of the reforms, the Department of Plant Protection has been modernised, laboratory capacity enhanced, operational controls tightened and alignment ensured with international phytosanitary standards. The objective, the ministry said, was to strengthen biosecurity and safeguard Pakistan's export credibility.

The ministry has also improved import conditions for methyl bromide on scientific grounds, leading to a reduction in costs for importers. As a result, exporters of cotton, grains, pulses and other commodities are saving approxi-

mately Rs30,000 to Rs40,000 per container.

In one case related to methyl bromide, a suspicious import procedure was identified through internal scrutiny and third-party verification, the statement said adding the licence of the concerned company was suspended, and in coordination with Pakistan Customs, four consignments worth about \$1 million were stopped at the port before clearance. Disciplinary action has also been initiated against those responsible. To protect export quality, the ministry has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against sanitary and phytosanitary violations. Under strict monitoring and an improved traceability system, three consignments totalling 6.2 metric tonnes of mangoes being sent to Norway were seized after attempts were made to export.

India cannot hold rivers under IWT: Saif

LAHORE (APP): Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif Ur Rehman Sunday said India cannot hold rivers water under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), a landmark international agreement brokered by the World Bank in 1960 to ensure equitable and predictable sharing of the Indus basin waters between India and Pakistan.

In his keynote address here at a seminar on "Impact of Rivers on Economy", he mentioned, the treaty grants Pakistan unrestricted use of the western rivers—Indus, Jhelum and Chenab—while allowing India limited, non-consumptive use for hydropower, irrigation and domestic purposes under strict technical conditions. Any attempt to manipulate flows, delay projects' dispute resolution, or use water as a political tool undermines not only the spirit of the treaty but also the foundations of regional stability.

Water is a shared lifeline, not a weapon. For Pakistan, the Indus system

sustains agriculture, food security and livelihoods of millions. Unilateral actions or coercive posturing threaten downstream rights protected by international law and set a dangerous precedent for transboundary water governance worldwide.

The IWT has survived wars and crises precisely because it provides robust mechanisms for data sharing, inspections, neutral experts and arbitration. These mechanisms must be respected and strengthened, not bypassed.

He said sustainable peace in South Asia requires cooperation, transparency and adherence to treaty obligations. Climate change, glacial melt and population growth already strain water resources; politicising rivers will only magnify risks. Upholding the Indus Waters Treaty is not a concession—it is a legal duty and a moral imperative to ensure water security, trust and stability for present and future generations, he concluded.

SBP's first monetary policy meeting of 2026 on Jan 26

KARACHI (INP): A large majority of market participants expect the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to cut interest rates at its first Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting of 2026, according to a Monetary Policy Survey conducted by a local research firm.

According to a survey, around 80 per cent of respondents expect the central bank to reduce interest rates further in the upcoming monetary policy.

The survey found that 56 per cent of participants anticipate a 50 basis points cut in the policy rate, while 15 per cent believe the SBP may opt for a one percentage point reduction. Meanwhile, 20 per cent of respondents expect the central bank to keep the interest rate unchanged, and 5 per cent foresee a 25 basis points cut. Only 3 per cent of survey participants expect a 75 basis points reduction in the policy rate.



SIALKOT: A vendor sells leather purses at his roadside setup.

Traders urge steps to control Flour, LPG prices in South Punjab

MULTAN (APP): Tanzeem Tajran Pakistan has expressed serious concern over the continuous rise in flour and LPG prices in South Punjab and urged the Punjab government and relevant authorities to take immediate measures to control them.

Speaking jointly, Central Chairman Khawaja Suleman Siddiqui, South Punjab President Sheikh Javed Akhtar, District Multan President Syed

Jafar Ali Shah, Multan President Khalid Mahmood Qureshi, and other traders' representatives highlighted that, despite South Punjab being a major wheat-producing region, poor families are struggling to afford basic food items.

They noted that a 20kg bag of flour is being sold for around Rs2,600, placing a heavy burden on low-income and middle-class households.

Apple farmers once again raise voice against controversial railway project

SRINAGAR (INP): Apple farmers in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama and Shopian districts have once again raised strong objections to a proposed railway line project, warning that it threatens to devastate their orchards and destroy their only means of livelihood.

According to Kashmir Media Service, survey work for the project has already begun, with authorities erecting marking pillars across several villages without consulting local communities. The move has triggered widespread anger among growers, who say

the project reflects New Delhi's disregard for Kashmiri economic and environmental concerns.

Raja Abdul Waheed, a member of the District Development Council from Shopian, said the proposed alignment would cause irreparable damage to the region's horticulture sector. "If this project is implemented, more than five lakh apple trees will be destroyed," he said. "The railway line will pass through multiple villages and even threaten protected Chinara trees, which are part of Kashmir's natural and cultural heritage."

