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QUETTA VOICE

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Quetta shivers as cold wave intensifies; gas and power outages deepen citizens' woes

Syed Ali Shah, News Desk:

QUETTA: A biting cold wave has gripped Quetta and surrounding districts following snowfall in the nearby mountains and continuous rainfall, pushing temperatures to near-freezing levels and making daily life increasingly difficult for residents. Quetta City Guide

Heavy snowfall was reported in areas surrounding

Khojak Pass, Kan Mehtarzai, Toba Kakarai, Ziarat, and parts of northern Balochistan, while chilly winds continued to sweep across Quetta on Thursday.

The prolonged cold spell has intensified the ongoing dry—and now damp—cold conditions across the region. However, what has frustrated citizens most is the unannounced and prolonged gas and electricity load-shedding, which has compounded hard-

ship at a time when heating is essential.

Residents in Sariab Road, Pashtunabad, Satellite Town, Jinnah Town, Brewery Road, Kandahari Bazaar, and Western Bypass complained that stoves and heaters remain useless for most of the day.

"We can tolerate the cold—but how do we cook for our families when there is no gas?" asked Abdul Rahman, a shopkeeper in Pashtunabad. Others echoed similar con-

cerns, accusing the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) of failing to ensure supply despite repeated assurances.

Frequent power outages have added to the misery. Students preparing for exams said they could not study at night, while small businesses reported financial losses.

Citizens criticized the Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO) for what they described as mismanagement and poor communication.

Balochistan Travel Guide "Both SSGC and QESCO disappear when people need them the most,"

said a resident of Satellite Town. "We deserve at least a proper schedule and transparency."

Authorities say efforts are underway to stabilize supply, but residents insist relief has yet to be seen. With the cold wave expected to continue, frustration is growing—and so are calls for accountability.

Sibi Blast Near Chainak Chowk: One Killed, Two Injured

Nashad Baloch:

SIBI: A powerful explosion near Chainak Chowk in Sibi left one person dead and two others injured on Wednesday, according to officials.

Rescue teams quickly transported the victims to Teaching Hospital Sibi for medical treatment. Doctors said the injured are being provided emergency care.



Police and security forces reached the scene immediately and cordoned off the area to begin an investigation. Authorities are trying to determine the cause of the blast and identify those responsible.

Eyewitnesses described moments of panic as people rushed for safety after the explosion.

Further updates will be shared as more information becomes available.

Justice must be accessible in practice, not just in principle: CJP

NEWS DESK: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi has noted that justice must be accessible in practice, not merely in principle, stating that the New Year calls upon us to reflect, to reform, and to renew our commitment to a justice system that places the citizen at its very centre.

"Justice must be dignified in process, not just in outcome; and responsive to the needs of women, children, the marginalized, and those living in remote and underserved regions," the CJP said in a message to the nation issued on the eve of the New Year. While extending his warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Pakistan, members of the judiciary, the legal fraternity, and all those who look to the courts for justice and reassurance, he prayed that 2026.

Media in Pakistan still stifled by censorship and threats in 2025

NEWS DESK:

The annual 2025 Media Freedom Report released by the Press Freedom and Monitoring Committee of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) has revealed that "despite complete control and censorship over Pakistani media", journalists faced serious threats in the outgoing year.

These threats include killings, arrests, treason cases, forced off-air orders, bank account closures, inclusion on the Exit Control List (ECL), and the withdrawal of institutional advertisements.

According to the report, in 2025, five journalists were killed; six faced cases, arrests, or government actions and three were subjected to harassment or intimidation.

During the course of the year, two press conferences were blocked; two media offices were attacked and two serious incidents of violence occurred. Moreover, two major digital restrictions and one controversial piece of legislation severely affected freedom of expression.



QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan chaired a high-level conference of commissioners and deputy commissioners, directing authorities to speed up development projects,

enforce price control, and ensure strict implementation of the plastic bag ban across the province.

The meeting reviewed several priority areas, includ-

ing temporary recruitments in education and health departments, quick resolution of public complaints through open courts, completion of ongoing schemes, and stronger use of social media to highlight government initiatives.

Senior officials, including Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Muhammad Hamza Shafqaat, Additional Chief Secretary (Development)

Zahid Saleem, Secretary S&GAD Syed Faisal Ahmed, Secretary Information Imran Khan, and Secretary Education (Schools) Asfandiyar Khan, attended via video link along with all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners.

The chief secretary said temporary positions should be filled without delay so inactive schools can become functional

again. He directed all districts to regularly hold open courts to provide immediate solutions to public issues related to water, electricity, health, and education.

Emphasizing price control, he warned that artificial price hikes would not be tolerated and instructed officials to activate price control committees and intensify action against profiteering.

Khan also ordered full enforcement of the plastic bag ban to support environmental protection.

On development, he stressed timely completion of schools, hospitals, roads, and water supply projects, and called for positive coverage of these initiatives on social media to keep citizens informed and highlight the provincial government's performance.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Climate Fund – A Lifeline Against Growing Disasters



Editorial: Balochistan has taken a historic and timely step by establishing its first-ever Climate Fund, a move that signals the province's recognition of the existential threat posed by global warming and climate change. In his recent meeting with British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti rightly underscored the urgency of mobilizing resources to safeguard communities from natural calamities that are growing in frequency and intensity.

Floods In Bunair The tragic flash floods in the Bunair area of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa this month, which claimed precious human lives, are a grim reminder of Pakistan's extreme vulnerability. The province sits on a fragile ecological and seismic zone – prone not only to floods but also to recurring droughts, earthquakes, and the looming threat of desertification. Each disaster further strains an already fragile infrastructure, displaces

communities, and deepens poverty.

Stop Deforestation The Climate Fund, if implemented transparently and effectively, has the potential to become a lifeline for millions.

It can provide the financial base for disaster preparedness, early warning systems, reforestation, water management, and community resilience projects. Equally important, it can build trust between the government and people by showing that saved resources – like the Rs. 14 billion carted from non-developmental expenditures – are being invested in protecting lives and livelihoods.

The Battle Cannot Be Fought Alone However, climate change is not a battle that Balochistan can fight alone.

Partnerships with international allies, such as the United Kingdom, are essential in bringing technical expertise, innovative solutions, and funding support. Training local institutions, particularly in areas like disaster management

and environmental governance, should be a top priority.

The provincial government's commitment to reforms in governance, education, and healthcare is commendable, but the climate emergency must remain at the center of its development agenda. Without climate resilience, all other reforms risk being washed away by the next flood or crippled by the next drought.

Balochistan has shown leadership by creating this Climate Fund.

The next step is to ensure that it does not become another underutilized policy initiative. Effective monitoring, independent oversight, and community involvement will be key to making it a success.

In the face of global warming, every delay carries a cost in human lives and economic stability. The Chief Minister must now take all possible steps to translate the promise of the Climate Fund into tangible protections for the people of Balochistan.

Balochistan's Education Crisis: Beyond Numbers and Empty Promises

Syed Ali Shah Analysis: The Balochistan government's claim that around 45,000 children have returned to schools is being pre-

mismanagement, and hollow commitments by successive provincial governments. For years, education in Balochistan has been treated more as

open skies or abandoned education altogether. Shelterless schools are not an exception but a norm across vast parts of the province. Equally alarming

important, but without strict monitoring and enforcement, such reviews risk becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise. The return of

government is serious about change, it must move beyond statements and statistics. Massive investment in school infrastructure, transparent teacher



sented as a major breakthrough in addressing the province's deep-rooted education crisis.

While any increase in enrollment deserves acknowledgment, this figure pales in comparison to the magnitude of the challenge. More than 3.1 million children in Balochistan remain out of school, a reality that exposes decades of neglect,

a slogan than a serious policy priority. Governments have consistently paid lip service to the issue, announcing plans, committees, and reforms that rarely translate into meaningful change on the ground.

The result is a broken system where thousands of schools remain without proper buildings, forcing children to study under

is the issue of so-called "ghost teachers" and ineffective staffing.

Despite repeated claims of reforms under the School Based Recruitment (SBK) system, absenteeism, political interference, and lack of accountability continue to cripple public education.

Reviewing recruitment processes is

45,000 children to schools should not be used to mask the harsh truth: millions are still deprived of their fundamental right to education. Poverty, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and weak governance continue to push children out of classrooms and into labor, vulnerability, and hopelessness.

If the Balochistan

management, community-based enrollment drives, and sustained political will are essential. Without tangible action, promises will remain empty, and another generation of Balochistan's children will be left behind. Education cannot survive on rhetoric alone; it demands urgent, honest, and decisive action.

Artificial Intelligence Just Taking Baby Steps

Syed Muhammad Qaseem:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence in computer systems. In simple words, AI enables machines to perform tasks that require human intelligence. These tasks can be learning from past experiences, solving problems, and making predictions based on provided data. Until now, AI has just started taking baby steps but it is growing at a much rapid rate.

