

# Independent

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Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

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## PM Shehbaz says: Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators showing positive trend, reforms yielding results

*Pak IT exports had shown reassuring progress and now stood at around \$3 billion annually through offshore channels*

DAVOS (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said Pakistan's economy was showing clear signs of improvement and the country was moving forward with renewed confidence, as key economic indicators continued to strengthen.

Addressing an event at the Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the 56th Annual Meetings of the World Economic Forum, the prime minister said Pakistan had achieved macroeconomic stability after difficult but necessary reforms and was now firmly focused on export-led growth and sus-

tainable development. "Our inflation has come down sharply from 30 percent to 5.5 percent, while the policy rate has been reduced from 22.5 percent to 10.5 percent," he said, adding that the improvement reflected disciplined economic management.

He noted that Pakistan's IT exports had shown reassuring progress and now stood at around \$3 billion annually through offshore channels.

The prime minister said that Pakistan's exports continued to face challenges but the future path was

unambiguous. "Pakistan has to pursue export-led growth," he said, underlining reforms in revenue collection as a key pillar of the strategy.

He said the government had introduced fundamental changes in the tax system, which was being fully digitized. As a result, the tax-to-GDP ratio had increased to 10.5 percent from 9 percent a few years ago, calling it a significant achievement.

Highlighting sectoral opportunities, Prime Minister Shehbaz said agricul-

*Continued on page 2*



DAVOS: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif addresses Pakistan Breakfast at Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the 56th Annual meeting of the World Economic Forum.

## CM Bugti hails sharp decline in terrorism, launches first climate fund of Balochistan

*UNHCR hands over 48 solarized public facilities worth Rs.1b to govt of Balochistan*

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, has highlighted the province's progress in addressing terrorism and climate challenges, emphasizing that a structured and proactive approach has led to a marked decline in terrorist incidents across the region.

The chief minister made these observations during a high-level meeting with a United Nations delegation headed by UN Resident Coordinator Mohammad Yahya. The discussions focused on human development, public welfare, human rights, Afghan refugee management, climate change, and avenues for development collaboration.

The UN delegation

recognized Balochistan's efforts, praising legislative steps against child marriage, youth skill development programs, the establishment of the Women's Endowment Fund, and other measures advancing human rights and social welfare.

The delegation congratulated the provincial government on these accomplishments.

Highlighting climate action, CM Bugti announced that Balochistan has launched a dedicated Climate Fund for the first time, signaling a forward-looking commitment to environmental sustainability. Regarding Afghan refugee repatriation, he confirmed that the provincial government is implementing federal policies with particular attention to the safety

and dignity of women, children, and the elderly, noting that no harassment incidents were reported during the process.

The chief minister also underscored Balochistan's cultural traditions of hospitality, noting that returning Afghan refugees traveling from Sindh and Punjab were welcomed warmly by provincial authorities.

Acknowledging UN support, CM Bugti highlighted the role of UNHCR in education, healthcare, and renewable energy initiatives, noting the handover of 48 solar-powered public facilities worth one billion rupees. These projects, he said, represent a major step toward pro

*Continued on page 2*



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi, chairing the 9th interactive Progress Review Session at Supreme Court of Pakistan.

## Pakistan accepts invitation to join Board of Peace to support sustainable peace in Gaza

*ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has accepted an invitation to join the Board of Peace to support sustainable peace in Gaza, the Foreign Office (FO) confirmed on Tuesday. The move aligns with the Gaza peace initiative under UN Resolution 2003.*

A major provision aligns statutory references with the Federal Constitutional Court, replacing the term "Supreme" with "Federal Constitutional" in relevant sections.

A Foreign Office spokesperson expressed hope that Pakistan's participation in the Board of Peace will contribute to a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and an increase in hu-

manitarian aid for the affected population.

"Pakistan will continue to support the reconstruction of Gaza and address the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people," the spokesperson said, reaffirming the country's full support for Palestinian self-determination.

The FO reiterated Pakistan's commitment to the two-state solution

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## CM Bugti warns of budget strain, pledges unyielding administrative reforms

*Says no compromise to be made on interests of Balochistan people*

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, has spotlighted a critical strain in the province's annual budget, which approaches Rs 1 trillion, revealing that nearly four-fifths of the funds are consumed by non-development needs of Balochistan's 13 million

Addressing the issue on the social media plat-

form X, the Chief Minister noted that a large portion of the non-development allocation goes toward salaries and pensions for roughly 250,000 government employees. This leaves only Rs 200 billion available to meet the development and welfare needs of the country.

Transferring the powers to local representatives would bring improvement in the system, he said while talking to a private television channel.

In reply to a question, he said, there is a need to hold local government elections on time. Commenting on relations with neighboring countries, he said, Afghan soil should not be used against Pakistan for spreading terrorism, adding that India should address the core issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir through international resolution.

### ISLAMABAD (APP):

Minister for Defense Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Wednesday said that local bodies elections would help strengthen system of the country.

Transferring the powers to local representatives would bring improvement in the system, he said while talking to a private television channel.

In reply to a question, he said, there is a need to hold local government elections on time. Commenting on relations with neighboring countries, he said, Afghan soil should not be used against Pakistan for spreading terrorism, adding that India should address the core issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir through international resolution.

## Naqvi forms committee to address Ulema's issues

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday constituted a committee under the leadership of Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry to address issues faced by Islamic religious scholars across the country.

The committee will formulate and submit workable recommendations aimed at resolving the issues raised by the ulema.

Addressing the delegation, Naqvi said that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman and other prominent religious scholars will also be members.

The committee will formulate and submit workable recommendations aimed at resolving the issues raised by the ulema.

Addressing the delegation, Naqvi said that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman plays a unifying role in society and is respected by all segments.

The interior minister added that unity, harmony and national solidarity were essential, stressing that Pakistan comes first.

He further said that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman has always spoken for unity, consensus and cohesion in the country and enjoys respect across political lines.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry said that the services of religious scholars for Pakistan were highly commendable. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman offered prayers for the integrity, progress, stability and prosperity of the country.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation led by Mufti-e-Azam of Pakistan Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhary.

## Governor urges swift completion of key flood recovery road project

### Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: Acting Governor Balochistan, Ghazala Gola, has underscored the critical importance of highways in driving regional development and improving the livelihoods of local communities. She called for the rapid progress of the World Bank-funded road sub-project connecting Dera Allah Yar to Har Din Sohbatpur, highlighting that its timely completion would bring far-reaching benefits to the entire region.

The acting governor made these remarks during a briefing at Governor



DAVOS: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar with Foreign Minister of Finland, Elina Valtion, on the sidelines of World Economic Forum (WEF).

## Veteran Journalist Shahid Rind joins Balochistan CM's office as political and media advisor

*CM Bugti praises Shahid's appointment, highlights role in promoting transparent governance*

### Independent Report

QUETTA: The Government of Balochistan has appointed senior journalist and political analyst Shahid Hamid Rind as Aide to the Chief Minister for Political and Media Affairs, according to an official notification issued by the Services & General Administration Department.

Shahid Rind is widely recognized as one of Pakistan's leading journalists, with extensive expertise in covering provincial and national politics, governance, public policy, and social issues. Known for his impartial analysis and responsible reporting, he commands respect as a credible commentator across multiple national and

regional media platforms.

In his new role, Rind will advise the Chief Minister's office on political strategy, strengthen media engagement, and facilitate effective public communication regarding governance initiatives and policy priorities.

Meanwhile, Chief

*Continued on page 2*

## CJP chairs review meeting on judicial reforms, sets timelines for disposal of death sentence appeals

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi chaired the ninth interactive progress review meeting at the Supreme Court of Pakistan to assess monthly progress under the Reform Action Plan (RAP) and to issue directions on pending initiatives aimed at modernizing the justice system and improving public-facing judicial services.

According to a press note released here Wednesday, the meeting was attended by the President and Secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association, the Registrar Supreme Court, IT Advisor or Hamayun Zafar, section heads of the Supreme Court, the Director General of the Federal Judicial Academy, and the Secretary of the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan.

During the meeting, progress was reviewed on reducing case disposal time, case categorization, digitization of judicial records, IT integration, digitization of financial receipts and expenditures, audit mechanisms, and public facilitation initiatives. Updates were also shared on automation measures, including software enhancements, QR-coded certified copies, E-Courts, capacity-building initiatives in data management and analytics, as well as alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and mediation programs.

The chair was informed that tasks related to e-filing and issuance of certified copies had been completed. Case categorization is currently underway and

*Continued on page 2*



QUETTA: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi reviewed the security measures for the Jaffar Express.

## Govt puts in place modern security arrangements on Jaffar Express: Abbasi

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The government has put in place the modern security arrangements on the Jaffar Express to ensure safe rail travel for the people of Balochistan.

To this respect, Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi reviewed the security measures for the Jaffar Express during his visit to Quetta.

He said a round the clock surveillance of railway tracks, installation of modern security cameras, and the availability of adequate security personnel on board the train have been ensured.

The Minister appreciated efforts of the Pakistan Army and FC Balochistan

for ensuring train's fool-proof security arrangements.

He emphasized that the protection of passengers' lives and property remains the top priority of the government and the Pakistan Army.

Abbasi Wednesday said that the People's Train Service in Balochistan represents a harmonious blend of cooperation between Pakistan Railways and the provincial government, terming it as a milestone in the provision of affordable and secure transportation in the province.

The minister said that for the first time in the 78-year history of Pakistan Railways,

## BHC's enforced disappearance ruling challenged in FCC

ISLAMABAD (INP): A petition challenging a Balochistan High Court (BHC) verdict related to the forced disappearance of parents has been filed before the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Wednesday. The petition was moved by Bibi Shukria, who has sought the recovery of her parents and requested the FCC to set aside the BHC's decision dated December 16, 2025. The petition states that the parents have been forcibly missing for the past three months. It alleges that on September 16, 2025, the parents of Shukria Bibi were abducted from Quetta's Sarai Road area on the orders of an influential government officer. It further claims that despite the availability of CCTV footage, police have refused to register a case against the influential government officer, and no meaningful action has been taken so far.

*Continued on page 2*

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The chief minister made these observations during a high-level meeting with a United Nations delegation headed by UN Resident

Coordinator Mohammad Yahya. The discussions focused on human development, public welfare, human rights, Afghan refugee management, climate change, and avenues for development collaboration.

The chief minister underscored Balochistan's cultural traditions of hospitality, noting that returning Afghan refugees traveling from Sindh and Punjab were welcomed warmly by provincial authorities.