Cotton arrivals cross 5.49m bales by Jan 15

MULTAN (APP): Seed cotton (phutti) equivalent to 5.49 million bales reached ginning factories across Pakistan by January 15, 2026, showing a marginal increase of 0.13 per cent compared to the same period last year.

According to a fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) released on Sunday, over 5.4 million bales have been processed and converted into lint.

Pak-China innovation agriculture cooperation centre launched in Kasur

ISLAMABAD (INP): China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) on Friday inaugurated the Pak-China Innovation Agriculture Cooperation Centre at Kasuri Farms in Kasur, Punjab, marking a major milestone in Pakistan-China cooperation in modern and technology-driven agriculture.

The centre is designed to promote cutting-edge agricultural research and technology transfer while strengthening collaboration in smart farming, biotechnology, seed development, mechanisation and climate-resilient agriculture.

It will also focus on capacity building through structured farmer training programmes, knowledge

exchange platforms and applied research initiatives, supporting sustainable food systems and rural development across Pakistan.

Speaking to Gwadar Pro, Alan Xi of the CMEC Group said the centre will encourage joint research publications, technology incubation and create opportunities for students, scientists and entrepreneurs, contributing meaningfully to food security and economic resilience.

"The centre will serve as a bridge between academia, industry and farmers, ensuring that innovation reaches the field and translates into real impact," he noted.

Earlier, CMEC Group

had also launched chili and sesame contract farming projects in Pakistan, aimed at improving crop productivity, ensuring quality seed supply and introducing modern farming practices.

These projects focus on providing farmers with technical guidance, input support and assured market access, helping integrate local producers into regional and global agricultural value chains.

The experience gained from these contract farming initiatives is expected to complement the work of the newly established centre by offering practical, field-level insights and scalable models for agribusiness development.



SARGODHA: Workers busy making sweet jaggery (gur) at his roadside setup.

Trump threatens allies with tariffs to force Greenland sale

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump escalated his bid to acquire Greenland on Saturday, threatening tariffs of up to 25 per cent on eight European nations until his purchase of the Danish territory is achieved.

Trump aimed the threat at Denmark and fellow NATO members who have deployed troops to the mineral-rich territory in recent days. The ultimatum threatens to create unprecedented tension within the alliance. Writing on his Truth Social platform, Trump announced that starting Feb 1, all goods sent to the United States from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Finland would be subject to a 10 per cent tariff.

"On June 1st, 2026, the Tariff will be increased to 25pc. This Tariff will be due and payable until such

time as a deal is reached for the Complete and Total purchase of Greenland," Trump wrote.

The US president argued that the European nations are "playing this very dangerous game" and have introduced unsustainable risks.

"Therefore, it is imperative that, in order to protect Global Peace and Security, strong measures be taken so that this potentially perilous situation end quickly, and without question," he added.

It was not immediately clear what legal authority the president would invoke to impose the levies. Since returning to office, Trump has frequently utilised sweeping tariffs to combat what the administration labels unfair trade practices and to press foreign governments on US interests.

The president has repeatedly claimed the US "needs" Greenland for na-

tional security reasons and that Denmark is incapable of ensuring the defence of the island, which is home to 57,000 people and sits at the strategic gateway to the Arctic.

European NATO members recently deployed troops to Greenland for military exercises. France stated the mission was designed to demonstrate a commitment to defending the territory. Denmark confirmed the US had been invited to participate in those exercises.

Trump characterised the resistance from European allies as a threat to global stability, warning that the nations opposing the deal "have put a level of risk in play that is not tenable or sustainable."

Trump's announcement coincided with mass demonstrations on Saturday in Greenland's capital, Nuuk, and across Denmark.



Presidential candidate Andre Ventura, of the populist Chega party, gestures to supporters while campaigning for Sunday's presidential election, in Lisbon, Portugal.

Former UK leader Blair back in limelight with Gaza role

LONDON (AFP/APP): Former British prime minister Tony Blair, whose legacy was heavily tarnished by the 2003 war in Iraq, has long been a contentious figure in the Middle East.

The 72-year-old political veteran was Friday named by US President Donald Trump as a member of a fledgling "Board of Peace" to help oversee Gaza.

He said Saturday he was "honoured" to have been tapped by Trump to join the board, adding he looked forward to working with "other colleagues in line with the president's vision to promote peace and prosperity".

He also welcomed as "a massive step forward" a Palestinian committee headed by former Palestin-

ian Authority deputy minister Ali Shaath, which began work in Cairo on Friday to govern post-war Gaza.

"It gives hope to people in Gaza that they can have a future different from the past and to the Israelis that they may have a neighbour which does not threaten its security," Blair said in a statement.

Blair has been credited in some media reports with helping craft the US leader's 20-point Gaza plan alongside Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner.

