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A Step Forward, But Transparency Must Become the Rule in Balochistan

Syed Ali Shah Analysis:

The recent initiatives taken by the Government of Balochistan toward transparency and reform deserve appreciation. Whether in climate governance, environmental planning, or administrative decision-making, the intent to move away from opaque practices sends a positive signal to a province long plagued by mistrust and institutional weakness.

Acknowledging challenges openly and taking the first steps to address them is not easy—especially in a region facing climate vulnerability, limited resources, and decades of governance deficits. Efforts such as structured planning, public engagement, and an emphasis on accountability reflect a growing recognition that business as usual is no longer sustainable.

However, appreciation must be accompanied by honesty. While these measures mark progress, a great deal still needs to be done to ensure true



transparency and merit-based decision-making, particularly in the appointment of public servants across Balochistan. For years, public perception has been shaped by allegations of favoritism, political influence, and non-merit appointments. These practices

have not only weakened institutions but also eroded public trust and discouraged capable,

educated youth who seek fair opportunities to serve.

If transparency is to become more than a slogan, it must be institutionalized across all departments, not limited to isolated initiatives. Recruitment, promotions, postings, and policy decisions should be governed by clear rules, digital systems, and independent oversight. Only then can merit truly replace influence.

Good governance is not built overnight. It is a continuous process that requires political will, administrative reform, and public vigilance. Balochistan stands at a critical point where small but sincere steps must now evolve into systemic change.

The people of the province do not expect perfection—but they do expect fairness. Strengthening transparency and merit in public service appointments will not only improve governance but also restore confidence in the state itself.

This is the path toward a stronger, more credible, and more hopeful Balochistan.

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Police force indispensable for ensuring internal security and rule of law: CDF Asim Munir

NEWS DESK:

Chief of Defence Force (CDF) and Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir emphasised that a strong, professional, and people-centric police force is indispensable for ensuring internal security and the rule of law, according to an Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) statement issued on Tuesday.

The army chief made these remarks during a visit to the National Police Academy in Islamabad, where he addressed senior police officials, and interacted with officers of the Police Service of Pakistan. CDF Munir also acknowledged the supreme sacrifices rendered by police personnel in the face of terrorism, crime and internal security challenges, it stated. "The field marshal remarked

that the duty of the police to enforce law and order is a sacred trust and that the armed forces will always stand fully with the brave and proud police personnel of Pakistan," said the statement.

The senior police leadership, on the occasion, reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening policing standards, enhancing professional capacity and advancing necessary institutional reforms to meet contemporary security challenges, it said.

The statement further said the field marshal was "briefed on the School for High-Impact Elite Law Enforcement Development (SHIELD), as well as training programs and initiatives aimed at capacity building and modernisation of the police". He also interacted with Cadet Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs), where he highlighted the piv-

otal role of the police as the first line of defence in safeguarding the lives, property, and honour of citizens."

During the visit, CDF Munir also laid a wreath at the Police Martyrs' Monument and offered prayers for martyrs, "paying solemn tribute to the Shuhada of the Police who laid down their lives in the line of duty while safeguarding peace, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring public safety across the country". The military's media wing stated that the CDF was presented with a guard of honour on arrival at the academy and was received by the commandant.

Interior Minister Molsin Nagvi and Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry were also present during the visit. Last week, Nagvi visited the National Police Academy and reviewed the ongoing renovation. He also gave necessary instructions to the commandant.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Education Crisis: Beyond Numbers and Empty Promises



Editorial:

The Balochistan government's claim that around 45,000 children have returned to schools is being presented 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, mismanagement, and hollow commitments by successive provincial governments.

For years, education in Balochistan has been treated more as 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 open skies or abandon education altogether.

Shelterless schools are not an exception but a norm across vast parts of the province. Equally alarming 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 important, but without strict monitoring and enforcement, such reviews risk becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise.

The return of

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

Balochistan in the Eye of Climate Change Storm: Calls for Resilient Climate Policies Surface

Chandni Kakar:



In the global battle against climate change, Balochistan, Pakistan, serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for climate resilience. The province is experiencing increasingly severe weather events, a consequence of human-induced climate change. However, many residents mistake these extreme weather occurrences for regular fluctuations, hindering recognition of the escalating climate crisis.

Balochistan becoming unbearably hot

Balochistan is becoming unbearably hot, with rising temperatures transforming heatwaves into a year-round threat. These heatwaves pose severe health risks, including heat stress, dehydration, and even fatalities. In

2017, Turbat recorded a scorching 53.5°C (128.3°F), setting a record for Pakistan. Unfortunately, forecasts suggest that temperatures will continue to rise.

However, the climate challenges in Balochistan extend beyond relentless heat waves. The province grapples with devastating droughts and floods, both of which wreak havoc on homes and infrastructure. The floods of 2010 and 2022 left nearly 4 million people displaced, disrupting lives and triggering food shortages and price spikes due to their impact on the agriculture sector.

The 2022 flood in Balochistan underscores the looming climate change threat

The 2022 flood underscored the looming threat of climate

change over Balochistan. Driven by intensified and increasingly frequent monsoon rains, the full extent of the damage is yet to be comprehended. However, it exposed the province's vulnerabilities and highlighted the urgent need for effective management strategies.