Every invention had various positive and negative impacts on human civilization. According to Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai "AI will have a more profound impact on human beings than fire, electricity, and the internet". This innovation also has both positive and negative impacts on human beings. If it is left unchecked it will have adverse impacts on human creativity, the job market, and the flow of information. However, the positive use of AI will bring major advancements in medical science, education, agriculture, etc. In the following paragraphs, the impacts of AI on humans are described.

Negative Impacts of AI:

AI is a technological tool and its use can be both positive and negative, although it is in the hands of human beings on how to use it. Following are some negative impacts of AI on humans.

Deep Fakes Through Generative AI:

In the age of information technology,

misinformation is a major issue. The introduction of generative AI into public space has further worsened the predicament of information flow.

Through generative AI, deep fakes are generated. These deep fakes are difficult to judge, as original or fake, for a person who has no knowledge of AI. The deep fakes can be an image, a video, or a voice note. Recently, in Slovakia's 2023 elections, a fake voice of a party's leader and a journalist was shared on social media, in which they were talking about purchasing votes from the poor population. This voice badly reduced the vote bank of that party during elections.

Another example of the deep fakes that created uncertainty was pictures of the former US president, Donald Trump's arrest, which provoked his supporter's sentiments against the state. Therefore, if the use of generative AI is left unchecked, bad actors in society will use it for their own purposes and spread wrong information.

AI's use in War:

Using AI for the purpose of AI will have a grave threat to the mankind. With only a few clicks and in some seconds, an AI program can write a book, a novel, a poem, an assignment and an article. Furthermore, it can sing a song, draw a painting, solve a problem, and make a prediction. On the other side, it takes much effort and time for a human to do

for the balance of power. Hence, like nuclear weapons, AI will further worsen security dilemmas if used for the purpose of war.

AI is a Major Threat to Human Creativity

Creativity is a unique characteristic of human beings due to which they bring development, prosperity, modernization, and business in their lives.

Modern-day intelligence is growing so

all these tasks. Due to the lazy and comfort-seeking nature of human beings, now they mostly rely on AI to perform these tasks. With the passage of time AI is learning more skills and human's reliance on AI is further increasing. This increase in reliance on AI will cause the death of creativity in humans.

AI and Job Market:

AI is coming to take your job". This news was seen on

nor have sleep problems, consequently, companies are manufacturing AI-driven cars to avoid road accidents. Journalists and content writers demand huge salaries for their work, while ChatGPT is a free AI app that can do the same tasks freely and quickly. More interestingly, AI will replace its founders (Software Engineers) who developed AI, as AI can write

positively. AI can Revolutionize the Medical Field AI along with synthetic biology can transform the world shaped until now. AI and synthetic biology can eradicate debilitating diseases, and find treatments for pandemics, thus providing health benefits. AI has also made a lot of achievements in the field of surgery. Last year, an AI robot performed a successful egg surgery in which

curious to predict things or the outcome of events. If data is fed to an AI, it can find patterns in that data, and based on these patterns it can give predictions. For example: AI can predict election results, market demand for a product, predict weather etc. In the US 2020 presidential elections, an AI model was trained to predict the outcome of elections. Tweets and Facebook posts were fed to the model from which AI separated positive and negative sentiments about former US President Trump and current US President Joe Biden. Based on the high number of positive sentiments, the AI model predicted that Trump would win the elections, and he won. So, humans can take advantage of this feature of AI and can reap its benefits.

Boosting Agriculture Through AI:

Pakistan is an agriculture-based country, and enhancing the agriculture sector will boost the country's economic performance. AI can increase agricultural production by predicting the best time to cultivate and harvest a crop. It is also capable of identifying soil conditions, plant diseases, weather forecasts, and when plants need to be irrigated. Moreover, AI can analyze the market's supply and demand chain. AI will be efficient in saving the loss of water during irrigation. Secondly, it will provide a suitable environment for the plants to grow through maintaining soil fertility and water

needs. To sum up, equipping agriculture with AI systems will boost agricultural production and prevent heavy water losses.

Recommendations for the Pakistani Government

The world has entered into the race of AI development. Fortunately, Pakistan has a huge human resource, but making them skilled in the field of AI is a hard task to do. All provincial governments should include AI in the school curriculum.

There should be an AI portal for students, from where they can get updates about AI developments around the globe and jobs announced by the government. Furthermore, universities must be directed to increase practical work in AI rather than theoretical.

Conclusion

In conclusion, AI nevertheless advantageous, poses a grave threat to human civilization. If AI is left unchecked, it can spread misinformation through deep fakes, worsen the status quo of security dilemmas, cause the death of human creativity, and take jobs. So, all countries should sit on a single platform and form laws to control the development and introduction of AI tools in public space. In addition, AI companies should include a watermark to the content generated through AI to cope with misinformation. In the end, AI will be more hazardous if it gets consciousness and moves physically freely without being dependant on humans.





446 lawmakers fail to submit asset statements; ECP issues revised deadline

NEWS DESK: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday said 446 lawmakers — including 125 members of the National Assembly — failed to submit their statements of assets and liabilities with the ECP by the due date — set at December 31.

In a press release issued today, ECP notified the lawmakers who had missed the earlier deadline to submit their statements by January 15, and said that “as many as 446 lawmakers failed to submit their statements of assets and liabilities” with the ECP by the due date.

Out of these, 125 lawmakers are members of the National Assembly, 26 Senators, 159 members of the Punjab Assembly, 62 members of the Sindh Assembly, 48 members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly and 26 members of the

Balochistan Assembly. The commission said that members of the parliament and provincial assemblies were required to submit a copy of a statement of assets and liabilities by Dec 31, including assets and liabilities of their dependents.

It stated that the submission was a mandatory requirement under Section 137 of the Elections Act, 2017.

Section 137 (1) of the Elections Act, 2017 stipulates that “every member of an assembly and senate shall submit to the Commission, on or before Dec 31 each year, a copy of his statement of assets and liabilities, including assets and liabilities of his spouse and dependent children as on the preceding thirtieth day of June on Form B.”

ECP directed lawmakers who had not yet complied to submit their

statements by Jan 15 during office hours. It warned that members who failed to do so will be suspended the next day, in accordance with the Elections Act, 2017.

Section 137(3) pertains to the suspension of lawmakers who fail to comply with the deadline.

Last year, ECP suspended the membership of 139 lawmakers after they failed to submit their annual statements of assets.

Those suspended included two Senators from Balochistan, Muhammad Qasim of BNP and Abdul Qudus of PPP.

Other lawmakers included 16 members of the National Assembly, 68 of the Punjab Assembly, 33 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, 15 of the Sindh Assembly and five of the Balochistan Assembly.

Govt Cuts Fuel Prices, Petrol Down Rs10.28/Litre, Diesel Reduce

News Desk: The government has announced a major reduction in petroleum prices, providing relief to consumers nationwide. According to a notification issued by

the Petroleum Division, the price of petrol has been slashed by Rs10.28 per litre, bringing the new rate to Rs253.17 per litre.

High-speed diesel has also been reduced

by Rs8.57 per litre, with the revised price now set at Rs257.08 per litre.

The notification added that the new prices became effective after midnight.



PM appoints Tahir Ashrafi as coordinator for religious harmony, diaspora in Muslim countries

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appointed Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Chairman of the Pakistan Ulama Council, as Coordinator for Religious Harmony and for the Pakistan diaspora in the Middle East and Muslim countries, the Prime Minister's Office said on Thursday.

The appointment comes at a critical juncture amid evolving developments in the Muslim world and the strategic importance

of Pakistan's relations with Gulf and other Islamic states.

Ashrafi has previously served as a special representative and brings extensive experience in religious diplomacy, interfaith engagement and international outreach.

In his new role, he will be tasked with strengthening coordination, enhancing mutual understanding and further improving Pakistan's relations with Islamic and Arab countries. He has played a significant



'Are you ready?': KP CM Sohail Afridi says he will visit Karachi on January 9

NEWS DESK: Days after concluding a three-day visit to Lahore to launch PTI's street movement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi announced on Thursday that he will visit Karachi on January 9.

Friday, January 9th the chief minister said on social media platform X, “Karachi, Sindh, are you ready?”

Afridi said he would be coming to Karachi “bearing Imran Khan's message”, adding that he would be meeting “all friends of the party”.

Afridi had previously announced that Karachi was his next destination for galvanising party supporters.

During his visit to Lahore, the KP CM had attempted to deliver a speech to supporters at Liberty Chowk but was unable to do so as a heavy contingent of police had blocked all

roads leading to the area by setting up pickets. He had also addressed PTI lawmakers at the Punjab Assembly, a visit that was marred by heated exchanges between members of his entourage and security officials, while several heated exchanges between PTI leaders and journalists were also witnessed.