Blair has plenty of experience in the region, spending eight years as the envoy for the Middle East Quartet of the European Union, United Nations, United States and Russia.

Dutch foreign minister calls Trump's Greenland tariff threat 'blackmail'

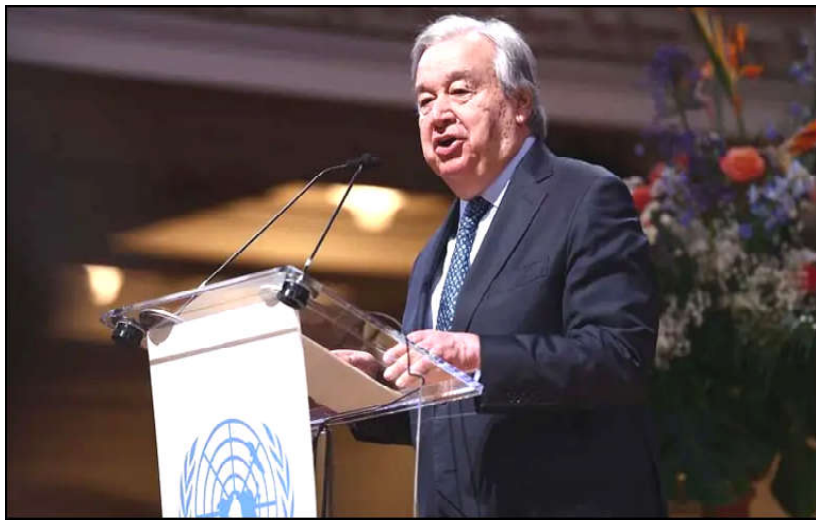
Monitoring Desk
THE HAGUE: The Netherlands' foreign minister on Sunday said that US President Donald Trump's threat to impose new tariffs on European allies until they agree to sell Greenland to the United States is "blackmail".

"It's blackmail what he's doing ... and it's not necessary. It doesn't help the alliance (Nato) and it also doesn't help Greenland," David van Weel said in an interview on Dutch television. In a post on Truth Social on Saturday, Trump said additional 10 per cent import tariffs would take effect on February 1 on goods from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Great Britain countries that have agreed to contribute personnel to a Nato exercise on Greenland.

Canada agrees to cut tariff on Chinese EVs in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products

BAKU (AZERTAC/APP): Breaking with the United States, Canada has agreed to cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products, Prime Minister Mark Carney said Friday, according to AP.

Carney made the announcement after two days of meetings with Chinese leaders. He said there would be an initial annual cap of 49,000 vehicles on Chinese EV exports coming into Canada at a tariff rate of 6.1%, growing to about 70,000 over five years. China will reduce its total tariff on canola seeds, a major Canadian export, from 84% to about 15%, he told reporters.



United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks at the UNA-UK conference to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the UN, at Methodist Central Hall, the site of the inaugural UN General Assembly, in London.

EU leaders reject Trump's tariffs threat over Greenland

Monitoring Desk
AMSTERDAM: The Netherlands' foreign minister on Sunday said that US President Donald Trump's threat to impose new tariffs on European allies until they agree to sell Greenland to the United States is "blackmail".

"It's blackmail what he's doing ... and it's not necessary. It doesn't help the alliance (NATO) and it also doesn't help Greenland," David van Weel said in interview on Dutch television.

Italy's prime minister

called US President Donald Trump's threat to slap tariffs on opponents of his plan to seize Greenland a "mistake" on Sunday, adding she had told him her views.

"I believe that imposing new sanctions today would be a mistake," Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni told journalists during a trip to Seoul, adding that "I spoke to Donald Trump a few hours ago and told him what I think."

The United States will also suffer if Trump implements threats to impose

tariffs on European countries opposing his plans to acquire Greenland, a French minister said on Sunday.

"In this escalation of tariffs, he has a lot to lose as well, as do his own farmers and industrialists," French Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard told broadcasters Europe 1 and CNews.

Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister on Sunday described the tariffs being threatened by Trump over European allies' stance on Greenland as "completely unacceptable".

Search for Indonesia plane missing with 11 people on board

MAKASSAR (AFP/APP): Indonesian authorities are searching for a small passenger plane after contact was lost on Saturday with the aircraft carrying 11 people, rescue officials told AFP.

The Indonesia Air Transport turboprop plane left from Yogyakarta and was headed for the city of Makassar on Sulawesi island, with three passengers and eight crew members on board, according to the Makassar search and rescue agency. Contact was lost shortly after 1:00 pm (0600 GMT).

Muhammad Arif Anwar, the head of the local search and rescue agency, said teams were deployed to a mountainous area of Maros Regency, which borders Makassar, near the last known location of the plane.

The search on land and by air involved the air force, police and volunteers, he added.