Acknowledging UN support, CM Bugti highlighted the role of UNHCR in education, healthcare, and renewable energy initiatives,

noting the handover of 48 solar-powered public facilities worth one billion rupees. These projects, he said, represent a major step toward pro

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The acting governor made these remarks during a briefing at Governor

House Quetta with Deputy Director of the World Bank project, Aslam Zehri. She reaffirmed her dedication to development-focused initiatives and public welfare, emphasizing that enhanced road infrastructure would strengthen connectivity and support economic growth for the surrounding communities.

The briefing was attended by World Bank officials, including Wasim Ahmed Babar and Saad Zahid, who discussed project timelines, challenges, and progress update dates.

He expressed his gratitude to the prime minister for Pakistan's consistent, principled and firm support to the Palestinian people. He also thanked Pakistan for its role as a global force in support of Palestine and its cause.

Commenting on relations with neighboring countries, he said, Afghan soil should not be used against Pakistan for spreading terrorism, adding that India should address the core issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir through international resolution.

Shahid Rind is widely recognized as one of Pakistan's leading journalists, with extensive expertise in covering provincial and national politics, governance, public policy, and social issues. Known for his impartial analysis and responsible reporting, he commands respect as a credible commentator across multiple national and

regional media platforms.

## ICC rejects Bangladesh's plea to play T20 WC matches outside India

### Sports Desk

DUBAI: Cricket's governing body said on Wednesday it had rejected Bangladesh's request to shift their T20 World Cup matches out of India, casting doubt on the team's participation in next month's tournament.

The T20 World Cup begins in little over two weeks on February 7, with Bangladesh's four group matches scheduled to be played in Kolkata and Mumbai.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has repeatedly refused to play its games in India, and the Dhaka government said on Tuesday that they would not be pressured into changing their stance.

The International Cricket Council said a statement that in the "ab-

sence of any independent security findings that ... compromise the safety of the Bangladesh team", the ICC will not relocate the match.

The row between the neighbouring nations erupted on January 3, when the Indian cricket board ordered the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman.

The BCB asked to move their matches to World Cup co-hosts Sri Lanka. There was no immediate confirmation of whether Bangladesh would buckle to the ICC's decision.

The ICC said it had "engaged with the BCB in sustained and constructive dialogue" to ensure Bangladesh could participate in the tournament, but added that those efforts had been "rebuffed".

The ICC said in a statement that "independent security assessments, comprehensive venue-level security plans and formal assurances from the host authorities" found there was "no credible or verifiable threat to the safety" of the Bangladesh team.

The council said, despite efforts, that the BCB had maintained its position citing "a single, isolated and unrelated development concerning one of its player's involvement in a domestic league."

Youth and Sports Adviser in Dhaka's interim government Asif Nazrul told the state-run BSS news agency late on Tuesday that Bangladesh "cannot be forced to play in India".



Relatives of missing persons gather at Gul Plaza Market site amid ongoing rescue operations after catastrophic fire in Karachi.

### CM Bugti hails..

#### Continued from page 1

moving clean energy, stable institutions, and sustainable public services benefiting both Afghan refugees and local communities.

Implemented during 2024-2025 with support from international donors including Global Affairs Canada, Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the project addresses long-standing challenges of unreliable grid electricity, frequent power outages, and high operational costs from diesel generators.

UNHCR Country Representative Filpa Kandler emphasized the

critical role of reliable energy in sustaining essential public services, highlighting the importance of maintaining refugees' dignity while ensuring services for all populations. UN Resident Coordinator Mohammad Yahya lauded Balochistan's reform efforts, protection of human rights, and commitment to Afghan refugees, pledging to expand collaboration further. The UN delegation comprised UNHCR Country Representative Filpa Kandler, IOM Country Representative Satomio, UNHCR Sub-Officer Head Tesfaye Bekele, Commissioner Afghan Refugees Arbab Talib-Ul-Mola, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Arkadi Lebowski, Associate Reporting Officer Mehwish Saeed.

To ensure timely justice in matters involving the fundamental right to life, it was decided that all pending death sentence appeals would be decided within the next 45 days.

The meeting was informed that life imprisonment cases are being fixed simultaneously. The pendency of life sentence cases, which stood at 4,160 on October 26, 2024, has been reduced to 3,608 cases. After the disposal of death sentence appeals, benches will proceed to hear life imprisonment cases, with fixation volume and timelines to be determined separately. It was further decided that jail petitions filed by convicts aged 80 years and above would be fixed on a priority basis, subject to proof, without requiring an early hearing application.

### CJP chairs..

#### Continued from page 1

is expected to be finalized within two months, while the bar-coding system for tracking files scheduled to be completed within the next 15 days.

The meeting also reviewed the status of jail petitions and death sentence appeals. It was noted that when Justice Yahya Afridi assumed office on October 26, 2024, the number of pending death sentence cases stood at 384. This number has now been reduced to 107. During this period, 172 new death sentence cases were instituted, while 449 cases were disposed of.

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### Pakistan accepts..

#### Continued from page 1

based on pre-1967 borders and stated that the country will play a constructive role as a member of the Board of Peace. According to the spokesperson, the decision to join was made following an invitation extended by the President of the United States to Prime Minister Pakistan. Pakistan expects that through the Board of Peace, a lasting ceasefire and increased humanitarian support in Gaza will be achieved. The move from Pakistan came after Turkey had expressed its consent to join the global Board of

Peace, becoming a key member in efforts to support sustainable peace in Gaza. The Turkish Foreign Ministry confirmed.

According to a spokesperson, Turkey's active diplomatic role in promoting global peace, the Foreign Minister noted that the move reflects the country's ongoing efforts to support stability in conflict regions.



Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah meets with Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan at CM House in Karachi.

## Khalid Magsi underscores role of universities in Pak scientific future

ISLAMABAD (APP): Iqbal Baloch, Rector COMSATS University Islamabad Professor Dr. Raheel Qamar, Executive Director COMSATS Ambassador Nafees Zakaria, senior officials from the ministry, faculty members, students, and a large number of distinguished guests.

Addressing the gathering, the minister said that the completion of 25 years is not merely the passage of time but a reflection of a remarkable journey rooted in knowledge, innovation, and global engagement. He

## NDMA issues medium-level landslide alert for central and northern Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Wednesday issued a medium-level landslide alert for central and northern districts of Balochistan, warning of heightened risks of landslides, rockfalls and debris flows in mountainous areas due to an expected spell of adverse weather from January 22. According to the assessment, very high landslide-prone zones include Quetta, Ziarat, Hamai, Sibi, Mach, Mastung, Kalat, Muslim Bagh, Pishin, Killa Saifullah, Kaka Khurasan, Huramzai, Sinjawi, and surrounding localities, where continued precipitation may trigger repeated



QUETTA: Chief Executive Officer QESCO Syed Younas Shah meeting with Acting Governor Balochistan, Ghazala Gola.

### Pakistan's..

#### Continued from page 1

ment in Gulf countries and beyond. On foreign relations, he said Pakistan enjoyed strong economic ties with China and was building cooperation with the United States, particularly in mining, minerals, counterterrorism and technology. Prime Minister Shehbaz also highlighted transparent privatization efforts, including Pakistan International Airlines, and said further privatization and outsourcing were planned in airports, power distribution companies and transmission lines.

He said Pakistan was also moving rapidly in emerging fields such as information technology, artificial intelligence and crypto, terming the country's large youth population both a challenge and an opportunity.

The prime minister said the federal and provincial governments were jointly implementing programs to empower youth through vocational and technical training. He cited the role of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NVTC), noting that its programs were subject to third-party audits and international certification, enabling Pakistani youth to secure productive employment.

As regards structural reforms, the prime minister said the government had taken tough decisions to shut down loss-making and inefficient state entities.

He said Utility Stores Corporation, which had been a burden on the national exchequer and offered substandard goods, had been closed to save public money.

### CM Bugti..

#### Continued from page 1

residents. Mir Sarfraz Bugti outlined steps taken over the last two years to tackle this fiscal imbalance, including the closure of several outdated and inefficient departments such as Zakat, Religious Affairs, and Civil Defense. The government has also eliminated 8,000 redundant posts and enforced strict measures against absenteeism, all aimed at bolstering transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency within provincial institutions.

The Chief Minister underscored that ongoing reforms will not be compromised by protests, external pressures, or attempts at coercion. He reaffirmed that public service, transparent governance, and efficiency continue to drive the provincial administration's priorities.

### Veteran..

#### Continued from page 1

Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, congratulated senior journalist and analyst Shahid Rind on his new appointment as Aide to the Chief Minister for Political and Media Affairs, welcoming his role in communicating the province's developments and issues to the public, media, and political circles.

In a message posted on the social media platform X, the Chief Minister expressed confidence that Rind's professional expertise and insight would continue to bring attention to Balochistan's key political, social, and public matters. He noted that Rind's commitment to responsible and transparent reporting would ensure citizens have access to accurate and timely information.



SARGODHA: Players are participating in Taekwondo trials during the "Khelta Punjab Pink Games" held at Sports Gymnasium organized by Sports Department.

### NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Executive Engineer Roads CWPP&H Department District Duki invites electronic bids for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates. Tender Fee (1500/-) A/C # C02716.

Venue, The Office of the DC, District Duki

S. No. Name of Work Estimated Cost Bid Security @ % Bid submission / Tender opening Date

1 CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN NALLA (4x3) STONE MASONRY FROM HAZARA MUHALLA TO MULLAH ABDULLAH MANDA VIA TABLIGHI MARKAZ TSE-252601949853 2% 05/02/2026

2 CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN NALLA STONE MASONRY FROM GANI NALLA REMAINING PORTION TO OLD IQRA SCHOOL TSE-252601949823 2% 05/02/2026

3 CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK TOP ROAD FROM BACHA KHAN CHOWK TO FC PARK ROAD AND FROM MICHEN CHOWK TO FC BOYS HIGH SCHOOL INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM TSE-252601949773 2% 05/02/2026

4 CONSTRUCTION OF B/T ROAD FROM KAJOO CHOWK TO REMAINING PORTION LIVESTOCK HOSPITAL INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM TSE-252601949763 2% 05/02/2026

5 CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK TOP ROAD FROM MINES OFFICE TO EASTERN BYPASS VIA IRRIGATION REST HOUSE & LINK TO EIDGHA ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN & SEWERAGE SYSTEM 2. CONSTRUCTION OF LINK ROAD FROM EASTERN BYPASS TO MAIN DUKLORALI ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN AND SEWERAGE SYSTEM 3. CONSTRUCTION OF GHAREEBABAD GRAVEYARD ROAD INCLUDING DRAIN AND SEWERAGE SYSTEM TSE-252601949753 2% 05/02/2026

6 CONSTRUCTION OF BIT ROAD FROM MAIN NASARABAD TO WESTERN BYPASS TSE-252601949623 2% 04/02/2026

7 CONSTRUCTION OF 2 NOS BOX CULVERTS AT CHOWA DISTRICT DUKI TSE-252601949553 2% 04/02/2026

All interested bidders must formally register with the BPPRA Electronic Public Procurement System (EPPS), where key eligibility criteria and complete tender documentation are available on the official website, www.bppra.gov.pk. Proposals are to be submitted electronically via the EPPS portal no later than 10:00 AM, followed by an electronic bid opening at 11:00 AM on the same day. Subsequently, the original bank documents—namely original (CDR) and the original bank challan, the bank's credit line—specify the relevant TSE number on the bank's official letterhead; in addition, all required stamp papers—must be delivered in hard copy to the designated address within one hour of the electronic bid opening; failure to comply will result in disqualification. This procurement is conducted under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules, 2014. For any inquiries, please contact Pirkanbaloch@gmail.com.