He was also barred from visiting the cantonment to meet party leaders, as well as the food street that had been shut down ahead of his visit.

He also went to Zaman Park amid heavy police deployment, while the detention of party supporters during the tour was also reported.

On Monday, he wrote to Punjab Chief



Minister Maryam Nawaz to complain about the treatment meted out to him during his visit. He maintained that the Punjab government's adoption of an extraordinary and excessive security posture — including sweeping detentions and visible enforcement theatrics — was “a message of intimidation rather than

cooperation”.

He complained that “such measures were neither proportionate nor warranted and conveyed an intent that went well beyond legitimate security considerations”.

The KP CM was of the view that, “taken together — protocol degradation, excessive policing optics, and synchronised digital vilification — the pattern is too consistent to be dismissed as coincidental”.

He termed the conduct “beneath the status of a provincial government” and stressed that it damaged the “collective credibility of federating units”.

Separately, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Khurd Khan said the KP CM's visit to the provincial assembly would be investigated by the law enforcement agencies in light of the CCTV footage and the initial inquiry report.

Aerial firing injures 25 in Karachi on New Year's Eve, police arrest 59

NEWS DESK: At least 25 people, including women and children, were injured in Karachi during New Year's Eve celebrations after being struck by stray bullets fired into the air, rescue officials said on Wednesday. Police arrested 59 people across the city on charges of aerial firing and recovered weapons from their possession.

The injured continued to be brought to hospitals late into the night as gunfire erupted in several neighbourhoods while people welcomed the New Year 2026. Most victims were hit by bullets fired from unknown directions, officials said.

According to Chhipra Foundation spokesperson Shahid Chaudhry, 25 people were injured in various parts of the city. He said the victims included 36-year-old Mukhtar near Chhaneas Goth, 33-year-old Nabeel near Haji Mureed Goth in Golemar, 40-year-old Naik Muhammad near Meezan Bank at the New Sahib Mandi, 20-year-old Ahmed near Korangi No 5, and 30-year-old Muhammad Aslam near Chaman Cinema at Bara Board in Pak Colony.

Chaudhry said 11-

year-old Meh Jabeen was injured by a stray bullet near Area Market in Korangi, while 35-year-old Khaleel Masih was wounded near Azam Basti, Street No 13. Seven-year-old Fareeha was hit near Safara Chowring.

Other injured included 16-year-old Sham Kumar near Imam Clinic in North Nazimabad Block 1, 65-year-old Haji Zahoor near Johar Mor, 45-year-old Jan Bahadur near Lyari Kalakot, and 18-year-old Faizan near Hotel 420 in Liaquatabad.

A 71-year-old man, identified as Salam Gul, was injured near Shalimar Bakery in Manzoor Colony. A

woman was injured near Qayyumabad, while another woman was wounded near Sikandar Goth in Gulistan-e-Hijri. A man was also injured by a bullet fired from an unknown direction near Juma Mosque in Lyari.

The injured were shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and Civil Hospital, officials said.

Meanwhile, police launched a citywide crackdown against aerial firing and arrested 59 people. SSP District Central Zeeshan Siddiqui said Khawaja Ajmer Nagri police arrested a suspect, Muhammad Suleman, while 44-year-old Ahmed

was wounded near a PSOPetrol pump in Garden. Rescue officials said two more people, 30-year-old Faraz and 25-year-old Surfan, were injured near Noorani Kabab House on Tariq Road.

The injured were shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and Civil Hospital, officials said.

Meanwhile, police launched a citywide crackdown against aerial firing and arrested 59 people. SSP District Central Zeeshan Siddiqui said Khawaja Ajmer Nagri police arrested a suspect, Muhammad Suleman, while 44-year-old Ahmed

weapons from him.

He said Gulberg police arrested three suspects — Usman, Bilal and Bilawal — while Yusuf Plaza police arrested five suspects. Joharabad police arrested two suspects and Super Market police arrested one on similar charges.

Police said Quidabad police raided Murra Farabad Colony and arrested a suspect, Salman, recovering a 30-bore pistol, bullets and spent shells. Gulshan-e-Maymar police arrested Wali Muhammad and recovered weapons from his possession.

According to police, District Central arrested 19 suspects, District East detained 17, and District City arrested seven. In other areas, Malir police arrested six suspects, District West detained three, Korangi police arrested two, District South arrested three, and Kamari district police arrested two suspects.

Police said cases have been registered against the suspects and further legal action is under way. They warned that aerial firing is a serious crime that endangers innocent lives and said a zero-tolerance policy has been adopted against the practice.

Pakistan, India exchange nuclear sites lists as FO flags water, regional concerns

NEWS DESK: Pakistan and India on Thursday exchanged updated lists of their nuclear installations, continuing an annual confidence-building measure under a bilateral agreement signed in 1988, the Foreign Office said.

Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said the exchange took place in line with the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, signed on December 31, 1988. The agreement came into force on January 27, 1991, and the two countries have shared such lists ever since the first time.

“In continuation of the practice, the exchange took place today as well,” Andrabi told a weekly news briefing. “A list of nuclear installations and facilities in Pakistan was officially handed over to the representative of the Indian High Commission in the Foreign Office today.”

“I understand that the Indian government is also sharing the list of Indian nuclear installations with our High Commission in New Delhi today,” he added.

The spokesperson said the agreement requires both countries to inform each other annually of their nuclear installations and facilities.



He also confirmed that Pakistan and India exchanged lists of prisoners.

“The Indian government is also sharing the list of Pakistani prisoners in their custody with the Pakistani high commission in New Delhi,” Andrabi said.

Under the Agreement on Consular Access, signed in 2008, both sides are required to exchange lists of prisoners in each other's custody on January 1 and July 1 every year.

Andrabi said New Delhi could not misuse its “restricted allowance” under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) to unilaterally construct projects on the western rivers.

He was responding to a question about the approval of the 260-megawatt Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project on the Chenab River in Kashmir. He said the project was in the custody of the Indian government.

“We have seen these media reports regarding Indian plans to construct the Dulhasti Stage-II hydroelectric project on the Chenab River,” he said. “Obviously, these reports raise serious concerns as no prior information was sought from Pakistan with regard to this project.”

Andrabi said the sharing of such information was mandated by the IWT, a World Bank-brokered water-sharing treaty signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960.

The treaty grants India rights over the eastern rivers — Ravi, Sutlej and Beas — while Pakistan has rights over the western rivers — Indus, Jhelum and Chenab — with limited use allowed to India for purposes including power generation.

“Such acts of commission and omission yet again exemplify a complete disregard of international law and bilateral treaties,” Andrabi said. He added that Pakistan's Indus water commissioner had sought clarification from his Indian counterpart on the nature, scope and technical details of the reported projects.

“He also wishes to ascertain whether this constitutes a new round of the river project, an alteration or additional work on an existing

plant,” Andrabi said.

He stressed that any project on the western rivers was subject to strict design and operational controls, as well as information-sharing requirements. “In the absence of formal communication from the Indian side, Pakistan is unable to access the project's conformity with the treaty provisions,” he said.

“We therefore, call upon India to urgently return to treaty compliance and respond to the queries raised by our Indus water commissioner in his latest as well as his earlier communications,” he added.

Andrabi said Pakistan viewed the IWT as a binding international agreement and remained committed to peaceful dispute resolution, but would “never compromise on our existential water rights.” China-Taiwan issue On relations with China, Andrabi said Pakistan had “consistently supported China in all matters of its core interests, including Taiwan.” He reiterated that Pakistan adhered to the One-China principle and regarded Taiwan as an inalienable part of China.

“We would urge all relevant countries to abide by their historical commitments, take steps to foster peace, security and development in Taiwan,” he said.

Public transport fares reduced across Punjab following drop in petrol prices

LAHORE (INP): Public transport fares have reduced across Punjab following a drop in petrol prices announced on January 1.

The federal government's recent decision to reduce petrol

prices is directly benefiting daily commuters, particularly those using inter-district bus services.

The Punjab Transport Department announced reductions in fares on multiple routes,

with savings ranging between Rs60 and Rs180 depending on the distance.

According to Rana Mohsin, Secretary of the Regional Transport Authority (RTA), fares from Lahore to major cities

have been revised. The bus fare to Islamabad has dropped from Rs1,910 to Rs1,850, while trips to northern destinations such as Murree and Peshawar now cost Rs2,290 and Rs2,530, respectively.

Other northern cities, including Mansehra and Abbottabad, have also seen fare reductions, with rates lowered to Rs2,420 and Rs2,240. Central and southern routes have received similar cuts. Faisalabad

bound passengers now pay Rs980 instead of Rs1,010. Multan fares have dropped to Rs1,650 and Sadiqabad bound travelers will pay Rs2,430.