Balochistan's annual rainfall of just 200 mm barely meets the needs of its parched population. This water scarcity adversely affects food production, access to drinking water, and livestock numbers, exacerbated by climate change. The severe droughts of 1997-2003 and 2014-2017 forced migrations to water-rich areas.

CC affects economy

Climate change also decimated the region's economy

through the loss of livestock. Between 2010 and 2022, over 1.5 million livestock were lost, costing over \$1 billion and displacing over 100,000 people, particularly in districts like Quetta, Pishin, Turbat, Pajpore, and Khuzdar.

However, Balochistan need not accept this grim fate. It requires comprehensive strategies tailored to its unique challenges. The provincial government must implement robust climate change policies, emphasizing water reservoirs and early warning systems, are imperative. Spreading awareness about climate change and promoting sustainable agricultural practices are

Tree plantations could mitigate sweltering temperatures

In a province where tree planting could mitigate sweltering temperatures and climate change impacts, government initiatives should engage younger generations in green initiatives. Achieving a resilient future necessitates a collaborative effort involving government, local communities, civil society, and the commercial sector. Balochistan's path towards resilience begins with a symphony of collective action.

By addressing these critical issues, Balochistan can better adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, ensuring a more secure and sustainable future for its residents.

Quetta City, Proposed Master Plan

Abdul Latif Kakar: The mountain-ringed Quetta city needs a comprehensive master plan to ensure the solution of problems faced by citizens and address the mega question of climate change.

Through the proposed plan, scarce resources would be transparently and rationally utilized to make it a better living city in the country.

For the first in the history of the province, the Urban Planning Development (UPD) under the leadership of chief minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has started the preparation of the master plan.

Geographical location, looming threat of natural calamities including earthquakes, drought, and floods, the need for making a comprehensive master plan for Quetta city is growing. Rather, it is now indispensable to make this plan, before it is already late.

Geography and Soil

Four main units may describe the soils of Quetta i.e. (1) piedmont plains (very deep and well-drained soil) (2) piedmont basins (3) salinity and alkalinity (4) gravelly piedmont fans and aprons bordering the mountains and plains.

The central part of the Quetta valley is covered by a soil that ranges from sandy loam to silt loam. This type of soil is good for crop production.



At the margin of the valley near foothills, the soil consists of sandy loam, mixed

with pebbles and rock fragments and is suitable for vegetation. In the Hanna valley,

the greater part of the valley floor is covered by barren rock about crops of low re-

lief and dry mala bed. The soil is restricted to the narrow banks and low ter-

aces along the main stream. However, the nature of the soil in Beliti

is silty clay which is not suitable for cultivation. Similarly, the

Chiltan surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams. The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides poor grazing for livestock.

Soil erosion As far as soil erosion is concerned, both stream erosion of soil and wind erosion is occurring in the district.

The stream erosion takes place in the piedmont plain along the banks and beds of streams.

Such streams are Sariah Lora, Hanna river, Habib Nallah near Hudda. Wind erosion occurs in the valley.

This all requires a review of the existing plans and documents and preparation of the digitized base map of Quetta with a protocol for its updating.

A review of existing policies, procedures, plans studies conducted by donor agencies, and other relevant data. Current and future population trends need to be reviewed.

Transportation, mass transit, and city traffic management and monitoring system, housing commercial, and industrial land use evaluation of the existing condition of buildings and housing schemes should be thoroughly reviewed.

To be precise, the city needs a master plan on an emergency basis to address the looming threat of climate change and natural disasters.



IHC reinstates bail, right to defence for Imaan, Hadi in social media posts case

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday reinstated the bail of lawyer and activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir and her husband, Hadi Ali Chatha, in the controversial social media posts case, after it was cancelled by a sessions court on January 15.

In the case registered under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (Peca), the two have been accused of inciting divisions on linguistic grounds through social media posts and creating the impression that the armed forces were engaged in terrorism within the country.

On January 15, Mazari and Chatha challenged their arrest orders in the IHC, arguing that the trial court had presiding over the hearing granted Mazari and Chatha a one-day protective bail, directing them to appear

in court today. During yesterday's hearing at the IHC, Murtaza informed the court that his clients' bail had twice been cancelled. "Now an order has been issued to arrest them," he said.

He maintained that "if there were any misdoings on his client's part, the judge should demonstrate patience".

"The judge is holding hearings every 15 minutes," he said.

Earlier on the same day, Judge Majoka had expressed displeasure over the government not yet been arrested during a hearing.

He directed the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency officials to obtain a search warrant for the accused's residence from a magistrate and ordered them to present Mazari and Chatha in court by 11am.

Gul Plaza tragedy triggers governance debate in National Assembly

NEWS DESK: The fire in Karachi's Gul Plaza dominated debate in the National Assembly on Tuesday, with MQM-P leader Farooq Sattar describing the blaze as a "national tragedy" and accusing the Sindh government and city authorities of negligence and a delayed response.

He said Karachi's residents had the right to question both the provincial and federal governments over where the city stood in their list of priorities.