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All interested bidders

## Balochistan pushes back against child labour, calls for unified action from government and industry

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Advocate Abdul Hai, member of the National Commission for Child Rights (NCRC) Balochistan, has warned that child labour not only infringes on the fundamental rights of children but also exposes significant governance gaps in law enforcement, accountability, and social protection frameworks.

Under the Huqooq-e-Pakistan II initiative, NCRC, in partnership with UNDP Pakistan and with support from the European Union, convened a provincial consultation focused on monitoring child labour within Balochistan's private sector. The session brought together representatives from federal ministries, chambers of commerce, civil society groups,

labor organizations, and business associations.

During the consultation, participants analyzed trends in child labour, obstacles in enforcing laws, and weaknesses in institutional coordination. Strategies were discussed to strengthen compliance in the private sector, particularly in informal supply chains, and to enhance social protection mechanisms, in alignment with the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights and GSP+ commitments.

The session is part of a series of national and provincial engagements designed to feed into an upcoming national report on child labour in the private sector.

NCRC will collate provincial evidence and stakeholder insights to for-

mulate practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving law enforcement, corporate accountability, and interagency coordination.

Advocate Abdul Hai stressed that eliminating child labour is not only a legal obligation under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals but also a moral and constitutional responsibility of Pakistan to safeguard its children.

UNDP Pakistan Consultant Zainab Mustafa highlighted the need for stronger multi-stakeholder coordination to effectively address child labour, expressing confidence that the forthcoming report will serve as a key roadmap for policymakers, civil society, and the private sector.

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QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Food Haji Noor Muhammad Dumar, MPA Zarak Khan Mandokhel, Sadiq Khan Achakzai, and President of Central Traders Association of Balochistan Abdul Rahim Kakar Inspect Liaquat Bazaar Haleem Plaza Fire in Quetta.

## Govt taking steps to empower women in Balochistan: Saira

QUETTA (APP): Secretary Women Development Balochistan Saira Atta on Wednesday said that the current government is taking serious and concrete steps for the development, empowerment and self-sufficiency of all women in the province.

She said that various projects are being implemented to create new opportunities for education, technical training and employment for women, so that they could play an active role in the society.

She expressed these views while talking to APP.

The Secretary Women Development said that the Women Development Department is introducing

various programs in collaboration with government and private institutions for the welfare of women, the aim of which is to make women skilled, strengthen them economically and give them a dignified position at the social level.

She said that the women of Balochistan are in no way less than the women of other provinces of the country in terms of intelligence, ability and competence, however, poverty, unavailability of basic and essential facilities and lack of opportunities have become major obstacles in the way of their development.

Saira Atta further said that the Women Development Department is working with government and private institutions for the welfare of women.

During the meeting, issues related to the social, educational and economic development of women were discussed in detail.

Secretary Women Development Saira Atta said that the women of Balochistan have immense potential, but due to lack of resources and opportunities, they are not able to utilize their full potential.

She said that poverty and lack of basic facilities are the biggest obstacles for women, which require comprehensive and sustainable policies to overcome.

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**External weaknesses**

For now, Pakistan's return to a current account deficit in the first half of the fiscal year is less a cause for worry than a reminder of how fragile the external balance remains once growth resumes. The current account has slipped back to a \$1.17bn deficit in the first six months of the year — following a surplus of \$957m in the same period last year and \$2bn over the full year. But the gap remains within the FY26 target of \$2.1bn, or 0.5pc of GDP.

The gap is blamed on the widening trade deficit that rose from \$14.5bn to \$19.2bn in July-December, despite continued demand compression. It underlines the extent of the growth challenge that lies ahead for policymakers and the State Bank amid dwindling foreign private and official flows. It also shows that the balance-of-payments problem is not a one-off event but a structural issue even if the immediate triggers remain a massive rise in food imports and a significant decrease in rice exports. The Afghan border's closure, too, has played a part.

The saving grace for the external account so far has been increased remittances and lower global oil prices. However, these cushions still leave us vulnerable to geopolitical shocks in the Middle East, as they may evaporate in case of regional escalations, particularly involving Iran. Undoubtedly, the containment of the current account deficit and last year's surplus has played a critical role in anchoring foreign exchange market sentiments, preventing speculative pressure on the home currency.

Now that the return to a current account deficit has dented this sentiment, if not eroded it altogether, we may see renewed pressure on the exchange rate and the SBP further tightening legitimate currency outflows if this trend continues. The emerging situation may force the SBP to again halt the monetary easing it just restarted after several months. A current account deficit is not a disease; it is rather a symptom of what ails the economy: falling agricultural and industrial productivity and policy failures holding exports down and scaring away foreign private investors.

Recent data shows that both outbound shipments and non-debt-creating, long-term foreign investment are plummeting. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has set up an inter-ministerial committee to recommend a strategy to exit the IMF programme. Obviously, such a strategy would focus on building up growth momentum in the next two years.

The committee must understand that there are structural weaknesses in agriculture, manufacturing and investment feeding into external imbalances. Unless growth is anchored in productivity, exports and sustained investment inflows, we will remain stuck in low-growth mode and be vulnerable to the next balance-of-payments shock.

**Zahid Hussain**

American President Donald Trump now seeks to create a new international organisation to rival the United Nations. His idea of the 'Board of Peace' goes beyond its original UN mandate of overseeing the rehabilitation of Gaza, which has been devastated by two years of Israel's genocidal war. Reportedly, so far nearly 60 countries have been invited to join the 'board' chaired by the American president. It is supposed to operate as a 'more nimble and effective international peacebuilding body'. It will cost \$1 billion for nations to buy a permanent seat on the so-called board. Many heads of government and state representing potential member countries have been invited to join. The full list of the invitees is still not known.

Interestingly, there is no mention of Gaza in the Board of Peace charter. Last year, a UN Security Council resolution had authorised the formation of the board to oversee the post-war administrative transition of the enclave.

**Ali Tauqeer Sheikh**

The assault comes from multiple directions, each more brazen than the last. Consider what happened barely a stone's throw from Parliament House itself: while legislators debated inside, Shakarparyan contractors were busy deforesting a beautiful tract of land within sight of the nation's seat of power. The trees fell and the earth was cleared, primed for mudslides once the monsoon arrives. Nobody in authority raised an alarm. The symbolism is almost too perfect: as we talk about governance, the very ground beneath our feet is being stolen.

This is not an isolated incident but part of a pattern. The Islamabad Wildlife Board, established precisely to protect the Margalla Hills National Park, has been neutered. Rina Saeed Khan, the champion who stood guard over these hills, now faces harassment through bogus cases, a punishment for the 'crime' of doing what the law mandates. When protectors become the persecuted, the capture is complete.

The physical trans-

**Trump**

Trump has separately named an 11-member executive board for Gaza as part of the 20-point peace plan for the enclave.

But the charter reportedly sent out by the Trump administration to potential members projects the Board of Peace as an international conflict resolution body along the lines of the UN. One wonders under what mandate this international body is being set up. It is the brainchild of the American president who seems to consider himself as the sole arbiter of the global order.

According to international media, the charter gives wide-ranging powers to Trump as the board's chair, allowing him to appoint and remove member states — a decision that could only be overturned by a two-thirds majority of members. It also provides him with the 'exclusive authority to create, modify, or dissolve subsidiary entities as necessary or appropriate to fulfil the Board of Peace's mission'.

Trump has been a fierce critic of the UN and under his presidency America has pulled out of

several of its agencies. His Board of Peace is also meant to undermine the global body. He aspires to create a new world order dictated by American military might. Interestingly, the charter says the objective of the board is "to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict". It is ironic that this talk of lawful governance comes from an administration that recently kidnapped the president of a sovereign state (Venezuela) and his wife in a military operation that trampled over all international laws. Trump has dismissed international law, saying only his "own morality" can curb the aggressive policies he is pursuing across the world.

Trump has also threatened to use military force against other South American countries and has bombed Iran last year. It aided Israel's genocidal war in Gaza that has killed more than 70,000 Palestinians and destroyed the entire enclave. The same administration, whose imperialistic designs have been fully exposed, claims to

uphold the idea of a rules-based world order.

Describing the need for setting up new international organisations, the charter maintains: "Durable peace requires pragmatic judgement, common sense solutions, and the courage to depart from approaches and institutions that have too often failed". It doesn't, of course, talk about the fact that America's own disdain for the rule of law has been the main reason for the failure of the UN and other international institutions. This board cannot provide global peace and stability. It is meant to be used to advance America's hegemony.

Curiously, the idea of this American-led multilateral organisation has been floated as the Trump administration prepares to take over Greenland, which has brought Washington into conflict with its European Nato allies. He has imposed an initial 10 per cent tariff on European countries opposing his plan to seize the Danish-controlled autonomous island.

In a recent message to Norway's prime minister, Marco

Rubio, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and America's Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff are also included in the executive board. There are also officials from Qatar and Egypt and an Israeli businessman, according to media reports.

One of the most controversial founding members of the Gaza board is Tony Blair, the former British prime minister, who is accused of war crimes for his decision to join the American war in Iraq.

As a part of the peace plan, an International Stabilisation Force will be raised to lead security operations, support demilitarisation and enable the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. Pakistan and some other Muslim countries have been approached to join the force that will be led by an American military officer. Given its dubious mandate, there is a real danger that the ISF will find itself fighting the Palestinian resistance group. Pakistan needs to think through any decision to join the ISF.

**Islamabad under siege**

formation of the city tells the same story. Those cascading contours that once defined Islamabad's character, giving it a topography distinct from the concrete monotony of other urban centres are being systematically flattened. This destruction is now cascading beyond the capital territory, driven by influential housing societies in the surrounding hilly areas. Contractors fill in these natural undulations to create level plots and farmhouses, erasing in months what nature took millennia to create. The model city is being reduced to just an other flat, characterless expanse of development.