Long-distance

journeys have also been reduced, with Lahore to Karachi fares reduced from Rs8,800 to Rs5,620, and Lahore to Sukkur from Rs5,510 to Rs3,400. The fare adjustments follow a Rs10.28 per litre cut in petrol and an Rs8.57 per litre

reduction in high-speed diesel, effective from January 1, 2026. Officials said the reductions aim to pass on the benefits of lower fuel costs to the public, providing immediate relief for commuters across Punjab.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif presiding over a meeting of the Federal Ministries on implementation of Economic Governance Reforms.

Punjab for strict enforcement of law banning kite flying

LAHORE, Jan 01 (INP): The Punjab Home Department has directed strict enforcement of the law banning kite flying across the province and has issued formal instructions to all commissioners, deputy commissioners, regional police officers, city police officers and district police officers in this regard.

According to a spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department here on Thursday, the government has expressed serious concern over incidents of illegal kite flying reported in certain areas of the province. Under the Punjab Regulations of Kite

Flying Ordinance 2025, kite flying is strictly prohibited throughout Punjab. The spokesperson said that the Punjab Cabinet has allowed Basant celebrations on a limited scale in Lahore only on February 6, 7 and 8, strictly in accordance with the law. However, kite manufacturing and kite flying at any place before the stipulated dates are completely banned.

Illegal kite flying poses a serious threat to human lives and public safety. The spokesperson said, adding that several incidents of pedestrians being injured due to sharp strings

have been reported, which is a matter of grave concern. Protection of human life remains the top priority of the Punjab government, and kite flying that endangers lives will not be allowed under any circumstances, added spokesperson.

It was clarified that even during the permitted Basant celebrations as a cultural activity under Jashn-e-Baharan, the use of sharp, metallic or chemical-coated strings will be strictly prohibited. Those involved in illegal kite flying or sale will face heavy fines and long-term imprisonment under

the law. The Home Department has directed indiscriminate action against kite manufacturers, sellers, suppliers of kite-flying material and those involved in kite flying. All actions will be taken strictly in accordance with the Kite Flying Regulations Bill 2025.

The spokesperson further said that kite manufacturing and kite flying without government permission are completely illegal. All districts have been directed to submit compliance reports on the implementation of these instructions to the Punjab Home Department, he added.

FBR fails to meet tax collection targets for first half of current fiscal year 2025-26

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) failed to meet its tax collection targets for the first half of the current fiscal year 2025-26.

This marks the fifth consecutive month that the FBR has failed to meet its tax revenue goals. Sources said tax revenue in the first six months of the financial year fell short by over Rs355 billion.

FBR had set target of Rs6,489 billion for July and December 2025 period, but it managed to collect Rs6,154 billion. The target was only met in July 2025, with December's collection falling approximately Rs25 billion short of the target.

In December, the FBR collected Rs1,421 billion, against a target of Rs1,446 billion.

The highest collection in December came from income tax, which amounted to Rs288 billion, followed by sales tax at Rs434 billion, cus-

Judiciary remains committed to safeguarding fundamental rights, upholding rule of law: CJF

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi has said that the judiciary remains firmly committed to safeguarding fundamental rights, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring that justice is delivered fairly, impartially, and without delay.

In his New Year message, the Chief Justice extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Pakistan, members of the judiciary, the legal fraternity, and all those who look to the courts for justice and reassurance.

He said the Constitution entrusts the judiciary with a solemn responsibility to ensure that justice is not only done but is also seen to be done, adding that this duty gains deeper meaning when viewed through the experiences of ordinary citizens who approach the courts with hope, trust, and vulnerability. Emphasizing a citizen-centric justice sys-

tem, the Chief Justice said the year ahead calls for reflection, reform, and renewal of commitment to placing citizens at the centre of judicial processes. He stressed that justice must be accessible in practice rather than merely in principle, dignified in procedure, and responsive to the needs of women, children, marginalized segments of society, and people living in remote and underserved regions. Outlining priorities for the coming year, he said the judiciary would pursue meaningful reforms aimed at improving access to justice, reducing delays, strengthening transparency, and responsibly leveraging technology to improve judicial efficiency. He added that these efforts would focus on outcomes that matter most to the public, including timely decisions, understandable procedures, and courts that are approachable and humane.

Power Division releases its annual performance report for 2025, highlighting historic reforms

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Power Division has released its annual performance report for 2025, highlighting historic reforms, improved financial discipline, significant consumer relief, and major strides toward sustainable development in the energy sector.

According to the report, the government, through prudent policies and effective decision-making, achieved notable progress in addressing long-standing challenges facing the power sector.

It said transparent and successful negotia-

tions with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) eliminated a cumulative financial burden of Rs 3,400 billion on consumers and the national exchequer. As a result, electricity tariffs were reduced by Rs 8.35 per unit for domestic consumers and up to Rs 16 per unit for industrial consumers.

The report stated that closure of inefficient and obsolete power plants helped reduce an additional Rs 7 billion burden on electricity consumers. It added that a special relief package of Rs 22.98 per unit was introduced

for industrial and agricultural consumers, boosting productive activities and supporting economic growth.

By cancelling unnecessary power projects amounting to 9,500 megawatts, the government provided a relief of Rs 1 per unit to consumers, while reducing circular debt by Rs 780 billion without taking on new loans was termed a major financial achievement. The abolition of Rs 35 PTV fee from electricity bills also addressed long-standing public grievances.

During 2025, the privatization process of three power distribution companies (DISCOs) was initiated to improve efficiency and service delivery. The report further noted that tariffs for electric vehicle charging stations were reduced by 44 percent, encouraging the adoption of modern and environmentally friendly transport. Special relief measures were also extended to flood-affected areas through bill waivers and payment concessions. Transparency was enhanced through the launch of the 'Apna Meter, Apni Reading' mobile application, empowering con-

21 monkeypox cases reported at Lahore's Mayo Hospital over past six months

LAHORE (INP): A total of 21 monkeypox cases have been reported at Mayo Hospital, Lahore over the past six months.

According to hospital authorities, none of the 21 patients diagnosed with monkeypox have any history of recent foreign travel.

At present, nine patients remain under treatment at the Mayo Hospital, the authorities added.

Samples from three suspected monkeypox patients have been sent to the Health Department for testing. Reports indicate that three deaths linked to monkeypox have been recorded in Lahore. Most of those affected are between the ages of 20 and 45. A nurse and two paramedical staff members at Mayo Hospital have also contracted the virus, while two children are among the confirmed cases.

An isolation ward has been established at Mayo Hospital specifi-

cally for the treatment of monkeypox patients.

Monkeypox is a viral disease caused by the Mpox virus. Although the natural reservoir of the virus remains unidentified, African rodents and non-human primates (such as monkeys) are suspected to harbor the virus and transmit it to humans.

The disease typically manifests with a rash that appears 3 to 5 days following the onset of fever, starting on the face and then spreading to other areas of the body. The rash progresses through several stages: macules, papules, vesicles, pustules, and scabs. Additional symptoms may include headache, muscle aches, exhaustion, and swollen lymph nodes.

The incubation period generally ranges from 7 to 14 days but can vary between 5 and 21 days. The illness usually lasts between 2 and 4 weeks.

of practical experience

and governance insights that can be adapted to local realities.

In the economic sphere, a majority of respondents expressed positive views towards trade and investment co-operation with China, citing tangible benefits such as employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and improvements in local income levels.

Connectivity and infrastructure initiatives were also perceived as strengthening regional integration, improving logistics, and supporting long-term economic resilience. Regarding development philosophy, the survey reports that more than 60 percent of respondents believe Chinese modernisation holds clear reference value for their own national development paths. Participants pointed to China's efforts to balance growth with social welfare, maintain cultural identity, and prioritise green and sustainable development—factors the survey frames as a basis for future policy dialogue.

ISLAMABAD (INP): A public opinion survey conducted across five SCO member countries indicates rising confidence in Chinese modernisation as a viable and learnable development pathway for the wider region.

The survey, carried out by the Institute of Peace and Diplomatic Studies (IPDS) under the ACCWS Knowledge Sharing Project, captures public perceptions in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Thursday.

The findings suggest strong regional resonance with China's development approach, particularly its emphasis on people-centred growth, economic inclusiveness, technological advancement, and respect for national conditions. Across the five countries surveyed, respondents increasingly view Chinese modernisation not as a rigid, one-size-fits-all model, but as a source of practical experience

LAUNCHING OF Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024-25

"Data-Driven Insights for Inclusive Growth"



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal officially launches the Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024-25 here in on.