Andi Sultan, operations chief at the Makassar search and rescue agency, said a helicopter and drones were being used to find the plane.

The aircraft manufacturer, France-based firm ATR, said it had been informed of "an accident" involving one of its planes.



COPENHAGEN: Demonstrators wave Greenlandic flags as they take part in a rally in the Danish capital to protest against US threats to take over Greenland.

Taiwanese reporter accused of bribing military officers to leak information to China

Monitoring Desk
TAIPEI: A journalist in Taiwan was detained Saturday on allegations of bribing army officers to provide military information to people from mainland China, as the self-ruled island cracks down on potential infiltration from China.

Taiwan's Qiaotou District Prosecutors Office said in a statement that a district court ordered the detention of a television reporter named Lin and five current and retired military officers. The statement didn't identify the journalist, but CTI TV issued a statement about the detention of its reporter Lin Chen-you. The company said that it does not know the details of the case, but called for a fair judicial process, adding "God bless Taiwan."

While Taiwan regularly pursues espionage cases within the government and military, allegations against journalists are unusual. Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own territory and threatens to take control of the island by force if necessary, has been increasing military pressure against the island. Last month, China's military launched large-scale drills around it for two days after a Washington announcement of large-scale arms sales to Taiwan.

Uganda army denies seizing opposition leader as vote result looms

KAMPALA (AFP/APP): Uganda's army denied claims on Saturday that opposition leader Bobi Wine had been abducted from his home, as counting continued in an election marred by reports of at least 10 deaths amid an internet blackout.

President Yoweri Museveni, 81, looked set to be declared winner and extend his 40-year rule later on Saturday, with a commanding lead against Wine, a former singer turned politician.

Wine said Friday that he was under house arrest,

and his party later wrote on X that he had been "forcibly taken" by an army helicopter from his compound. The army denied that claim. "The rumours of his so-called arrest are baseless and unfounded," army spokesman Chris Magezi told AFP.

"They are designed to incite his supporters into acts of violence," he added.

AFP journalists said the situation was calm outside Wine's residence early Saturday, but they were unable to contact members of the party due to continued communications interruptions.

Taliban contest UN report on malnourished women, children

Monitoring Desk
KABUL: Afghanistan's Taliban government said on Saturday its goal was "to help all malnourished children and mothers," after the United Nations warned that millions would experience acute malnutrition this year.

The World Food Programme's Afghanistan director John Aylieff said this week that five million women and children would experience life-threatening malnutrition in a worsening crisis in the country of 40 million people.

The United Nations agency has said that nearly four million children would require treatment for malnutrition.

Trump says no reason 'right now' for Insurrection Act in Minnesota

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): US President Donald Trump said Friday there was no immediate need to invoke the Insurrection Act over protests against immigration raids in Minnesota, a day after threatening to use the law.

But in a move that would inflame the standoff between the White House and Minnesota, CBS News reported that the Justice Department was investigating Minnesota governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey for impeding federal officers.

They have both called for peaceful protests against immigration sweeps in their state. The DOJ did not respond to a request for comment.

Amid the escalating row between Trump and Minnesota leaders this week, the president threatened the drastic measure that would have allowed him to deploy the military to police the protests.

"If I needed it, I would use it. I don't think there is any reason right now to use it," Trump told reporters at the White House when asked about the law that grants the deployment of soldiers on US soil.

The Insurrection Act allows a president to side-step the Posse Comitatus Act to suppress "armed rebellion" or "domestic violence" and use the armed forces "as he considers necessary" to enforce the 19th-century law.

Iran considers 'gradually' restoring internet after shutdown

Monitoring Desk
TEHRAN: Iranian authorities have said they are considering "gradually" restoring internet access after imposing a communications shutdown 10 days ago, as nationwide protests in the country began to subside following a crackdown by security forces.

Demonstrations sparked in late December by anger over economic hardship exploded into protests widely seen as the biggest challenge to the Iranian leadership in years.

Iranian officials have said the demonstrations were peaceful before turning into "riots" and blamed foreign influence, namely from Iran's foes, the United States and Israel. The rallies subsided after the crackdown carried out by security forces amid a communications blackout that started on January 8 as the protests grew in size and intensity.

Government officials

have said calm has been restored, with schools reopening on Sunday — Iran's weekend falling on Thursday and Friday — after a week of closure.

Late Saturday, the Tasnim news agency reported "the relevant authorities announced that internet access would also be gradually restored", but gave no further details. Citing an unnamed "informed source", the agency said local messaging applications "will soon be activated" on Iran's domestic intranet.

On Sunday morning, AFP was able to connect to the internet from its Tehran office, though the vast majority of internet providers and mobile internet remain cut. Outgoing international calls have been possible since Tuesday, and text messaging was restored on Saturday morning. For days, text messages and international phone calls — and at times even local calls — were cut off.