The city has been further bifurcated by signal-free corridors that have killed its walkability. Islamabad was designed as a city where I could once move between sectors on foot or bicycle, where neighbourhoods connected organically. Now, massive thoroughfares carve through the urban fabric, making it impossible to cross without risking one's life. We have prioritised cars over people and speed over liveability, destroying the pedestrian character that once made the city humane.

Construction in green belts now proceeds with impunity. These areas were once the oxygen veins of the city, meant to ensure that development never became suffocating. Today, we allow construction there and needlessly expand roads, parking lots, and seminaries. Semi-permanent camps for law-enforcement agencies further narrow the spaces that let the city breathe. Each road-widening project claims more green spaces — the very things that made Islamabad different.

We have carved the E sectors out of what was supposed to be the Margalla Hills National Park. These areas were intended as habitats for leopards, pangolins, barking deer and grey goral. Instead, we authorised cricket pavilions, university campuses, golf courses, and private housing, turning ecological corridors into real estate opportunities. The wildlife that once roamed freely now finds itself trapped in shrinking pockets, leading to the conflicts we bring our hands about when a leopard ventures into the encroached areas. We took their home and act surprised when they show up at ours.

Meanwhile, garbage chokes the tributaries of the Lai nullah, and invasive species like paper mulberry are spread in the name of landscaping, driving away indigenous birds which need indigenous trees for nesting, mating and chirping.

The consequences of this reckless development play out in tragic ways. We once took pride in a gravity-based drainage system where every manhole bore the Mohenjo Daro seal, a symbol of inherited excellence in urban planning.

Now, the CDA and its approved housing societies have encroached upon natural channels, narrowed nullahs, and built roads over storm-water drains. When the rains come, the water has nowhere to go. The floods in E-11 in 2021 and G-11 in 2025 were the price of denying water its right of passage. This is manufactured urban flooding and it persists because nobody is held accountable.

While rainwater harvesting is ignored, all sources of natural recharging are being flattened. This run-off adds to pollution, while ad hoc population growth depletes the groundwater, allowing the

tanker mafia' to emerge. Even our ancient heritage is not spared; we allowed encroachments on caves where Buddhist monks once meditated. We cut through the heart of our ecosystem to construct corridors like Alexander Road, ostensibly for connectivity, but really to open up land for developers who see only profit where there should be preservation.

Perhaps the most stunning revelation of the current mindset was the proposal to mortgage F-9 Park for a sukuk bond worth Rs500 billion. The federal government actually considered pledging this 750-acre public park as collateral for debt. Though the proposal was withdrawn after a public outcry, the fact that it was seriously entertained reveals a disturbing truth.

Meanwhile, the air tells its own story of decline. Islamabad's air was once distinctively crisp, and a part of its identity, as were its tree-lined avenues. That air is gone. Unchecked vehicular emissions, construction dust, and the burning of waste have transformed the atmosphere. The capital now appears regularly on pollu-

**Arctic posturing****Mahir Ali**

Lately, a half-remembered Bee Gees song from long ago has been haunting the mind. It's the one that begins with: "I started a joke, which started the whole world crying/ but I didn't see that the joke was on me..."

When Donald Trump indicated on the eve of his second inauguration a year ago that his longing for Greenland had not diminished since his first term, it was viewed as just another thought bubble, alongside his designs on Canada and the Panama Canal zone. After all, it had been made clear to him in 2019 that the vast, mostly frozen territory wasn't for sale.

But once he gets a bee in his bonnet, it can be hard to dislodge. The US president has sought to justify his redoubled focus on acquiring Greenland by claiming that American might alone can protect the world's largest island from a takeover by Russia or China. The latter has never displayed any such inclination, while the former has enthusiastically been applauding Trump's designs. Moscow's delight probably requires an explanation.

Russia has predictably, and to some extent justifiably, been assailed by its western neighbours for Vladimir Putin's territorial ambitions in Ukraine. So it's amused by the spectacle of the hostile powers scrabbling for a response to an American land grab. The US has had designs on Greenland since it bought Alaska from Tsarist Russia in 1867 at the throwaway price of two cents an acre. The Truman administration offered Denmark \$100 million in gold bullion to purchase the territory in 1946, but Copenhagen wasn't interested.

However, under a secret agreement concluded in 1951 (but not revealed until 40 years later), Denmark gave the US unlimited use of Greenland (initially alongside its Scandinavian neighbours) is justly resented by the territory's Inuit inhabitants. Among the now self-governing island's 57,000 people, around 85 per cent reportedly want complete independence from Denmark. A similar proportion disdains the idea of forcibly being turned into Americans.

The EU has plucked up the courage to whimper about its American masters' stated intentions, including the threat to impose 10pc, and eventually 25pc, tariffs on states that oppose Greenland's takeover. There's been talk of triggering counter-tariffs, but that's unlikely to make much headway when European ministers meet tomorrow. Europe is paying the price for having latched on to Uncle Sam's hindquarters for far too long, and its current predicament deserves little sympathy. Ursula von der Leyen is hardly the kind of figurehead who can proclaim European independence, while even Dutch courage would be too much to expect from Nato's Mark Rutte, who infamously called Trump 'daddy', and is lost for words when the pater familias goes rogue.

It would have made sense in the 1990s to incorporate the Russian Federation in European defence arrangements. Stupidly, the focus was on extending Nato's reach to Russia's borders. Putin, initially keen on cooperating with the West, balked at the idea of Georgia and Ukraine being invited into Nato. That's not the only reason for his misguided violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, but he can surely be excused a spot of schadenfreude as his invertebrate adversaries in Europe struggle to respond to the threat of US aggression against one of its most servile allies on the continent.

Denmark has long served as an obsequious handmaiden of US imperialism, willing to commit war crimes in Afghanistan

and Iraq. Hence its encroachment at being turned into a potential target. The Danish colonisation of Greenland (initially alongside its Scandinavian neighbours) is justly resented by the territory's Inuit inhabitants. Among the now self-governing island's 57,000 people, around 85 per cent reportedly want complete independence from Denmark. A similar proportion disdains the idea of forcibly being turned into Americans.

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New shipping routes and Greenland's rare earths are also in the mix as climate change advances with the US administration's eager (and egotistical) imperialist, and this week's Davos conclave should provide more entertainment to face with his reluctant detractors. Meanwhile, the song cited at the outset concludes on a sombre note:

"I fell out of bed hurting my head from the things that I said/ 'Til I finally died — which started the whole world living." If only it were that simple.

**Shahzad Sharjeel**

There was a time when aerial photography was possible only from a helicopter; the exception was the KMC fire brigade snorkels in the service of the MQM, covering party events. Then came drones, and soon no wedding shoot was complete without these contraptions buzzing inside the marques, capturing guests at different stages of chewing, gulping, slurping, and spilling.

It was a matter of time before these flying demons were put to use for espionage and war. While gluttons fantasised about drone-dropped pizza and fiction writers toyed with plots involving target-killing drones, the invention was also put to good use for crop surveys, forestry, and pest management.

Russia and Ukraine have deployed swarms of drones against each other, and the recent Pakistan-India spat saw drone warfare. Depending upon their size, utility, and sophistication, these could be suicide weapons or the sort that fly back to their bases, that is, if they dodge the anti-drone drones. Among other types, some foreign outlets claimed that Pakistan deployed the Turkish-made Yihia-III and Songar drones. An internet search puts the price of a single unit of the latter between \$24,000 and \$50,000. India reportedly used the much more expensive Israeli-made Harop/Harpy, the Polish-made Warmate, and the indigenous produced Nagastria-1. The Israeli variants could cost anywhere between \$0.5 million and \$4m apiece, depending on capability and service contracts.

With the US attacking Venezuela and eying Iran, with whom we share

**Drone on**

a border, and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE vying for regional supremacy, and Israel attacking anywhere in the region at will, Pakistan has entered regional defence pacts. Some look at these pacts as the beginning of a Muslim Nato, only the 'bloc' is a check-a-block with Greenland-type enticements to put paid to any such unifying mechanism. Remember how Saddam Hussein was armed and encouraged by the West to think that he could just saunter into Kuwait and help himself to its oilfields.

There is a slight glimmer of hope, although a long shot. For the longest time, I have believed that one way to ensure the Muslim states don't get played against one another and the rest of the world is to establish a joint administration of the holy mosques under a representative body of the Muslim world. The rest of the country could be administered; however, the citizens decide. Why, you may ask, would it work? Well, if a collective defence of the sacred sites is desirable, then a collective administration should be considered as well. If any Muslim country does it in return for bilateral gains only, then it is neither fulfilling a religious duty nor contributing to the peace and stability of the region and the world.

In days gone by, the armed student wing of a party was named the Thunder Squad, apparently to strike fear into its opponents' hearts. Hardly a day passes without one country or another expressing its desire to purchase squadrons of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. The lightweight, all-weather, day-night aircraft is a joint venture between the Pakistan Aeronautics Complex, Kamra, and Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation of China. According to the PAC site, 58 per cent of production is carried out in Pakistan and the remainder in China. No official numbers are available on the price of these jets, though some reported estimates range between \$25m and \$30m each. According to media reports, multiple contracts with various countries for the sale of JF-17 Thunder could amount to \$20 billion.

If true, one wonders whether the proceeds from these exports will go into the national kitty and be distributed to the federating units through the National Finance Commission, or whether these receipts will be ringfenced for defence purposes. No matter how innovatively the military-industrial complex raises funds to establish and run the defence infrastructure, it should not claim discretionary control over the proceeds. Public investment and an extremely uneven playing field at the expense of the private sector have helped its development. Human development must get a lion's share of its profits. The IMF has projected that social sector spending will continue to decline until 2030. We don't need a lender to tell us that the population will grow unchecked, that rates of wasting and stunting among children will persist, that polio will not be eradicated, that traders will not be taxed, and that the salaries will continue to simmer in the pot until they rise to the top, belly up. One can continue to drone on about being a hard state to the point of brittleness. The thunder needs to produce some rain for the parched land, the only motherland we have.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi addressing as Chief Guest to closing ceremony of International Tourism Conference 2026.

## Sindh CM decides to restore legal status of NICVD

**NICVD performs 200+ free TAVI procedures, each worth Rs 4 m in private hospitals**

KARACHI (INP): Announcing that no obstacle would be tolerated in the way of free treatment of heart patients, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Wednesday said that a decision had been taken to restore the legal status of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) Karachi.

Presiding over 84th meeting of the governing body of the NICVD in Karachi, the chief minister said that by removing legal ambiguities, the institute would be enabled to provide services to people without any interruption. He also announced Rs15.50 billion grant in aid

for the institute's operational matters.

CM Murad said that the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (ZABICVD) in Landhi area of Karachi would be the world's largest hospital for the treatment of heart patients. Some important decisions were taken at the meeting for the protection of the institute's future and continuity of services.