Intermittent rainfall persists in Islamabad, several areas of Punjab

ISLAMABAD (INP): Intermittent rainfall persisted in Islamabad and several areas of Punjab on Thursday, intensifying cold weather conditions across the region.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, Saidpur recorded the highest rainfall at 21 millimetres, followed by Shamsabad with 19 millimetres. Sector H-8/2 received 18 millimetres, while New Katarian recorded 17 millimetres and Gawalmandi 15

millimetres. Meanwhile, Kachheri and Bokra each received 13 millimetres of rain. Overall, more than 14 millimetres of rainfall has been recorded across Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

In Azad Kashmir, rain and snowfall continued for the third consecutive day. Snowfall persisted in Neelum Valley, Leepa Valley, and other upper regions, while Muzaffarabad experienced intermittent rain since last night. Several link roads in up-

per areas have started closing due to snowfall.

With multiple roads in Neelum and Leepa valleys already blocked, weather officials said intermittent rain and snowfall are likely to continue throughout the day.

Meanwhile, snowfall continued in the Galiyat region of Abbottabad on the first day of the new year. Power supply along the Abbottabad-Murree Road remained suspended due to slippery conditions.

In Mansehra district, over five inches of snow was recorded in Shogran, a popular tourist destination, while Kaghan received more than two inches of snowfall.

The Khyber Development Authority has advised tourists visiting snowfall-hit areas to take precautionary measures, including using iron chains on vehicle tyres.

The ongoing rain and snowfall have further intensified the cold across northern regions.



QUETTA: Activates of Pashtunkhwa Awami Party hold protest outside QPC.

ACTIVE ENGINEER-BUILDING
on Works PP&H District Plishin.

OGDCL announces major oil, gas discovery in KP's Kohat district

NEWS DESK: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) on Thursday announced a major oil and gas discovery from the Nashpa Block in Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, calling it a significant addition to Pakistan's indigenous energy resources.

In a statement, OGDCL said successful production had been achieved from the Baragzai X-1. Exploratory well, with output of 4,100 barrels of oil per day and 10.5 million cubic feet of gas per day.

The company said the well was drilled to a total depth of 5,170 metres,

where a 187-metre hydrocarbon-bearing zone was identified in the Datta Formation.

A cased-hole drill stem test confirmed the well's commercial potential, recording production at a 32/64-inch choke with a wellhead flowing pressure of 3,880 pounds per square inch gauge.



OGDCL is the operator of the Nashpa exploration licence with a 65 percent working interest, while the Pakistan Petroleum Limited holds 30 percent and Government Holdings Private Limited holds 5 percent.

A company spokesperson said, "The new discovery would strengthen national energy reserves and OGDCL's resource base."

It added that developing local oil and gas resources would help improve the country's energy supply-demand balance and reduce reliance on costly imports.

An earlier discovery at the Baragzai X-01 (Slant) exploratory well had already highlighted the Nashpa Block's potential.

In December 2025, OGDCL announced that the well was producing 2,280

barrels of oil per day and 5.6 million standard cubic feet of gas per day, marking the first hydrocarbon discovery from the Kingriali Formation in the area.

That well, spudded on December 24, 2024,

was also drilled to a depth of 5,170 metres.

Officials said the find helped de-risk deeper exploration and opened prospects for further discoveries in

the region.

Pakistan has long been seen as having potential in tight and shale gas, which are trapped in rock formations and require specialised drilling techniques.

However, large-scale commercial production has yet to be proven.

OGDCL's renewed push comes after US President Donald Trump said Pakistan held "massive"

oil reserves, a claim analysts said lacked credible geological evidence.

The company is also fast-tracking its shale programme, shifting from a single test well to a five-to-six-well plan in 2026-27.

Expected production is estimated at 3 to 4 million standard cubic feet per day per well.

If successful, officials said the programme could eventually scale to hundreds, or even more than 1,000 wells across the country.

Collection falls short by Rs331bn in July-December

NEWS DESK: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) missed its revenue collection target by nearly Rs331 billion in the first half of 2025-26, driven by a fall in domestic sales tax and income tax collection.

The FBR collected Rs6.159 trillion during July-December period against the target of Rs6.490tr. However, the collection is 10pc higher compared to the year-ago figure of Rs5.618tr.

The revenue shortfall is primarily attributed to a slowdown in domestic sales tax collection, driven by several factors. The decline was also recorded in the income tax collection during 1H FY26.

As a result of these factors, the revenue collection fell short of target by Rs21bn in December. FY26 to Rs1.425tr against the projected target of Rs1.446tr. However, it recorded a growth of 7.38pc when compared with the last year collection of Rs1.327tr in December FY25.

FBR raises Rs6.159tr against projection of Rs6.490tr. The IMF, in its last review, has already revised down the FBR's annual tax collection target by Rs150bn. However, this shortfall could widen further if economic activity fails to rebound in the coming months.

In the FY25, the FBR missed its revenue collection target by nearly Rs163bn after two-times downward revision and collected Rs11.737tr against the revised target of Rs11.900tr. However, the collection reflects a year-on-year growth of 26.19pc from Rs9.301tr in FY24.

In line with its commitments under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, the government has introduced additional revenue measures totalling Rs1.05tr in the last budget. These include Rs655bn in new tax initiatives and Rs400bn through intensified enforcement.



PTCL to participate in 5G spectrum auction

NEWS DESK: Hatem Bamatraf, President and Group CEO of PTCL and Ufone, announced on Wednesday that PTCL, along with the merged telecom entity of Ufone and Telenor Pakistan, will take part in the upcoming 5G spectrum auction.

He hoped that the concerns of the telecom industry would be addressed and the spectrum would be offered under favourable terms during the auction.

Mr Bamatraf was addressing a press conference with the management of Telenor Pakistan, where they formally announced PTCL's acquisition of

100pc of Telenor Pakistan's issued share capital and Orion Towers for Rs108bn.

Unresolved \$800m issueThe PTCL CEO did not comment on the unresolved issue regarding the \$800 million withheld by Etisalat since 2006, when the UAE-based company took control of PTCL.

The Pakistani government still holds 62pc of PTCL's shares, with the remaining 38pc divided between Etisalat (26pc) and public investors (12pc).

Telenor Pakistan and Orion Towers are now fully owned subsidiaries of PTCL, alongside Pak Telecom Mobile

Ltd (Ufone) and U-Mier-oftance Bank.

Telenor Pakistan will continue to operate as a separate legal entity for the next 5-6 months before merging with Ufone as a merged entity (Mer-geCo), subject to approval from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Islamabad High Court.

Mr Bamatraf said the merged company would optimise spectrum resources, expand network capabilities, and deliver seamless, secure, digitally enabled services aligned with Pakistan's digital ambitions.

He also assured Telenor Pakistan employees that there would be no job losses due to the merger, emphasising respect for talent and the integration of industry best practices.

Following PTCL's acquisition of Telenor Pakistan, the merged entity, which includes Ufone, will become the country's second-largest telecom operator, with approximately 35pc of the subscriber base.



Climate shocks agriculture

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's agriculture sector once again found itself trapped between climate shocks and policy uncertainty in 2025. For a sector that contributes around 24pc of GDP and provides livelihoods to more than one-third of the country's workforce, the year served as a stark reminder of how vulnerable national food security remains.

As Punjab is the key province when it comes to agricultural output, the crisis has been far more pronounced there. The combination of lower agricultural output in FY25, high input costs, hyperinflation and devastating monsoon floods that destroyed crops and damaged infrastructure pushed thousands of farmers deeper into financial distress.

The Economic Survey of Pakistan 2024-25 reflects this fragility. Agriculture recorded a modest growth of 0.56pc in FY25, far below expectations and insufficient to support broader economic momentum. While livestock showed relative resilience with growth of 4.72pc, the crop sector contracted

sharply due to erratic weather, reduced acreage and falling productivity. Major crops such as cotton and wheat underperformed, undermining farm incomes and weakening backward and forward industrial linkages.

Punjab, which accounts for nearly 70pc of national food grain production, entered 2025 already under pressure from rising input costs and falling crop prices and a severe drought. The free-market wheat and sugarcane regime. Subsequent floods turned a

difficult year into a near crisis. Torrential rains, followed by an unusual release of water by India into Pakistani rivers, inundated large parts of Punjab, submerging standing crops of rice, cotton, sugarcane, maize and vegetables. Irrigation channels, farm-to-market roads and storage facilities were damaged, delaying harvest and disrupting supply chains.

Although the floods also affected Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, the agriculture sector in those provinces was not hit as hard as in Punjab. Official assessments estimate that crop and agriculture-related infrastructure losses exceeded Rs430 billion nationwide, with Punjab accounting for the largest share.

The destruction has not only reduced output for the current season but also disrupted subsequent sowing cycles, raising fears of prolonged pressure on food supplies and rural incomes.

For farmers on the ground, the impact has

been immediate. Muhammad Aslam, a small farmer from southern Punjab, said floodwaters remained on his land long enough to wipe out his entire crop. "Everything was ready and we were just weeks away from harvesting, but floodwater spared nothing," he said. While compensation covered some costs, it did not replace a season's income.

"I am not alone. The entire belt suffers. Even our homes were destroyed, pushing us into extreme poverty, delayed depression," he added.