Americans increasingly reject immigration police methods

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): US immigration agents now remind many Americans of the Gestapo — and not just the left-wing activists who have taken to the streets to protest violent raids commanded by President Donald Trump.

Avid Trump supporter and podcaster Joe Rogan, whose massive audience heard him repeat Republican talking points in the run-up to the 2024 election, fueled debate this week by airing those concerns.

"Are we really gonna be the Gestapo, 'Where's your papers?' Is that what we've come to?" Rogan asked millions of listeners.

"You don't want militarized people in the streets just roaming around, snatching up people — many of which turn out to be US citizens that just don't have their papers on them," he said. A growing number of Americans agree with that sentiment. In every national poll, a majority condemns the actions of

the immigration officer who shot and killed 37-year-old Renee Good, a US citizen, in Minneapolis on January 7.

A Quinnipiac survey found that 57 percent of voters condemn ICE's methods, with 94 percent of Democratic voters and 64 percent of independents against Republicans, by contrast, support them at 84 percent. Another poll from Economist/YouGov found that, for the first time, 46 percent of respondents support abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), exceeding the 43 percent who oppose getting rid of it. "The most useful way to think about Joe Rogan is as America's most famous swing voter," left-wing commentator Ben Burgis posted on X this week. Rogan wasn't the pliant conservative megaphone White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt may have had in mind when she reaffirmed the Trump administration's hard line of the ICE officer's innocence.

2025 was third hottest year on record: climate monitors

BRUSSELS (AFP/APP): The planet logged its third hottest year on record in 2025, extending a run of unprecedented heat, with no relief expected in 2026, global climate monitors said Wednesday.

The last 11 years have now been the warmest ever recorded, with 2024 topping the podium and 2023 in second place, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service and Berkeley Earth, a California-based non-profit research organisation.

For the first time, global temperatures exceeded 1.5C relative to pre-industrial times on average over the last three years, Copernicus said in its annual report.

"The warming spike observed from 2023-2025 has been extreme, and suggests an acceleration in the rate of the Earth's warming," Berkeley Earth said in a separate report.

The landmark 2015 Paris Agreement commits the world to limiting warming to well below 2C and pursuing efforts to hold it at 1.5C — a long-term target scientists say would help

avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned in October that breaching 1.5C was "inevitable" but the world could limit this period of overshoot by cutting greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible.

Copernicus said the 1.5C limit "could be reached by the end of this decade — over a decade earlier than predicted".

But efforts to contain global warming were dealt another setback last week as President Donald Trump said he would pull the United States — the world's second-biggest polluter after China — out of the bedrock UN climate treaty.

Temperatures were 1.47C above pre-industrial times in 2025 — just a fraction cooler than in 2023 — following 1.6C in 2024, according to Copernicus.

The World Meteorological Organization, the UN's weather and climate agency, said two of eight datasets it analysed showed 2025 was the second warmest year, but the other six datasets ranked it third.



Sheriffs confront anti-ICE demonstrators protesting outside of the Whipple federal building in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

PMYP, Dellsons partner to launch zero cost digital remittance wallet for overseas Pakistanis

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Prime Minister's Youth Programme signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) on Sunday with Dellsons Associates Private Limited at the Prime Minister's Office to collaborate on developing a Digital Wallet linked with the Digital Youth Hub, aimed at enabling instant and zero cost remittances for overseas Pakistanis, particularly blue collar workers in the United Arab Emirates, as part of the government's drive toward a cashless and digital economy.

The LOI signing ceremony was witnessed by PMYP Chairman Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan, with participation from representatives of the Ministry of Finance, ONE LINK, and United Bank Limited. The meeting was also attended by Dr Muhammad Ali Malik, Joint Secretary PMYP, and Ibrahim Amin, Founder and Chairman of Dellsons Associates Private Limited, along with their respective teams.

Under the proposed

collaboration, a regulated Digital Wallet will be integrated with PMYP's Digital Youth Hub, allowing overseas Pakistanis in the UAE to send remittances through formal banking channels at zero cost.

The initiative aims to ease financial access for migrant workers, enhance financial inclusion, and encourage the use of documented remittance systems. The partnership aligns with the prime minister's vision of a digital and cashless economy and supports PMYP's Four Es framework of education, employment, engagement, and environment.

Officials said the initiative would leverage financial technology to promote productive employment, secure cross border transactions, and digital literacy among Pakistani youth working abroad.

Dellsons Associates Private Limited, which operates in financial technology and digital payment solutions with active partners in the UAE, will support the design, development, deployment, and

management of the Digital Wallet. The remittance framework will be implemented in coordination with ONE LINK, United Bank Limited, and other relevant stakeholders.