The meeting also approved the immediate appointment of Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the NICVD.

CM Murad said that the NICVD needed an additional grant of Rs3.5 bil-

lion in the financial year, 2025-26.

NICVD Executive Director Professor Tahir Sagheer, who gave a detailed briefing to the chief minister, said that so far, the allocation of Rs10 billion had been approved for the hospital, while it was facing a deficit of Rs4.6 billion.

He added that an increase in administrative and service expenditures led to the funding gap.

CM Murad said that over 200 Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) procedures were performed at the hospital for free, while private hospitals charged Rs4 million for the purpose.

### Barrister Qadim Nawaz elected as General Secretary IHCBA

ISLAMABAD (APP): Barrister Qasim Nawaz Abbasi was elected unopposed as the General Secretary of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) ahead of bar's annual elections. No candidate contested against him till the deadline for filing nomination papers. He was declared the General Secretary unopposed. Elections will be held on February 14 for the president and other posts in which the lawyers will elect a new cabinet through votes.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Azma Bokhari shared before-and-after pictures of manhole covers installed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on social media and remarked sarcastically, "Wow! Such massive development is taking place in the prov-

ince for the creation of 700 new doctor posts for Basic Health Units be completed within one week.

He stated that strengthening and activating health facilities at the local level is essential to reduce unnecessary referrals.

He emphasized that while natural disasters cannot be prevented, losses can be minimized through timely planning and improved management. In this context, relevant departments were directed to prepare advance flood contingency plans and immediately share them with the district administration.

### Azma Bokhari criticises so-called development in KP claims

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari has criticised the development claims of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government saying that in the so-called "province of change," even installation of manhole covers is being projected as a major achievement.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Azma Bokhari shared before-and-after pictures of manhole covers installed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on social media and remarked sarcastically, "Wow! Such massive development is taking place in the prov-

ince of change, and we didn't even know about it."

She said it was astonishing that posters highlighting the installation of manhole covers also featured two different images of Sohail Afzad, as if the project were a historic or landmark achievement. Speaking in a sarcastic tone, she added that people are often criticized for pointing out a lack of development, but now even routine tasks such as installing manhole covers are being officially publicized with before-and-after images.



LAHORE: Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan addressing various events including the Glasgow Consulate in the UK during his visit to Europe.

## Punjab Governor says: Overseas Pakistanis playing an important role in country's economy

### Independent Report

LAHORE: Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that overseas Pakistanis are playing an important role in country's economy. They have consistently supported the homeland during challenging time.

He expressed these views while addressing various events including the Glasgow Consulate in the UK during his visit to Europe. On his arrival in the UK, overseas Pakistanis, Pakistani Consul General Samar Javed and Chaudhry Aslam, along with business men, warmly welcomed the Governor Punjab.

Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that overseas Pakistanis are playing an important role in the country's economy through investment in the country. He said that providing a conducive

environment for overseas Pakistanis to invest in Pakistan is the top priority of the government.

The Punjab Governor said that whenever Pakistan faced any natural disaster or difficult time, overseas Pakistanis have supported the country wholeheartedly.

He said that Pakistanis are making Pakistan famous all over the world, including the UK, through their skills. The Punjab Governor said that we will not leave overseas Pakistanis alone in any difficulty.

The Punjab Governor said that those who incite overseas Pakistanis against Pakistan by false and hateful videos will be dealt with strictly. He said that those who spread false and fabricated news against Pakistan and Pakistani institutions on social media will be dealt with iron hands.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Information Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Ghulam Abbas on Wednesday said that the first priority of the GB caretaker setup was to conduct the upcoming elections transparently and peacefully.

Speaking on the program Meet the Press in National Press Club (NPC) here, he said that all political parties will be allowed to contest in the upcoming general elections of GB.

He emphasized that the caretaker Chief Minister has given clear directions to identify the problems being faced by the people and efforts should be taken to resolve the issues of electricity, internet and others.

### Police launch grand search and strike operation against terrorists

KOHAT (INP): The district police have intensified grand search and strike operations across the district under the vision of Inspector General of Police Khyber, Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Hameed to decisively target terrorists, proclaimed offenders, and their facilitators.

The latest operation was carried out under the direct supervision of District Police Officer (DPO) Kohat Shehbaz Elahi in the remote and mountainous areas of Thana Lachi.

## Sindh a land of saints, peace, tolerance: Minister Khichi

HYDERABAD (APP): Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi said the federal government would take comprehensive measures in collaboration with the Sindh government to preserve and promote the province's rich culture and heritage.

Talking to APP after visiting the shrine of renowned Sufi poet Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (RA) in Bhit Shah, the minister said Sindh was the land of saints, and Sufi scholars, where the message of love, tolerance and peace had been passed down from gen-

eration to generation. He said his visit to the shrine brought him spiritual peace and inner happiness, adding that the atmosphere of this place was beyond words.

The federal minister laid a 'Chadar' at the shrine, offered Fatiha and prayed for the security, unity and prosperity of the country and the nation. Aurangzeb Khan Khichi said Sindh's culture enjoys a prominent position across the world due to its vastness and beauty. He noted that the traditional dress, lifestyle, language, music and Sufi traditions of Sindh were a valuable part of Pakistan's national identity.

The minister said that the Punjab government is actively laying a network of new hospitals across the province. He highlighted that the Chief Minister has launched several landmark



KARACHI: Members of the Human Rights Council of Pakistan light earthen oil lamps in tribute to the victims of the Gul Plaza fire, outside the Karachi Press Club.

## CM announces telemedicine system, cardiac surgery services in Jhang

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif announced the introduction of a province wide telemedicine system and the launch of cardiac surgery services at the District Headquarters Hospital in Jhang, as part of the government's efforts to receive quality healthcare at people's doorsteps.

and noted that patients were now being treated locally instead of being referred to Lahore.

The chief minister said patients had informed her that while they were given appointments several months later in larger cities, procedures in Jhang are being completed in just 48 hours, which she described as a result of improved governance and administrative support.

She said 16 cath labs

have been launched across Punjab within weeks and months, while cardiology institutes had been established in Sahiwal, Muree and Sargodha. She added that patients from other provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were also receiving treatment in Punjab, reflecting the province's inclusive healthcare policy.

The chief minister said dialysis cards allowed patients to receive treatment worth up to one million rupees, while clinics on wheels and field hospitals had provided treatment to over 20 million people. She said free medicines worth

Rs100 billion are being provided across Punjab, along with home delivery of essential drugs, including insulin.

She said telemedicine services would allow doctors to consult patients through mobile phone screens, while specialist consultants from across the world are also being engaged. She added that air ambulance services has also been launched to ensure timely transfer of critically ill patients.

Referring to paediatric cardiology care, the chief minister said she was distressed to learn of a long waiting list for child heart surgeries upon assuming office, adding that thousands of children had since successfully undergone treatment, including patients from other provinces. She said Nawaz Sharif Medical District would house specialised hospitals for children, cardiology, blood diseases, orthopaedics, burn treatment and genetic disorders. Advanced cancer treatment facilities, including modern Chinese technology, are also being introduced, she added.



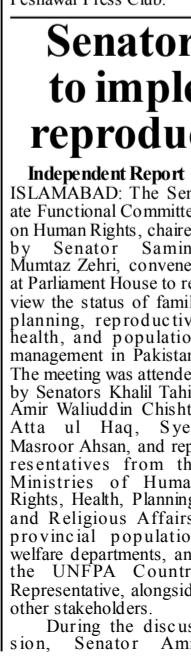
Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif inaugurates announced a Cath Lab in Jhang and the launch of cardiac surgery services at the District Headquarters Hospital in Jhang.

### Governor Kundu distributes awards among KP journalists for professional services

PESHAWAR (APP): An awards distribution ceremony for the journalistic community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held at Governor House Peshawar on Wednesday, where Governor Faisal Karim Kundi presented awards to 22 journalists in recognition of their professional services.

The ceremony was attended by Chairman Balochistan International Think Tank and Friends of Universe Society Pakistan Awais Jadoon, President Peshawar Press Club M. Riaz, President Khyber Union of Journalists Kashifuddin Syed, office-bearers of the Peshawar Press Club, and a large number of journalists from across the province. The awards were presented on behalf of the Balochistan International Think Tank.

The award recipients included M. Riaz, Farzana Ali, Zia-ul-Haq, Shamim Shahid, Kashifuddin Syed, Zulfiqar Ali Shah, Bakht Zada Yousafzai, Zahir Shah, Faridullah Khan, Shahid Hameed, Khalid Kheshgi, Amjad Ali Khadim, Yaseen Qureshi, Arshad Aziz Malik, Naveed Alam, Saif-ur-Islam Saifi, Farooq Firdausi, Bilal Ahmed, Shahzad Ahmed and Akram Khan. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman Balochistan International Think Tank Awais Jadoon and President Peshawar Press Club.



ISLAMABAD: Managing Director Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Senator Capt. Shaheen Khalid Butt and National Coordinator NACTA Jawad Ahmad Dogar displays the MoU documents formalizing cooperation to support victims of terrorism, during a UNODC-conducted seminar in Islamabad.

## Senator Samina flags failure to implement curriculum on reproductive health in schools

### Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights, chaired by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri, convened at Parliament House to review the status of family planning, reproductive health, and population management in Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by Senators Khalid Tahir, Amir Waliuddin Chishti, Atta ul Haq, Syed Masroor Ahsan, and representatives from the Ministries of Human Rights, Health, Planning, and Religious Affairs, provincial population welfare departments, and the UNFPA Country Representative, alongside other stakeholders.

During the discussion, Senator Amir

Waliuddin Chishti highlighted the impact of taxation on contraceptives, noting that it has restricted access, leaving many people without essential family planning services. Health officials responded that the matter had previously been reviewed at the Cabinet level and that ongoing efforts are in place to address these issues within the constraints of the IMF program and federal taxation policies.

The role of religious guidance was also discussed. Religious scholars present clarified that they do not oppose family planning or reproductive health initiatives. Their recommendations focus on delivering such messaging in accordance with Islamic teachings, prioritizing the health of children and mothers. They noted that while nikah procedures currently include verification of age through CNIC, medical tests remain optional and could be incorporated in a recom-

mandatory format to help prevent potential health issues, without imposing compulsion.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri emphasized that reproductive health and family planning are fundamental human rights. She underscored the urgent need to implement these programs effectively and ensure they are accessible to all, particularly in schools, where education on puberty, hormonal changes, and family planning must begin early.

## Aurangzeb highlights economic reforms, investment drive at WEF

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, held a series of important meetings in Davos on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual meeting, focusing on advancing Pakistan's economic reform agenda, strengthening international partnerships, and promoting investment-led growth.