Such accounts are echoed across Punjab's countryside. Farmer leaders argue that repeated shocks have left growers exhausted and disillusioned. Khalid Khokhar, President of Pakistan Kissan Itehad, said the crisis extends far beyond floods.

"In the last two years alone, farmers have suffered cumulative losses of Rs2,200 billion in the wheat crop because of low market prices under the free-market regime," he said. Losses in cotton, sugarcane and other crops, he added, were equally severe.



Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) misses tax target by Rs330b

NEWS DESK: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has missed its reduced target for the first half-year by Rs330 billion, which is less than official estimates, helping to lower the risks of a mini-budget that could impact users of solar panels, mobile phones, and bank account holders.

Against the original target, the shortfall was as high as Rs545 billion for the July-December period of the current fiscal year, according to provisional figures. The collection, nonetheless, was better than the original target of Rs6.7 trillion by only 10pc compared to the last fiscal year, a pace that is far lower than the needed growth rate of collecting nearly Rs14 trillion in revenues in this fiscal year.



taken on the revenues in the previous months. The six-month collection was higher by only 10pc compared to the last fiscal year, a pace that is far lower than the needed growth rate of collecting nearly Rs14 trillion in revenues in this fiscal year.

Chairman FBR Rashid Langrial enjoys the support of the Prime Minister's House which thinks that, despite missing the target, the bottom line was improving. According to the provisional figures, the FBR pooled Rs6.16 trillion during the July-December period, falling short of the downward target

by Rs330 billion. It was also Rs545 billion less than the original target of Rs6.7 trillion for the same period. During the last programme review, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had cut the FBR's target by Rs214 billion to adjust the impact of lower than projected inflation and economic growth and the floods. Both sides had also agreed that in case the revenue shortfall kept widening, the government would bring a mini-budget of at least Rs200 billion in January.

The chances of the mini budget remain, but these are now less due to a relatively lower shortfall

and tight control on development expenditures.

The government said that Pakistan had assured the IMF that it will take Rs200 billion worth of additional tax measures in January to compensate for any slippages in the budget surplus by increasing the income tax rates on landline and mobile phones and cash withdrawals from banks.

These agreed measures included an increase in sales tax on solar panels and expanding the web of federal excise duty (FED) on confectionery and biscuits. The government's back-up measure in-

cludes increasing the withholding tax on cash withdrawals to 1.5pc, an increase of almost 100pc. The government currently charges 0.8pc on cash withdrawals from a person whose name does not appear in the active taxpayers' list.

According to another back-up measure, Pakistan had informed the IMF that it may increase the withholding tax on landline phones from 10pc to 12.5pc, a surge of 25pc in the tax burden on households having a landline connection. It is expected to generate Rs20 billion annually.

In another regressive measure, which could hurt every individual, the government may increase the withholding tax on cellular calls from 15pc to 17.5pc. This is expected to generate an additional Rs24 billion every year, said the sources.

The government has agreed to increase the sales tax from 10pc to 18pc. Sources said that another proposal was to impose 16pc FED on confectionery and biscuits to raise Rs70 billion in revenues every year.

Petrol price slashed by Rs10.28, diesel by Rs8.57 for next fortnight

NEWS DESK: The government on Wednesday slashed the rates for petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD) by Rs10.28 and Rs8.57, respectively, for the coming fortnight.

In a late-night announcement, the Petroleum Division said the revision followed movements in international markets and recommendations from the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA).

According to the announcement, the ex-depot petrol price was reduced to Rs263.17 per litre from its previous price of Rs263.45. It is primarily used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws, and two-wheelers, and directly impacts the budgets of the middle and lower-middle classes.

Meanwhile, the ex-depot price of HSD was decreased to Rs257.08 per litre for the current fortnight from Rs265.65 per litre. Most of the transport sector runs on HSD.

Its price is considered inflationary as it is mostly used in heavy transport vehicles, trains and agricultural engines like trucks, buses, tractors, tubewells, threshers, and particularly adds to the prices of vegetables and

other eatables. Although general sales tax (GST) is zero on all the petroleum products, the government is charging Rs78 per litre on diesel and Rs82 per litre on petrol and high octane products on account of petrol levy and an Rs2.50 per litre climate support levy (CSL).

The government is also charging about Rs16-17 per litre custom duty on petrol and HSD, irrespective of their local production or imports. In addition, about Rs17 per litre distribution and sale margins are going to oil companies and their dealers.

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Anthony Joshua discharged from hospital

NEWS DESK: Former world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua has been discharged from hospital, state officials said Wednesday, after surviving a fatal car accident in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.

Joshua was traveling on Monday with friends Sina Ghami and Latif Ayedole on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in the southwest of the country when their SUV rammed into a stationary truck.

The Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Agency (TRACE) in Ogun state, where the accident occurred, said preliminary investigations showed the vehicle was moving at excessive speed and had burst a tyre before the crash.

"Anthony Joshua was discharged from hospital late this afternoon" Lagos and Ogun state governments' spokesmen said in a joint statement late Wednesday night.

"Though heavy hearted and full of emotion over the loss of his



two close friends, he was deemed clinically fit to recuperate at home," Lagos state's spokesman Gbenga Omotoso and his Ogun counterpart Kayode Akinnade said.

Both state governments have been overseeing the boxer's treatment since the crash on Monday. After leaving the hospital, the former heavyweight champion and his mother paid their respects at the funeral home where the bodies of his friends were "being prepared for repatriation", the statement said. Nigerian police

hails from the southwest Nigerian city and he is known to visit there when he is in the country. Lagos, Nigeria's bustling economic capital, throngs with visitors from across the country and diaspora each December.

Joshua, 36, was admitted at Lagos's Lagoon Hospital, the statement said, contradicting earlier information by a TRACE official who gave the name of a different hospital. Joshua's family

Recovering Cummins, Hazlewood, David in Australia squad for T20 World Cup

NEWS DESK: Australia named injured fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and big-hitter Tim David in their provisional squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in February-March, while expanding their spin options to suit conditions in Sri Lanka and India.

Cummins, who has not played an international game in the short format since June 2024, was rested from the final two Ashes games against England to manage his back issues, only playing in the third test in the series.

The pacer will undergo final scans later in the month to determine his participation in the World Cup. Cricket Australia said. The teams have until January 31 to name their final squads. Hazlewood was ruled out of the entire Ashes series with an injury in the Achilles' region while recovering from a hamstring strain, while David picked up a

fresh hamstring injury in the Big Bash League (BBL) on Boxing Day. They are tracking well and we are confident they will be available for the World Cup," Australian chair of selectors George Bailey said.

Australia also handed surprise call-ups to left-armers spinners Matt Kuhnemann and Cooper Connolly, who have just one T20 wicket between them.

They join experienced leg-spinner Adam Zampa, with Glenn Maxwell and Matthew Short offering additional spin support.

This is a preliminary squad so should changes need to be made they will be made ahead of the support period," Bailey said.

Connolly has been in sublime form with the bat in the BBL this year with 170 runs in four games at a strike rate of 166.

Australia, who will be playing their group games in Sri Lanka, will be led by Mitchell Marsh as captain, and will kick off their World Cup campaign against Ireland on February 11.

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Serie A title race enters New Year

NEWS DESK: The New Year kicks off with four points separating the top five in the Serie A standings with Inter Milan, AC Milan, Napoli, AS Roma and Juventus all with a realistic shot at the title.

Inter hold top spot after a four-match winning run and on Sunday they host Bologna who put an end to their Italian Super Cup hopes this month with a semi-final win on penalties.

Bologna have hit a dip in league form, without a win in their last four games to slip to seventh and 10 points adrift of Inter, who are still without the injured Denzel Dumfries, Francesco Acerbi and Angelo Yoon Bommy.

Inter are the top scorers in the league, with 35 goals in 16 games and this season's leading marksman in Serie A, Lautaro Martinez with nine goals, will lead the line at the San Siro alongside Marcus Thuram.

Milan, second in the standings and one point behind their neighbours, travel to Cagliari on Friday. Massimiliano Allegri's side are unbeaten in 16



league games while Cagliari have won only two out of eight home matches.

Rafael Leao is an injury doubt for Milan, but Allegri will have striker Niclas Fullkrug available after his recent arrival on loan from West Ham United.

The German will likely be on the bench with Christian Pulisic and Christopher Nkunku set to start up front as Milan aim to move top when they kick off the weekend's action and put pressure on Inter. Hojlund

revival under Conte from Napoli returned from their Super Cup success with a win at Cremonese to stay third and sit two points off the leaders ahead of an away game at Lazio on Sunday where the league champions come up against former manager Maurizio Sarri, who underwent a minor heart operation this week but was expected to return to his regular duties within days.