According to the agreement, the project will comply fully with regulatory requirements of the Central Bank of the UAE and the State Bank of Pakistan, including anti money laundering, counter terrorism financing, know your customer, consumer protection, and cybersecurity standards. The implementing partners will also establish technological infrastructure, operational support systems, customer onboarding mechanisms, marketing outreach, and UAE based service and support centres.

Officials said the collaboration is expected to boost formal remittance inflows, reduce dependence on informal transfer channels, strengthen digital adoption, and contribute to Pakistan's broader economic stability and digital transformation agenda.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tahir, taking oath to the PFUCC members during the oath taking ceremony to the Pakistan Federal Union of Columnist and Creators (PFUCC) at Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Foundation.

Ulema Council terms Trump's peace board invitation huge success

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Ulema Council on Sunday termed US President Donald Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to join a proposed Peace Board on Palestine as a major diplomatic success for Pakistan.

In a statement, Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Ashrafi said the invitation reflected the strength of Pakistan's diplomatic engagement and its sustained efforts to highlight the Palestinian cause at international forums.

He said Pakistan had consistently raised the is-

sue of Palestine across the world, and the move was a recognition of those efforts.

Ashrafi praised the manner in which the prime minister, along with the country's top military leadership, presented the Palestinian case before the US president and the international community, calling it commendable and a source of national pride.

He urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to accept the invitation and play an effective role in promoting peace, particularly for the betterment of the Muslim Ummah and the people of Palestine.

Wajha Qamar says: Policy-driven research must reach marginalised

ISLAMABAD (APP): The State Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Wajha Qamar, stated on Sunday that the government remains steadfast in its commitment to evidence-based and actionable policymaking.

She emphasized the need for a more integrated approach to reach children who are entirely neglected, marginalized, and lack social identification. The Minister shared these views while addressing a policy dialogue titled "The Equity Equation: Advanced Data Systems for Education Planning." The event was organized by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) in collaboration with LUMS and the Pak Alliance for Maths and Science.

The primary objective of the event was to introduce cutting-edge tools, such as predictive modeling, to address the crisis of Pakistan's 25 million out-of-school children. This initiative, powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning, is de-

signed to predict household-level educational decisions influenced by economic and social barriers.

Research is futile unless it is linked to practical challenges, and ideas are meaningless until they are translated into implementation frameworks," the State Minister remarked.

Dr. Muhammad Shahid Soroya, Director General of PIE, described the massive number of out-of-school children as an "educational emergency" requiring proactive measures. He noted that this advanced technology will play a pivotal role in executing the recently approved National Education Action Plan. The new system allows policymakers to determine the efficacy of various interventions—such as transport subsidies versus school construction—before allocating resources. Experts from LUMS (Dr. Farah Nadeem, Dr. Faisal Bari, and Dr. Zubair Khalid) presented a dashboard highlighting causes for school dropouts, including costs, safety concerns, and family dynamics.

Police, CTD kill a militant in IBO

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Police and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) carried out an intelligence-based operation in the Kulachi area and its surroundings on information regarding the presence of militants, police spokesman said on Sunday.

According to officials, the operation was conducted under the leadership of District Police Officer (DPO) Sajjad Ahmed Sahibzada. As the law enforcement teams approached the suspected hideout, the militants opened fire, prompting police to return fire. During the exchange, one militant was killed while two others were injured. A police constable sustained minor injuries.

Police said the killed militant was involved in attack on Khutti check post and targeted killings incidents.

Shaban moon likely to be sighted on January 20

KARACHI (INP): The Ruyat-e-Hilal Research Council has predicted that the crescent moon of Shaban-ul-Muazzam is unlikely to be sighted in Pakistan on Monday evening, January 19, 2026, due to unfavorable astronomical conditions.

According to the Council, this means that Shaban 1447 Hijri is expected to begin on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, after the completion of 30 days of Rajab-ul-Murajjab.

Secretary General of the Council, Khalid Ijaz Mufti, said that the new moon will be born at 12:52am Pakistan Standard Time on the night between Sunday and Monday (January 18-19). However, at sunset on January 19, the age of the moon across all parts of Pakistan will be less than 18 hours, whereas a minimum of 19 hours is generally required for visibility.



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti distributing appointment order amongst successful candidates of Sub-Accountant posts advertised by Finance Department.

CM Bugti congratulates top candidates, emphasizes fairness in online test

Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti personally contacted the successful candidates who qualified through the online test conducted for Sub-Accountant positions in the Finance Department, congratulating them on their achievement and reaffirming the provincial government's commitment to merit-based recruitment.

During the telephonic conversations, the chief minister inquired in detail about the testing arrangements, the online examination system and the overall transparency of the recruitment process. He emphasized that ensuring fairness, transparency and equal opportunity in government employment

is a core objective of his administration.