The minister met with President of the Asian Development Bank, Masato Kanda, to review Pakistan's ongoing economic reforms and discuss ways to further deepen the long-standing partnership between Pakistan and ADB, said a press release issued by the finance ministry here on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the ADB President noted that Pakistan was entering a significant phase of economic transformation, with renewed momentum in reforms and growing confidence in the market.

He thanked the ADB President for his continued support and guidance, noting that Pakistan's relationship with ADB had entered a new and more strategic phase. He shared that the past year marked a decisive shift toward macroeconomic stability, with this positive trajectory continuing.

The minister highlighted improvements across key economic indicators, including easing inflation, declining policy rates, strengthening foreign exchange reserves, and improving investor sentiment, all reflecting renewed confidence in Pakistan's reform path.

He briefed the ADB President on progress in structural reforms, particularly the government's renewed focus on privatization and private sector participation. He noted that recent initiatives had generated strong market interest and helped establish important benchmarks, with additional projects in the pipeline across multiple sectors.

Aurangzeb emphasized the importance of continued collaboration with development partners, including ADB, to support these reforms and unlock Pakistan's growth potential.

Discussions also covered efforts to modernize Pakistan's energy sector and advance sustainable and clean energy solutions. He highlighted ongoing reforms aimed at improving efficiency, strengthening systems, and supporting long-term economic sustainability.

Both sides agreed to maintain close coordination to identify practical solutions that support inclusive and durable growth.

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He briefed the ADB President on progress in



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry chairing a meeting during his visit to SUPARCO Headquarters.

## Pakistan, Canada explore enhanced cooperation in minerals, energy sectors

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik held a meeting with the High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan Tanik Ali Khan, to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation in the minerals and energy sectors.

During the meeting, High Commissioner Tanik Ali Khan stated that the success of Barrick Gold at Reko Diq is a strong example to build upon Pakistan-Canada mineral cooperation, said a press release issued here Wednesday.

He said that Canada is actively working to bring more Canadian companies to the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum (PMIF). Highlighting the evolving global landscape, the High Commissioner remarked that in a changing multilateral world order based on networks, shared values, and common interests, there is openness and willingness to engage with Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik held a meeting with High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan, Tanik Ali Khan.

## USF Launches Rs. 1.16bn Broadband projects for 9 districts

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a major push toward nationwide digital inclusion, the Universal Service Fund (USF) on Wednesday signed contracts worth PKR 1.16 billion with Jazz to roll out high speed broadband across nine underserved districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, aiming to connect over 533,000 rural residents within 6 to 18 months as part of the Prime Minister's "Digital Pakistan" vision.

The signing ceremony, held at the USF Head Office in Islamabad, was attended by Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Ms Shaza Fatima Khawaja as Chief Guest.

The agreements were formally signed by USF Chief Executive Officer Chaudhry Mudassar Naveed and Jazz Chief Executive Officer Aamir Ibrahim for four Next Gen-

eration Broadband for Sustainable Development projects.

Addressing the ceremony, Ms Shaza Fatima Khawaja said the government was not merely awarding contracts but laying the digital foundation of a "Digital Nation."

She said Pakistan is witnessing a historic surge in IT exports and international technology partnerships, adding that the government is in the final stages of spectrum auction and preparations for a 5G launch to further strengthen connectivity.

"My unwavering mission is to catalyse ICT growth across every avenue. Today, we are witnessing unprecedented momentum in the technology sector. These projects are a concrete step toward resolving long-standing connectivity challenges in rural Pakistan," the minister said.

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan meets Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong to discuss enhanced agricultural trade and broader economic cooperation.

## Govt balanced sugar trade to protect farmers, consumers: Rana Tanveer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain told the National Assembly on Wednesday that the government allowed sugar exports last year to protect farmers and the sugar industry from losses caused by surplus production, and later permitted limited imports to stabilise prices for consumers.

Replies to questions in the House, the minister said climate-related factors later affected production estimates.

Initial projections of around seven million tonnes were revised downward, with actual production standing at about 6.8 million tonnes. He clarified that price regulation did not fall under the federal government, while the Sugar Advisory Board only assessed production levels and recommended export or import decisions.

He acknowledged that sugar prices rose due to market manipulation by manufacturers and producers, but said timely government intervention prevented prices from reaching the feared level of Rs250 per kg. Instead, he said, prices were largely contained at around Rs200 per kg, even in remote areas of Balochistan.

The minister said current estimates suggested sugar production this year would range between 6.8 and seven million tonnes, which would help stabilise prices.

He said a high-level committee on deregulation, formed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif under the leadership of Sardar Awais Leghari, had submitted its report after consultations with stakeholders.

## Pakistan, China discuss enhanced agricultural trade, economic cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday turned around to bearish trend, losing 1,588.52 points, a decline of 0.84 percent, to settle at 187,033.27 points compared to 188,621.78 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data.

During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 1,325,597 million shares with a traded value of Rs 69,583 billion, against 1,225,807 million shares valuing Rs 63,898 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization declined to Rs 21,134 trillion from Rs 21,305 trillion a day earlier.

Out of 488 active companies in the ready market, 118 advanced, 331 declined, while 39 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 263,237 million shares, followed by Hasco Petroleum with 100,763 million shares and Faifi Foods Limited with 74,973 million shares.

## Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity was reported at the port where six ships, Hansa Africa, GFS Giselle, Odelmar, PVT Jupiter, Al-Soor-II and Horizon-I, were scheduled to load/offload containers, Cement, Palm oil, Gas oil, and LPG, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, FOTCO oil Terminal, and Sui Southern Gas Terminal, respectively, during the last hours.

Meanwhile, another bulk cargo carrier, 'Richland Singapore', with Soya Bean Seed also arrived at outer anchorage.

A total of nine ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, ABK Tiger and Horizon-I, are expected to sail on today afternoon.

Cargo volume of 126,944 tonnes, comprising 80,871 tonnes imports cargo and 46,073 export cargo carried in 1,878 Containers (351 TEUs Imports & 1,527 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 17 ships at Outer Anchorage of the Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Manina and Kallone & another ship, APL Oregon, carrying Fertilizer, Coal, and Container, expected to take berths at FAP, PIBT, and QICT today.

## TRANSFORMING TOURISM FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Mr. Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh, attends the Sustainable Tourism Forum & Expo (STF) 2026, organized by the Islamic Chamber of Commerce & Development (ICCD) in collaboration with FPCCI as Guest of Honour at PC Hotel, Karachi.

## Robert-Jan says: Pak-Netherlands undertaking concrete initiatives to further strengthen trade, investment ties

FAISALABAD (APP): The Ambassador of the Kingdom of Netherlands to Pakistan, H.E. Robert-Jan Siegert, has said that Pakistan and Netherlands are steadily moving toward enhanced economic cooperation, which will lay long-term impact on the economic relations of the two countries.

Both countries are undertaking concrete initiatives to further strengthen trade and investment ties, headed.

Speaking at Pakistan Textile Exporters Association (PTEA) on Wednesday, he emphasized the importance of joint efforts to make the business environment more facilitative and attractive for foreign investors by addressing existing challenges.

While acknowledging that bilateral trade relations

are robust and growing, he observed that there remains scope for further progress, particularly in investment cooperation.

He underlined the need for simplification of regulatory procedures, improved ease of doing business, and broad-based reforms beyond special economic zones, calling upon both sides to jointly advocate business-friendly reforms.

He invited Pakistani textile exporters to actively participate in the EU-Pakistan Business Forum scheduled to be held in the last week of April in Islamabad.

In the international market, gold prices climbed by \$127 to reach \$4,840 per ounce, marking a fresh record.

## Govt moves to revive PSM, sets May 2026 deadline for decision

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government has decided to move towards the revival of Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM), reversing its earlier plan to liquidate the state-owned enterprise, the National Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

The Minister welcomed the Chinese Ambassador and reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast commitment to boosting its exports through a multi-faceted strategy.

Parliamentary Secretary for Industries and Production Shahid Usman told the House that two protocols had been signed between Industrial Engineering LLC of Russia and PSM under the Ministry of Industries and Production.

"MSMEs are the backbone of Pakistan's economy and essential for

achieving sustainable GDP growth of 6-7 per cent," he said while addressing a press conference here.

He was accompanied by Secretary Ministry of Industries and Production Saif Anjum.

He said, the three day

expo will be held at the Lahore Expo Centre from January 24 to 26 to showcase the country's un-

tapped entrepreneurial and industrial potential and bring together thousands of MSMEs from the country.

## Junaid calls for space-based monitoring for port expansion and maritime safety

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on Wednesday said advanced space-based monitoring systems could play a vital role in safeguarding seas, improving maritime management and strengthening responses to environmental threats.

Junaid Chaudhry made the remarks during a visit to the headquarters of the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), marking the first-ever such visit by any maritime affairs minister in the country.

During the visit, Chairman SUPARCO Yusuf Khan and senior officials provided the minister with a detailed briefing on the organisation's operations and technological capabilities. The discussions high-

lighted SUPARCO's role in satellite monitoring, maritime safety, and port management.

The minister was also presented with a satellite-based assessment of potential sites for new ports, reflecting Pakistan's focus on expanding its maritime infrastructure. In addition, officials outlined plans for relief and rescue operations within national maritime boundaries, leveraging satellite technology and artificial intelligence to enhance efficiency and response times.

Addressing the participants, Junaid Chaudhry stressed the importance of leveraging satellite technology to tackle environmental and ecological challenges, including the impacts of climate change and disaster risks facing the country's coastline and maritime sector.

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# US will not use force to gain Greenland, Trump tells Davos

## Monitoring Desk

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump ruled out the use of force in his bid to control Greenland on Wednesday, but said in a speech in Davos that no other country can secure the Danish territory.

"People thought I would use force, but I don't have to use force," Trump said at the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Switzerland.

"I don't want to use force. I won't use force."

Trump took a hectoring tone, chastising the United States' European allies for their insolence, disloyalty and policy missteps in areas ranging from wind power and the environment to immigration and geopolitics.

Trump's increasing threats to Europe over Greenland have frayed

transatlantic ties and worried Europeans, overshadowing a speech that was intended to focus primarily on the US economy.

Calling Denmark "ungrateful," the Republican US president played down the issue as a "small ask" over a "piece of ice" and that an acquisition would be no threat to the Nato alliance, which includes Denmark and the United States.

"No nation or group of nations is in any position to be able to secure Greenland other than the United States," Trump said, adding: "I'm seeking immediate negotiations to once again to discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States." On several occasions during a speech that lasted more than an hour, Trump mistakenly referred to Greenland as Iceland.

Trump, who marked the end of a turbulent first year in office on Tuesday, is set to overshadow the agenda of the WEF, where global elites chew over economic and political trends.