Napoli revitalised the career of Scottish midfielder Scott McTominay after his arrival from Manchester United last season and Antonio Conte looks to be doing the same with Danish striker Rasmus Hojlund. Hojlund has netted six league goals for Napoli, with four of those coming in the last three games, and his loan move from United is likely to be made permanent after his impressive start at the club.

Roma are fourth, three points behind Inter with a game more played, and Gian Piero

Gasperini comes up against his former club Atalanta in Saturday's away game.

Gasperini spent nine seasons in charge of Atalanta and has hit the ground running in his first campaign at Roma. His side have the best defensive record in the league, conceding 11 goals in 17 games.

Despite three defeats in their last five, Roma are still in the title chase and have yet to draw a game this season in 23 matches across all competitions.

Sabalenka wants 'Battle of the Sexes' rematch and revenge

NEWS DESK: World number one Aryna Sabalenka on Thursday said she wants a rematch of her "Battle of the Sexes" showdown with Nick Kyrgios so she can get revenge.

Australia's Kyrgios beat the Belarusian 6-3, 6-3 in a highly-publicised showdown in Dubai last Sunday, with modified rules that divided fans.

Sabalenka's side of the court was reduced in size by nine percent in an attempt to restrict Kyrgios' power and speed advantage, while each player only received one serve.

"I think I would definitely do it again," she said ahead of the Brisbane International, her season-opening tournament as she prepares for the Australian Open on January 18. "I love revenge and I don't like to leave it the way it is."

While keen to face-off with Kyrgios again, Sabalenka said she would want a full court and two serves.

"I think for the next match we will come up with a different format," she said.

"Before the match I didn't realise I would have to adjust and it was a bit tricky for me.

I think I would keep the full court but I would take two serves."

That would even our level a lot more. "I always say that when you are losing, you are learning and I learned a lot about his game," she added. "I would do it again. I need revenge."

The contest bore little resemblance to the era-defining 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Back then, there was more at stake with the nascent women's professional tour, set up by King, fighting for legitimacy and prize money for female players far lower than for the men. King, one of the all-time greats of the women's game who was at the peak of her powers, saw off

the 55-year-old Riggs, a top player in his day, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in Houston. The Sabalenka-Kyrgios showdown faced backlash, with some calling it a "money grab" while others said it did little to advance the women's game.

But Sabalenka said she felt exhibition tennis, like the Kyrgios contest, was important. "I think it's really important for tennis to keep it interesting, keep it fresh, keep it new, keep it fun," she said.

She added that she was proud of her part in the "Battle of the Sexes", despite Kyrgios barely playing in recent years and ranked a lowly 671.

"I am happy that I was able to challenge him, make him work and make him physically get tired and mentally get tired," she said.

She added that she was proud of her part in the "Battle of the Sexes", despite Kyrgios barely playing in recent years and ranked a lowly 671. "I am happy that I was able to challenge him, make him work and make him physically get tired and mentally get tired," she said.



Rodri and Doku could return against Sunderland

NEWS DESK: Rodri and Jeremy Doku could both be involved when Manchester City travel to Sunderland on New Year's Day, manager Pep Guardiola said Wednesday.

A key playmaker at the Etihad when fit, Rodri was an unused substitute in Saturday's Premier League win over Nottingham Forest following his latest injury setback.

The Spaniard missed most of last season with a severe knee problem and his attempts at returning to action have been hampered by several issues, with the latest a hamstring complaint.

Doku, a winger who enjoyed a fine start to the season, has been sidelined for the past four games with a calf injury.

Their returns could be valuable to a City side who are set to be without several players during a congested January schedule.

City, including a

trip to Tottenham on February 1, face 10 games in the space of 32 days over four competitions.

John Stones, Oscar Bobb and Mateo Kovacic are also out injured while Rayan Ait-Nouri and Omar Marmoush are at the Africa Cup of Nations.

"Rodri has come back," Guardiola told a pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

"Maybe he can

play a few minutes. I'm looking forward to it. Doku maybe, John and Oscar no."

Guardiola added: "In terms of squad we are not in our best right now for this tight schedule. It's right lately we have played with the same guys but with the schedule we have."

"We will arrive back (from Sunderland) at 2:00 am (02:00 GMT) or 3:00 am and two days later

we have Chelsea and then after that we have Brighton - really tough opponents. We don't have many players to rotate."

City, who will begin 2026 five points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal but with a game in hand, could strengthen their squad during the January transfer window.

Guardiola, however, refused to be drawn on reports linking the club with

Bournemouth's Antoine Semenyo.

"I don't have any news about anything right now," said the City boss, who also refused to be drawn on rumours Bobb could leave.

"The winter transfer window is completely closed right now. So, Sunderland."

Sunderland are seventh in the table having made an impressive return to the top flight following last season's promotion.

City defeated the Black Cats 3-0 at the Etihad on December 6 but Guardiola expects a difficult encounter at the Stadium of Light.

"They are so tough," he said. "The crowd is unbelievable. They have beaten Newcastle, Arsenal and Aston Villa could not win there."

"They have had really good results. It will be completely different there but at the same time we are ready."

Australia name squad for T20 World Cup

NEWS DESK: Australia named injured fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and big-hitter Tim David in their provisional squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in February-March, while expanding their spin options to suit conditions in Sri Lanka and India.

Cummins, who has not played an international game in the short format since June 2024, was rested from the final two Ashes games against England to manage his back issues, only playing in the third test in the series. The pacer will undergo final scans later in the month to determine his participation in the World Cup. Cricket Australia said.

The teams have until January 31 to name their final squads. Hazlewood was ruled out of the entire Ashes series with an injury in the Achilles' region while recovering from a hamstring strain, while David picked up a fresh hamstring injury in the Big

Bash League (BBL) on Boxing Day. They are tracking well and we are confident they will be available for the World Cup," Australian chair of selectors George Bailey said.

Australia also handed surprise call-ups to left-armers spinners Matt Kuhnemann and Cooper Connolly, who have just one T20 wicket between them.

They join experienced leg-spinner Adam Zampa, with Glenn Maxwell and Matthew Short offering additional spin support. "This is a preliminary squad so should changes need to be made they will be made ahead of the support period," Bailey said.

Connolly has been in sublime form with the bat in the BBL this year with 170 runs in four games at a strike rate of 166. Australia, who will be playing their group games in Sri Lanka, will be led by Mitchell Marsh as captain, and will kick off their World Cup campaign against Ireland on February 11.

Australia squad for T20 World Cup: Mitchell Marsh (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood.

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We envision a promising future for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, says PM Shehbaz after phone call with MBS

NEWS DESK: After a phone call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Wednesday that the two leaders envisioned an "exciting and promising future" for both countries.

In a post on the social media platform X on Thursday morning, the premier echoed the statement released by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) a day earlier.

Calling it a "warm and most cordial telephone conversation," PM Shehbaz said the two "reaffirmed our shared commitment to further strengthening the long-standing fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which have attained new heights in recent months."

"While expressing Pakistan's complete solidarity with the king-



dom, we also exchanged views on the regional situation, emphasising the need for unity within the Ummah and maintaining regional peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy," he said.

PM Shehbaz said he was "grateful" to the Saudi crown prince, who reaf-

firmed the kingdom's desire to expand cooperation with Pakistan in all areas of mutual interest and also "shared his intention to undertake an official visit to Pakistan in the coming year".

"Together, we envision an exciting and promising future for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia," he said.

A similar statement was also issued by the PMO a day earlier, when the premier had also met Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saad Ahmad Al-Malkiy at the Prime Minister's House to discuss regional and global developments. The prime minister reiterated the need to maintain peace and stability

through dialogue and diplomacy.

He expressed satisfaction over bilateral relations and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further deepening ties, while appreciating Saudi Arabia's support for Pakistan and its role in promoting regional peace and stability, the statement said.

The prime minister recalled his meetings with the crown prince during the year,

which he said had been highly productive and contributed significantly to elevating Pakistan's ties to new levels. He also expressed deep appreciation for Saudi Arabia's consistent support to Pakistan in times of need and its constructive role in promoting regional peace and stability. Ambassador Al-Malkiy conveyed greetings from the Valais canton. The

Around 40 killed, 100 injured in explosion in Swiss ski resort bar, police say

NEWS DESK: Around 40 people have been killed and 100 injured, most of them seriously, after an explosion tore through a crowded bar during a New Year's Eve party in the upscale ski resort of Crans-Montana, Swiss officials said on Thursday.

A fire broke out at 6.30 a.m. PKT in a bar called "Le Constellation" in the resort in southwestern Switzerland. The cause of the blast remains unclear but authorities said it appeared to be an accident.

"At the moment we are considering this a fire and we are not considering the possibility of an attack," prosecutor Beatrice Pilloud told a press conference, adding that authorities had opened a full investigation.