The successful candidates expressed complete satisfaction with the online testing mechanism, stating that the process was conducted in a highly transparent, impartial and merit-driven manner. They conveyed their happiness and surprise at securing government jobs purely on merit, without any political influence, favoritism or bribery.

Appreciating the initiative, the candidates thanked Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti for introducing a modern, digital and transparent recruitment system, saying it had restored their confidence in public institutions. Many candidates noted that for the first time they felt as-

sured that deserving and capable youth in Balochistan could access government employment through a fair and credible process.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that eliminating corruption, favoritism and the culture of recommendation from public sector recruitment is essential for institutional reform and good governance. He added that the provincial government is determined to fully digitize recruitment processes across departments to ensure lasting transparency and accountability.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti further stated that empowering educated youth through merit-based employment is vital for the province's progress and stability.

Indian authorities blamed for exacerbating Kashmir's water crisis

SRINAGAR (INP): Indian illegally occupied Jammu Kashmir's crippling water crisis is a man-made disaster, with Indian authorities accused of neglecting the territory's water infrastructure and ignoring the impacts of climate change.

According to Kashmir Media Service, historic springs like Arupal, Nagbal, and Bulbul Nag in Pulwama have dried up, crippling water supply schemes and leaving thousands without access to drinking water.

"Years of neglect and mismanagement have made us vulnerable to climate change," said Ghulam Nabi, a social activist. Locals accuse authorities of prioritizing projects over people, forcing them to rely on irregular tanker services. "The government's response is too little, too late," said Nusrat Jan, a resident.

The situation is dire along River Jhelum and Rambhara rivulet, with dozens of water supply schemes affected.

Jati Umra prepares for grand walima of CM Maryam's son

LAHORE (INP): Foolproof security arrangements have been made in and around Jati Umra on the occasion of Walima ceremony of the grandson of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and son of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, Junaid Salfar. On the other hand, guests have started to trickle in at the venue. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, federal and Punjab ministers, senators, political personalities, guests from foreign countries will also attend the function.



QUETTA: General Secretary Idara-e-Amoor-e-Islami Pakistan, Mulana Qari Abdul Rehman, Vice-President Mulana Dr Attaur Rehman and others during a press conference regarding Iran-US tension.

Non-payment of DRA Balochistan employees announce sit-in at Quetta Red Zone on January 20

QUETTA (PR): Employees from across Balochistan have announced a province-wide sit-in at the Red Zone in Quetta on January 20 to protest persistent salary disparities and the non-payment of the Disparity Reduction Allowance (DRA).

According to details, the federal government had earlier decided to eliminate pay disparities by granting a 100 percent Disparity Reduction Allowance to federal employees and extending the same framework to the provinces in a phased manner. So far, federal employees have received 70 percent DRA, while a proposal to grant the remaining 30 percent in the upcoming federal budget is under consideration.

In contrast, Balochistan government employees are currently receiving only 40 percent DRA. During the tenure of former chief minister Jam Kamal, following a 12-day protest movement, a 15 percent DRA was approved, while an additional 10 percent was deferred until the next budget.

Achakzai's appointment as NA opposition leader positive development: Parvez Elahi

ISLAMABAD (INP) Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi has said that the appointment of Mehmood Khan Achakzai as Leader of the Opposition will prove to be a positive development for the democratic process. The former Punjab chief minister congratulated Achakzai while speaking on telephonic call on Sunday.

Following the disqualification of Omar Ayub, PTI founder Imran Khan had nominated Mehmood Khan Achakzai for the position of Leader of the Opposition. However, the speaker had maintained that the notification could not be issued while the matter was sub judice. Subsequently, after Omar Ayub withdrew his petition, Speaker Ayaz Sadiq issued the notification formally appointing Mehmood Khan Achakzai as Leader of the Opposition.

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Amb. Baloch highlights Pak, France ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan to France Muntaz Zahra Baloch, Sunday, highlighted the multifaceted relations between Pakistan and France and the wider francophone world.

She said while the governments created frameworks and agreements, it was the people professionals, academics, entrepreneurs, and civil society leaders, who gave life to bilateral relationships between countries.

The ambassador addressed the Association of Pakistani Francophone (French-speaking) Professionals (PPRF) at an event held at the Embassy of Pakistan, a press release said.

Two found suspiciously dead in Jammu

JAMMU (INP): Two people were suspiciously found dead in separate incidents in Akhnoor and Belicharana areas of Jammu region in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, Anju Devi, 46, wife of Yashpal, was found unconscious at her home in Akhnoor and pronounced dead on arrival at Government Medical College Jammu. In a separate incident, an unidentified male, approximately 45 years old, was found unconscious in Lane 4, Belicharana, and declared dead at GMC Jammu. Both bodies have been shifted to the mortuary for post-mortem.