Nato leaders have warned that Trump's Greenland strategy could upset the alliance, while the leaders of Denmark and Greenland have offered a wide array of ways for a greater US presence on the strategic island territory of 57,000 people.

"We want a piece of ice for world protection, and they won't give it," Trump said in his speech to a packed congress hall. Hundreds of delegates gathered in the lobby to listen or watch Trump's speech on video monitors or on mobile phones. After an hour, most of them had tuned out and resumed chatting.

US President Donald Trump speaks during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos.

## UN strongly condemns Israeli demolition of UNRWA headquarters in occupied East Jerusalem

UNITED NATIONS (APP):

The demolition underway on Tuesday of the headquarters of UN agency UNRWA by Israeli forces in occupied East Jerusalem—reported "under the watch of lawmakers and a member of the Tel Aviv Government" — has prompted swift condemnation from the global body.

Responding to the dramatic development, head of the UN agency tasked with delivering humanitarian services to millions of Pales-

tinians, Philippe Lazzarini, described it as an "unprecedented attack" against the UN, whose premises are protected under international law.

The move represents "a new level of open and deliberate defiance of international law, including of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, by the State of Israel", the UNRWA Commissioner-General said on X.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the demolition "in

the strongest terms".

The UN chief has repeatedly and unequivocally stated that the compound remains UN premises and is "inviolable and immune from any form of interference."

"The Secretary-General views as wholly unacceptable the continued escalatory actions against UNRWA," the statement from his office continued.

Guterres called on Israel to halt the demolition and restore the compound to the UN "without delay".

## Gunman jailed for life in killing of Japan ex-PM Abe

NARA (AFP/APP):

The gunman charged with killing Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe was found guilty Wednesday and jailed for life, more than three years after the broad-

daylight assassination shocked the world.

The shooting forced a reckoning in a country with little experience of gun violence, and ignited scrutiny of alleged ties between prominent conservative lawmakers and a secretive sect, the Unification Church. As he handed down the sentence at a court in the city of Nara, judge Shinichi Tanaka said Tetsuya Yamagami, 45, had been "determined" to shoot Abe.

Speaking members of his AK Party parliament, Erdogan said Turkey welcomed its ceasefire agreement between the SDF and Damascus, adding hoped the group's "full integration" would herald a new era in Syria.

"Our hope is for

this issue to be solved permanently without any more bloodshed, for the terrorist organization, which is now stuck in some areas in northern Syria, to lay down its weapons, disband, and for there to be no more conflict," he said.

Laying down weapons is the only way out, he added, and any provocation would be a "suicide attempt."

## Israeli fire kills 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two children, local hospital officials say

### Monitoring Desk

CAIRO: Israeli forces on Wednesday killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two 13-year-old boys who were collecting firewood, three journalists and a woman, hospitals in the war-battered enclave said.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on any of the incidents.

The two boys were killed in separate incidents.

In one strike, the 13-year-old, his father and a 22-year old man were hit by Israeli drones on the eastern side of the central Bureij refugee camp, according to officials from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir Al-Balah, which received the bodies.

Later Wednesday, an Israeli strike on the central town of Zahraa hit a vehicle carrying three Palestinian journalists who were filming a newly established displacement camp managed by an Egyptian government committee, said Mohammed Mansour, the committee's spokesman.

zation linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group. It has been engaged in a peace process with the PKK for months and says the group — and its extensions — must disband and disarm.

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## North produces enough nuclear material a year for 10-20 weapons: S. Korea president

SEOUL (AFP/APP):

North Korea is producing enough nuclear material a year for up to 20 weapons, South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung said on Wednesday.

"Even now, nuclear materials sufficient to produce 10 to 20 nuclear weapons a year are still being produced" in North Korea, Lee told reporters at a New Year news conference.

At the same time, the North is continuing to improve its long-range ballistic missile technology aimed at striking the US mainland, Lee added.

"At some point, North Korea will have secured the nuclear arsenal it believes it needs to sustain the regime, along with ICBM capabilities capable of threatening not only the United States but the wider world," he said, referring to intercontinental ballistic missiles.

But Pyongyang has not responded to his overtures and recently accused South Korea of flying a drone into the border city of Kaesong.

Lee's office has denied it was behind the incursion but alluded it might have been carried out by civilians.

## AI reshaping the battle over the narrative of Maduro's US capture

CARACAS (AFP/APP):

While some have celebrated Maduro's ouster, the "Chavismo" movement he leads—named after his predecessor Hugo Chavez—has worked to reframe what his fall means for Venezuela's future.

Leon Hernandez, a researcher at Andres Bello Catholic University, told AFP that with AI's rapid creation of content, we see development of "disinformation labs" that flood social media platforms.

"There were things that circulated that were not real during the capture (of Maduro), and things that circulated which were real that generated doubt," Hernandez said.

"That was the idea: to create confusion and generate skepticism at the base level by distorting certain elements of real things."

The goal, he added, is for the content to overwhelm audiences so they cannot follow it.



Najwa Al-Rajoudi, mourns over the body of her nephew Moussa Al-Rajoudi during his funeral at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, after he was killed in an Israeli fire.

## Hong Kong ferry disaster ruled 'unlawful killing' after 13 years

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): A Hong Kong ferry collision in which 39 people died more than a decade ago was an unlawful killing, according to a long-awaited court ruling on Wednesday.

The Lamna IV ferry sank after colliding with another vessel on October 1, 2012, killing 31 adults and eight children in what became the Chinese city's deadliest maritime disaster since 1971. A judge-led commission later found "a litany of errors" including a missing bulkhead door, which contributed to the ferry sinking within two minutes. The coroner's court held an inquest last year following a lawsuit brought by victim representatives.

Coroner Monica Chow said on Wednesday

that the crash happened because of gross negligence by the coxswain from each vessel. "I find each of the 39 deceased was killed unlawfully," she said.

Both coxswains were jailed in 2015 as part of a criminal case and completed their sentences years ago.

Coroners in Hong Kong look into the cause and circumstances of death but have no authority to punish culprits. The inquest spanned more than 40 days and called 84 witnesses, including those responsible for designing, building and certifying the Lamna IV.

Chow only delivered part of her ruling and will continue on Thursday. Some of the coroner's remarks proved divisive among the victims' families. Alice Leung, who lost her brother in the tragedy.

Coroner Monica Chow said on Wednesday

## Norway will not participate in Trump's 'Board of Peace': PM's office

OSLO (AFP/APP): Norway's government said Wednesday it would not join the "Board of Peace" initiated by US President Donald Trump, who has vented his frustration at the Nordic country after being snubbed for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The government announced a new ceasefire with the Kurds on Tuesday after taking swathes of north and east Syria that had long been under the control of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The United States, which has long headed an international coalition and backed the Kurds against IS, said the purpose of its alliance with the SDF had largely ended years after they defeated the jihadists.

Now, the United States was backing Syria's new Islamist authorities who are seeking to extend their control across the country after years of civil war. Thousands of former jihadis, including many Westerners, have been held in seven Kurdish-run prisons in north and east Syria, while tens of thousands of their suspected family members live in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps. At Al-Hol, the AFP correspondent saw soldiers open the camp's metal gate and enter.

The American proposal raises a number of questions requiring "further dialogue with the United States", State Secretary Kristoffer Thon said in a statement.

"Norway will therefore not join the proposed arrangements for the Board of Peace, and will therefore not attend a signing ceremony in Davos," Thon said. Norway would continue its close cooperation with the United States, he added. Trump's Board of Peace was originally conceived to oversee the rebuilding of Gaza.

## One dead, four seriously injured in train accident near Barcelona

BARCELONA (AFP/APP): One person died and four were seriously injured after a train near Barcelona ploughed into the rubble of a collapsed wall on Tuesday, firefighters said, Spain's second deadly rail accident in days.

The latest incident is likely to raise more questions about Spanish rail safety after the collision of two high-speed trains in the southern region of Andalucia on Sunday killed 42 people and injured more than 120. On Tuesday, a retaining wall collapsed onto the tracks, causing an accident involving a passenger train" in the municipality of Gelida, around 40 kilometres (25 miles) west of Barcelona, the northeastern Catalonia region's civil protection agency posted on social media.

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BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Tuesday sent a congratulatory message on the convening of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV).

The CPV is the strong leadership core of the Vietnamese people and the cause of socialism in Vietnam. Since the 13th National Congress of the CPV, the Central Committee has demonstrated the advantages of the communist party leadership and the socialist system, and have made positive contributions to peace, stability, development and prosperity in the region and the world, it said.

At the same time, the North is continuing to improve its long-range ballistic missile technology aimed at striking the US mainland, Lee added.

"At some point, North Korea will have secured the nuclear arsenal it believes it needs to sustain the regime, along with ICBM capabilities capable of threatening not only the United States but the wider world," he said, referring to intercontinental ballistic missiles.

General Muohu zi Kainerugaba, 51, has made no secret of his desire to succeed his father, who was declared winner of a seventh term as president on Saturday at the age of 81 in a vote declared a "sham" by the opposition.

Kainerugaba, who is typically referred to by his first name in Uganda, was unusually quiet during the electoral campaign but returned to his habitually provocative online postings soon after the results.

"We have killed 22 NUP terrorists since last week," Kainerugaba wrote on X, referring to the opposition National Unity Platform, led by Wine, the singer-turned-politician who came second in the ballot.

"I'm praying the 23rd is Kabobi," he added, using his nickname for the opposition leader.

Wine has gone into hiding since the vote, accusing the security forces of raiding his home and attempting to capture him. His whereabouts have been unknown since Saturday.

Official data released Tuesday showed unemployment remained at 5.1 percent, a near five-year high, at the end of last year.

However, price pressures are widely expected

to ease in 2026, with inflation set to move closer to the Bank of England's two-percent target. The ONS attributed December's rise to higher tobacco prices, fares and food costs. Along with weak unemployment figures and some recent positivity on the economic growth front, the inflation numbers will be used by the BoE to determine its next moves on interest rates.

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose to 3.4 percent in December, compared to 3.2 percent in November, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. The analysts' consensus forecast had been for inflation of 3.3 percent.

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## India's weaponisation of water: Pak sounds alarm at UN over water security crisis

NEW YORK (INP): Pakistan has warned that India's unilateral decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance has created an unprecedented crisis for Pakistan's water security and regional stability.

Calling the move a deliberate "weaponisation of water," Pakistan's representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Usman Jadoon, said India's actions amounted to material breaches of the landmark 1960 treaty.

Speaking at the Global Water Bankruptcy Policy Roundtable hosted by Canada and the United Nations University on Tuesday, Ambassador Jadoon said India's actions had committed several serious violations of the treaty, including unannounced disruptions of downstream water flows and the withholding of critical hydrological data.