Some of the victims are from other countries, said Stephane Ganzer, head of security for the Valais canton. The

canton's head of police, Frederic Gisler, said a helpline had been opened for relatives. "I can't hide from you that we are all shaken by what happened overnight in Crans," Gisler told the press conference.

"Our count is about 100 injured, most seriously, and unfortunately tens of people are presumed dead," he said, adding that patients had been dispatched to hospitals in Sion, Lausanne, Geneva and Zurich. The Italian foreign ministry said information from Swiss police indicated about 40 deaths, but Gisler declined to give a specific figure.

Earlier, police said many people were being treated for burns and that the area had been completely closed off with a no-fly zone imposed over Crans-Montana. Authorities said 10 helicopters and 40 ambulances had been deployed.



Zohran Mamdani sworn in as New York's first Muslim mayor

NEWS DESK: Zohran Mamdani, the young upstart of the US left, was sworn in early on Thursday to take over as New York mayor for a four-year term sure to see him cross swords with US President Donald Trump.

The 34-year-old Democrat took his oath of office at an abandoned subway stop under City Hall just after midnight to take the helm of the United States' largest city. He will be New York's first Muslim mayor.

His office said the understated venue beneath City Hall reflected his commitment to working people, after the 34-year-old Democrat campaigned on promises to address the soaring cost of living.

NBC News reported that Mamdani took the oath with his hands on two copies of the Holy Quran — one belonging to his grandfather and the other from the New York Public Library's Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture. "Happy New Year to New Yorkers, both inside this tunnel and above," said Mamdani, standing beneath a vaulted ceiling with the words City Hall over his head. "This is truly an honour and a privilege of a lifetime."

He also called the ornate subway station "a testament to the importance of public transit to the vitality,

the health, and the legacy of our city".

Mamdani's private swearing-in to start his four-year term was performed by New York Attorney General Letitia James, who successfully prosecuted Trump for fraud.

His wife, Rama Duwaji, was also present alongside him. According to CNN, his parents, filmmaker Mira Nair and Mahmood Mamdani, a professor at Columbia University, were also in attendance.

A larger, ceremonial inauguration is scheduled later on Thursday with speeches from left-wing allies Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Around 4,000 ticketed guests are expected to attend the event outside City Hall.

Mamdani's team has also organised a block party that it says will enable tens of thousands of people to watch the ceremony along Broadway. New York law spells out that four-year mayoral terms start on the January 1 after elections.

To avoid any ambiguity about who's in charge of America's most populous city, it has become a tradition to hold a small swearing-in just after midnight.

Born in Uganda to a family of Indian origin, Mamdani moved to New York at age seven and enjoyed an elite upbringing with only a relatively brief stint in politics, becoming a member of the New York State Assembly before being elected mayor.

He is surrounding himself with seasoned aides recruited from

past mayoral administrations and former US president Joe Biden's government.

Mamdani has also opened dialogue with business leaders, some of whom predicted a massive exodus of wealthy New Yorkers if he won. Real estate leaders have debunked those claims.

He has promised a freeze on rents and free buses and childcare, building a campaign around affordability issues that some have seen as a path forward for his Democratic Party around the country ahead of midterm elections.

Mamdani had inspired a record-breaking turnout of more than two million voters and took 50 per cent, nearly 10 points ahead of Andrew Cuomo running as an independent and well ahead of Republican Curtis Sliva.



Putin wishes Russians victory in Ukraine in New Year speech

NEWS DESK: President Vladimir Putin said Russia believed it would win in Ukraine in an address Wednesday, as his country marked another New Year — their main holiday — at war.

The almost four-year offensive in Ukraine has come at a huge human cost, with military deaths on both sides believed to be in the tens, or even hundreds, of thousands.

Putin devoted much of his short address to "fighters and commanders" in Ukraine.

He did not mention an alleged Ukrainian drone attack on one of his residences which Kyiv has denied, calling the claim an attempt to derail a stumbling US-led peace process.

During the diplomatic rush to end Europe's worst conflict

since World War II in recent weeks, Putin has consistently told Russians.

that the military intends to seize the rest of Ukrainian land he has proclaimed as Russian by force if talks fail.

Addressing soldiers, whom he called "heroes", Putin said: "We believe in you and our victory". Putin's traditional speech was first aired in the far-eastern Kamchatka peninsula — the first Russian region to enter 2026.

December 31 marks 26 years since Putin came to power.

Russia — which now occupies around a fifth of Ukraine — has hit its smaller neighbour with an almost daily barrage of missiles and drones that have killed thousands of Ukrainian ci-

vilians and displaced millions.

Moscow has consistently hit Ukraine's energy and other civilian infrastructure — forcing days-long power cuts in freezing temperatures.

In Vyshegorod, a town outside Kyiv, residents left without power for several days due to Russian bombing told AFP the strikes had made their lives "hell". Russia doubled down on Putin home claim.

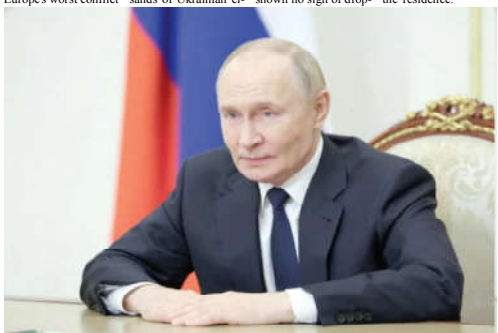
US-led diplomacy to end the war has gained pace in recent weeks, with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expected to attend a January 6 summit in France with allies, after holding talks with US President Donald Trump in Florida.

But Russia has shown no sign of dropping its maximalist demands in Ukraine.

The European Union accused Moscow on Wednesday of trying to "derail" negotiations with its claim this week that Kyiv tried to attack Putin's residence in north-west Russia. Moscow made the accusation shortly after Zelenskyy held talks with Trump and Kyiv has already called it a "fabrication".

intended to "manipulate" the peace process. The Kremlin accused Ukraine of launching dozens of drones at Putin's lakeside residence in the Novgorod region — between Moscow and Saint Petersburg — on the night of December 28.

Moscow on Wednesday published video of a drone it said Kyiv had sent toward the residence.



World toasts end of 2025 amid Trump tariffs, Gaza truce

NEWS DESK: People around the world toasted the end of 2025, bidding farewell to one of the hottest years on record, packed with Trump tariffs, a Gaza truce and vain hopes for peace in Ukraine.

New Year celebrations took on a sombre tone in Sydney as revelers held a minute of silence for victims of the Bondi Beach shooting before fireworks lit up the harbour city at the stroke of midnight.

Heavily armed police patrolled among hundreds of thousands of people lining the Sydney shore barely two weeks after a father and son allegedly opened fire on a Jewish festival at Bondi Beach, killing 15 people in Australia's deadliest mass shooting for almost 30 years. Parties paused for a minute of silence an hour before midnight

Wednesday, with the famed Sydney Harbour Bridge bathed in white light to symbolise peace.

"Right now, the joy that we usually feel at the start of a new year is tempered by the sadness of the old," Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a video message.

At midnight, nine tonnes of fireworks were set off to welcome the New Year. Fireworks light up the midnight sky over the Chao Phraya River during 2025 New Year's Day celebrations in Bangkok on January 1, 2026. Photo: AFP.

"The fireworks have always been on my bucket list and I'm so happy to be here," said Susana Suisuiki, an English tourist.

Pacific nations including Kiribati and New Zealand were the



first to see in 2026, with Seoul and Tokyo following Sydney in celebrations that will stretch to glitzy New York and the Hogmanay festival on

the chilly streets of Scotland.

More than two million people are expected to pack Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach for

what authorities have called the world's biggest New Year's Eve party.

In Hong Kong, a major New Year fire-

works display planned for Victoria Harbour was cancelled to pay homage to 161 people killed in a fire in November that engulfed several apart-

ment blocks.

Truce and tariffs For many it has been a year of stress and excitement, even without the wars that have claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Labubu dolls became a worldwide craze in 2025, thieves plundered the Louvre in a daring heist, and K-pop heartthrobs BTS made their long-awaited return. Laser lights illuminate the midnight sky over the Lotte World Tower, South Korea's tallest building in Seoul during New Year's Day celebrations on January 1, 2026. Photo: AFP.

The world lost pioneering zoologist Jane Goodall, the Vatican chose a new pope and the assassination of the right-wing activist Charlie Kirk laid bare America's deep political divisions.

Donald Trump re-

turned as US president in January, launching a tariff blitz that sent global markets into meltdown.

Trump used his approval ratings ahead of midterm elections to be held in November. "Isn't it nice to have a strong border. No Inflation, a powerful military, and great economy?" Happy New Year! he wrote.

Many expect times to continue in 2026.

"The economic situation is also very dire, and I'm afraid I'll be left without income," said Ines Rodriguez, 50, a merchant in Mexico City. After two years of war that left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins, US pressure helped land a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in October.