Achakzai proposes 'national govt' to ensure transparent polls

HYDERABAD (INP): Tehreek Tahaffuz-e-Aiyen Pakistan (TTAP) chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai has proposed the formation of a national government for four months to hold transparent elections, after which power should be transferred to the winning party.

Speaking to media representatives after meeting Quami Awami Tehreek (QAT) chief Ayaz Latif Palijo at his residence in Hyderabad, Achakzai said the current rulers lack the capacity to govern and called for a three-day roundtable conference involving all stakeholders to put the country back on track.

Former National Assembly speaker Assad Qaiser and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas were also part of the delegation.

He proposed that the national government should be comprised of five major political parties. He said the TTAP was formed to resist attacks on the Constitution, adding that all concerns

raised by the opposition have now proven to be true.

The TTAP chief, who is also the chairman of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, said the country can move forward only if parliamentary supremacy is ensured and all nationalities and provinces are given their due rights. Referring to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he said Jinnah once remarked that his pockets were full of counterfeit coins, and "today there is a need for a movement to remove those counterfeit coins from the system."

He said Pakistan is a federation of nations and can only function smoothly if all nationalities are given equal rights and a fair share in power. Earlier, QAT chief Ayaz Latif Palijo said he was thankful to the delegation, including Achakzai, for visiting Hyderabad. He said his party had been part of political alliances in the past, including the MRD, and the current alliance has also been established to "restore democracy through a political struggle."



KARACHI: Member of Balochistan Assembly (MBA) and Provincial President of Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) Farha Azeem Shah addressing a press conference.

Digital legal platforms, AI integration can improve access to justice: Barrister

ISLAMABAD (APP): A legal technology expert, Barrister Naveed Khan has said that the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) is playing a vital role in improving access to justice by reducing public fear of litigation and strengthening trust in the judicial system.

Talking to APP, Barrister Naveed Khan said that a number of artificial intelligence based online platforms, including AI Attorney, Pakistan Law Bot, DigiLawyer and Lexa, are playing an important role in helping the public understand their legal rights.

He said these platforms are also assisting users in drafting legal documents and reviewing existing documentation, which has significantly reduced dependence on traditional and time-consuming processes.

Highlighting the role of askwakeel.pk, Barrister Naveed Khan said the platform stands out by offering detailed legal consultation with direct human interaction at a nominal fee of Rs 2,000. He said the initiative is bridging the gap between citizens and credible legal experts, making professional legal advice more accessible and affordable for the public.

He noted that women, elderly citizens and individuals from remote areas are among the key beneficiaries of online legal services, as many of them only have access to a smartphone. "If people are informed about their rights through digital means, a significant barrier to justice is removed," he added.

On the role of artificial intelligence, he clarified that AI should be used as an assistive tool rather than a replacement for human judgment. "AI can help in documentation, drafting and preliminary case assessment, but human oversight remains essential," he said.

He said a more efficient justice system would not only benefit citizens but also create more opportunities for lawyers and attract foreign investment. "Investors look for effective dispute resolution and contract enforcement, and for that a modern judicial system is crucial for economic growth," he added.



QUETTA: Provincial Secretary Finance Imran Zarkoon visiting the hall during online test of vacant posts of Sub-Accountant at Finance Department.

Senior political leadership, Parliamentarians offer condolence with Syedaal

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: The condolence messages on the demise of the wife of Amanullah Khan Nasar, elder brother of Deputy Chairman Senate, Syedal Khan Nasar, continued to pour in from across the country.

On this day as well, senior political leadership, parliamentarians, and distinguished personalities from various walks of life expressed their heartfelt condolences to the Deputy Chairman Senate.

Those who offered condolences included Senator Muhammad Azam Khan Swati, Senator Abdul Qadir, Senator Sardar Dostan Khan Domki, Senator Umar Farooq, former Senator Sardar Yaqoob Khan Nasir, former Senator Sardar Fatah Muhammad Hasni, former Senator Sardar Muhammad Shafiq Tareen, former Senator

Naseebullah Bazzi, Maulana Abdul Wasay, former Member National Assembly Ajmal Wazir, Inayatullah Wazir, Khan Ahmed Khan Achakzai, Malik Fareed Achakzai, Sardar Nageeb Khan Tareen, Haji Nazar Gul, Sardar Mujtaba, former Provincial Minister Nawaz Khan Kakar, former Provincial Minister Nasir Khan Zareen, besides senior officers and staff of the Senate and National Assembly.

A large number of other parliamentarians, government officials, lawyers, tribal elders, business community members, representatives of various chambers, doctors, senior officers, journalists, bureaucrats, and academicians also visited the residence of the Deputy Chairman Senate to express their sorrow over the sad demise of the deceased.



QUETTA: Large number of people visiting Joint road Sunday Bazaar for buy daily commodities.