"Pakistan's position

is unequivocal; the treaty remains legally intact and permits no unilateral suspension or modification," he said.

He stressed that for more than six decades, the Indus Waters Treaty had provided a time-tested framework for the equitable and predictable management of the Indus River basin, which sustains one of the world's largest contiguous irrigation systems.

The basin, he noted, provides over 80 percent of Pakistan's agricultural water needs and supports the lives and livelihoods of more than 240 million people.

Ambassador Jadoon said water insecurity had emerged globally as a systemic risk, affecting food production, energy systems, public health, livelihoods, and human security.

"For Pakistan, this is a lived reality," he said, describing the country as a semi-arid, climate-vulnerable, lower-riparian state.



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfraz Bugti in a group photo with Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq during her visit to Quetta.



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfraz Bugti in a group photo with Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq during her visit to Quetta.

## CM Bugti vows unrelenting drive to eradicate polio across Balochistan

**Senator Ayesha lauded the serious efforts of the Balochistan govt to improve anti-polio campaign & routine immunization coverage**

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, has reaffirmed the provincial government's unwavering commitment to eliminating polio, emphasizing that the campaign is treated as a national priority and pursued with full seriousness. He highlighted that protecting children from the debilitating disease remains at the forefront of government initiatives, with security measures, monitoring, public awareness, and the health system coordinated to ensure comprehensive coverage.

The chief minister expressed these views during a meeting with the Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, who visited Quetta on Wednesday. National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Coordinator Anwar-ul-Haq and Provincial EOC Coordinator Inam-ul-Haq also participated in the discussions.

The meeting provided a platform for both sides to review strategies for strengthening and coordinating the anti-polio campaign in Balochistan, enhancing routine immunization coverage, and addressing critical operational challenges on the ground.

Chief Minister Bugti

stressed that expanding routine immunization alongside polio eradication is crucial to building a resilient health system.

## PM informs MD IMF on improving macro-economic indicators, reforms

### ISLAMABAD (APP):

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehzad Sharif, Wednesday, apprised Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva of Pakistan's improving macro-economic indicators, stabilization efforts, and progress on structural reforms.

He underscored Pakistan's commitment to fiscal discipline, revenue mobilization, and sustainable growth.

The prime minister

met the IMF MD in Davos, Switzerland on the sidelines of the 56th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum.

PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Akhad Khan Cheema, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb and Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar.

## DPM, Finland FM reaffirm to further strengthen bilateral cooperation

### ISLAMABAD (APP):

Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister of Finland Elina Valttonen, Wednesday, reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen and expand Pak-Finland bilateral cooperation in key areas including trade and investment.

The DPM/FM met with Finland FM on the sidelines of the 26th World Economic Forum in Davos.



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan addressing the Business Facilitation Centre soft launching ceremony.

## Govt of Balochistan launches one-stop business hub to boost investment and employment

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan, has unveiled a strategic initiative aimed at promoting investment and accelerating trade and business activities across the province.

Speaking at the soft launch of the Business Facilitation Center at Sikandar Jamali Auditorium, organized by the Balochistan Investment Board, he highlighted that digitization of public services and innovation across government departments are central to improving transparency, efficiency, and governance.

Addressing the province's pressing challenge of unemployment, the chief secretary said the new center will provide investors and entrepreneurs with all necessary services through a single-window system, streamlining procedures and reducing bureaucratic delays.

He also proposed expanding the initiative to divisional headquarters to further enhance accessibility for business stakeholders.

Balochistan Investment Board Vice Chairman Bilal Khan Kakar emphasized that the center reflects Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz

Bugti's vision of positioning the province as a business-friendly hub. He noted that the board has prioritized attracting investment projects since assuming office a year ago, generating encouraging results.

CEO of the Balochistan Investment Board, Qaim Lashari, briefed attendees on the center's objectives, explaining that the one-window platform is designed to simplify regulatory processes, remove governmental bottlenecks, and modernize the Ease of Doing Business framework to attract investment.

## Peace cannot be established at gunpoint, Hafiz Naeem

**Says the ongoing displacement of patriotic residents of KP & adjoining tribal districts must be stopped**

### Independent Report

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Emir Engineer Hafiz Naeemur Rehman, has said that the ongoing displacement of patriotic residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the adjoining tribal districts as a result of repeated military operations must be stopped.

He stated that problems can never have a lasting solution through the use of force, and that the government should try to resolve issues through dialogue. Before launching any new military operation, previous operations should be reviewed and the nation should be informed.

## SC dismisses civil petition in long-standing land dispute

### ISLAMABAD (INP):

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has dismissed a civil petition in a long-standing land dispute, refusing to grant leave to appeal against the impugned judgment. According to a written detailed verdict issued by the Supreme Court, a two-member bench comprising Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan and Justice Shakil Ahmad announced the decision after hearing Civil Petition No. 3939 of 2025 filed by Masrat Safia Khanum and others.



QUETTA: Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq and Provincial Minister for Health Bakht Muhammad Kakar being briefed by Provincial Secretary Health Mujeeb ur Rehman Panzai regarding Health Leadership Conference 2026.

## Govt to focus on relief for salaried class in coming budget

### ISLAMABAD (INP):

Prime Minister Shehzad Sharif has directed that no mini budget will be introduced this fiscal as the government works on a comprehensive budget strategy for the next financial year focusing on relief for the salaried class and industrial sector.

Official sources on Wednesday told media that the government would attempt to bridge the tax shortfall through enhanced revenue collection rather than imposing new taxes. Efforts would be made to persuade the IMF to agree to no additional taxes during the remaining period of the current fiscal year, they added. According to the sources alternative measures would be adopted to

increase tax revenues while efforts to curb smuggling would be intensified. Action against tax evaders and non-filers would continue, with the Federal Board of Revenue stepping up enforcement. A special wing of the FBR has been auditing non-filers who display lavish lifestyles on social media platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Covert operations are reportedly underway to collect data and take action against such individuals, they continued.

Work has begun on the directive of prime minister on providing relief to the salaried class, and a strategy is being formulated for inclusion in the upcoming federal budget.



BEIJING: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq meets Chairman Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Mr. Wang Huning, in Beijing, China.

## Implementation of agreement with JAAC foremost priority of government: AJK PM

### MUZAFFARABAD (APP):

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister, Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has reiterated his government's commitment to address public grievances and further strengthening the ties between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan.

He noted that he and his team were working tirelessly to resolve the issues facing the region. He remarked that his government has come to remove hurdles in the way and open pathways for the people, adding that efforts driven by clear and sincere intentions often yield results even within a short period of time.

During his visit, AJK PM inaugurated a hydel power project costing Rs. 1.70 billion. He also announced the construction of Mori Bridge, Reji Bridge, Civil Judge complex, and a five-kilometer Khurshidabad-Reji road.

He announced that Kahuta Town Committee has been upgraded to a Municipal Corporation, the notification for Khunsheedabad Town Committee has been issued, and the Khurshidabad THQ Hospital is being inaugurated.



QUETTA: Grand Alliance Balochistan Central President Abdul Quddus Kakar and members arrested by police officers in Quetta protest.

## Pakistan on path to growth, stability & prosperity: Danyal

### RAWALPINDI (APP):

Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Barrister Danyal Chaudhry said on Wednesday that Pakistan had moved past severe economic difficulties, negative propaganda and fears of default, and was now firmly on the path of growth, stability and improvement. He said improving economic indicators, better overall performance and rising confidence were clear signs that the country was heading in the right direction and that the coming period would bring greater prosperity.

Addressing a furniture exhibition ceremony here, Barrister Danyal said there was a time when the opposition claimed the country would default within 20 to 48 hours, but it had instead emerged as an example of economic recovery and stability.

He said prudent government policies had resulted in a marked reduction in inflation and helped put the economy back on its feet. He expressed confidence that Pakistan would eventually exit the International Monetary Fund programme, which would, he added, automatically strengthen the economy and provide tangible relief to the public.

The parliamentary secretary said controlling inflation, fiscal deficits and other economic challenges over the past few years was a major achievement of the government.

He said Rawalpindi had always played a central role in Pakistan's economy, adding that the local trader community had consistently stood at the forefront during difficult times for the country.

## Talal rejects allegations of non-responsiveness

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry told the National Assembly on Wednesday that his attendance in the House and parliamentary committees ranged between 100 to 110 per cent, rejecting allegations of non-responsiveness or non-compliance.

Speaking on a point of order, he said no member of the National Assembly or Senate could claim that replies were not provided or that standing committees were ignored.

He said heads of departments regularly attended committee meetings and full compliance was ensured.

Referring to concerns about detained individuals in Rawalpindi, the minister said he had personally spoken to senior police officials and was informed that no Pakistani children were being held.

He said a list of seven individuals was under review and the verification process was expected to be completed the same day, after which verified Pakistani nationals would be released.

On the issue of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, Talal Chaudhry said he had discussed the matter with

## Musadik Malik reviews environment related projects in Sindh

KARACHI (APP): To review various ongoing environmental projects in Sindh, the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik jointly chaired a meeting with Sindh Minister for Planning and Development Jam Khan Shoro on Wednesday.

The meeting attended by World Bank representatives, Chairman P&D Board Najam Ahmed Shah, senior officials from environment and other relevant departments reviewed in detail matters regarding Pak Flow project, transforming Carbon Finance and carbon emission reduction, said a statement issued here.

Federal Minister Dr. Musadik Malik appreciated the Sindh government for taking effective measures in environmental projects, particularly in the promotion of mangroves and the carbon credit sector. These projects will not only contribute to environmental protection but will also benefit the national economy, he added.

He said some inmates in the country had spent decades in prison without receiving as many visits as the current high-profile inmate, who, he said, had already met more than 850 people, including family members, political leaders and lawyers.

He said organising public gatherings or creating law and order situations inside jails was unacceptable.

He said that the recent controversy over jail visits was being unnecessarily politicized.

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## IGP Balochistan announces rewards for officers' outstanding performance

QUETTA (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Balochistan Muhammad Tahir has announced commendation certificates and cash rewards for police officers and personnel of four districts in recognition of their outstanding performance, particularly in the ongoing anti-narcotics campaign.

According to a spokesperson for Balochistan Police, the announcement was made to acknowledge the effective role played by police formations in Quetta, Khuzdar, Kech, and Panjgur in combating drug-related crimes and strengthening law enforcement efforts in their respective areas.

Under the scheme commendation certificates will be awarded to senior officers, including the DIG Quetta and the SSPs of Khuzdar, Kech, and Panjgur.

He reaffirmed that the Balochistan Police will continue to take firm action to ensure public safety and uphold the rule of law across the province.

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