The fire that broke out late on Saturday night at Gul Plaza has killed at least 28 people, while dozens still remain unaccounted for.

Temper flared in the House as MQM-P members tore up agenda papers and demanded that routine business be suspended to focus solely on the Karachi tragedy.

Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar later moved a motion to defer the remaining agenda, which was approved by Deputy Speaker Ghulam Mustafa Shah.

Sattar said decades of neglect had left Karachi critically short of firefighting resources, arguing that the city was

underrepresented and underfunded. Paying tribute to firefighter Furqan Ali, who died while battling the blaze, he said accountability was unavoidable and that those responsible must seek forgiveness from the public. He renewed calls for stronger local governments, saying a city the size of Karachi could not be run by a chief minister alone.

PPP leader Shehla Raza rejected MQM-P's criticism, saying it was not necessary for ministers to immediately visit incident sites and that the priority should be effective emergency management. She outlined the official response to the fire, acknowledging delays caused by traffic congestion, and insisted that Sindh had a functioning local government system.

Later, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif called for calls for empowered local governments, saying it was "humanly impossible" to manage Karachi under the current administrative structure.

"I am not blaming individuals, I am blaming the system," he said, arguing that the concentration of authority in provincial capitals had weakened governance.

He said the spirit of the 18th Amendment had yet to be realised, as power had not been meaningfully devolved to the grassroots level. True public empowerment, he said, required strong and autonomous local government systems.

"If there is no empowered local government, there will be no effective fire brigade, no timely emergency response and no accountability at the neighbourhood level," he said.

Calling the Gul Plaza fire a wake-up call, Asif urged parliament to reflect seriously and pursue constitutional reforms to strengthen local governments.

MQM-P lawmaker Wasim Hussain, responding to remarks by PPP's Asif, said that according to political rivals of past complexity in Karachi's problems, including development linked to Gul Plaza. Patel rejected the allegations, saying the Sindh government was committed to stabilising the city and supporting those affected by the fire.

Plea seeks FIR against indian woman Sarabjit Kaur

NEWS DESK: A petition has been filed before the Lahore Sessions Court seeking the registration of a criminal case against Indian national Sarabjit Kaur for allegedly missing her visa and violating Pakistani laws.

The application was submitted by the former chairman of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Mahinder Pall Singh, through his lawyer, Advocate Ali Changezi.

According to the petition, Kaur entered Pakistan on a religious pilgrimage (yatra) visa but is alleged to have breached the visa conditions.

Singh had previously filed a petition in the Lahore High Court seeking Kaur's deportation.

The 48-year-old, who travelled to Pakistan under the name Sarabjit Kaur, arrived on November 4 as part of an Indian pilgrim group attending the birth anniversary celebrations of

Baba Guru Nanak. On November 5, she converted to Islam, married a Pakistani national, Nasir Hussain, and adopted the name Noor Hussain.

Her absence became apparent on November 13 when the pilgrim group returned to India without her. Authorities later confirmed that her visa had expired on November 4, prompting the initiation of deportation proceedings under immigration regulations.

In his petition, Singh argued that Kaur was residing in Pakistan illegally and should be deported under the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the relevant standing orders of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). He also requested that a case be registered against her husband, Nasir Hussain, for allegedly harbouring her. The petitioner further claimed that Kaur had fled from Nankana Sahib, violating the Pa-

kistani Foreigners Act, 1946. Additional Sessions Judge Shahbaz Raja took up the matter and sought a response from the concerned authorities. Advocate Ali Changezi, who had also pursued the initial deportation petition, said: "Kaur had been handed over to the FIA by police and officials of the Evacuee Trust Property Board for return to India."

He added that the petitioner was seeking the formation of an inquiry team to determine how a woman, allegedly having a criminal record in India, was granted a Pakistani visa.

Kaur and her husband were reportedly arrested from the Nankana Sahib area after intelligence agencies conducted a raid in the village of Pehray Wali.

No official explanation has yet been provided for the suspension of the deportation process.

Balochistan Cabinet Approves New Divisions, Key Legal and Governance Reforms

News Desk:

The Balochistan Provincial Cabinet, under the leadership of Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, has approved wide-ranging administrative, legal, and development reforms aimed at strengthening governance, security, and public service delivery across the province.

A key decision includes the approval of two new administrative divisions, Pishin and Koh-e-Suleman, to improve administrative outreach and local governance.

The cabinet also approved a structured and long-term policy framework to address the issue of missing persons.

Under the approved mechanism, investigations will be carried out at designated centers under the supervision of authorized police officers, ensuring legal safeguards and allowing family members to meet detainees.



The cabinet also approved the Balochistan Prevention, Detention and De-radicalization Rules 2025, the Balochistan Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism Rules 2025, and amendments to the Witness Protection law to strengthen protection for complainants and witnesses in terrorism-related cases.

In a move to promote transparency and merit, the cabinet expressed satisfaction over online, merit-based recruitment in the Finance Department and decided to gradually digitize recruitment processes across all provincial departments.

The cabinet also agreed to adopt the national curriculum from the academic year 2026-27, launch the Chief Minister Academic Excellence Program for teacher support, and recruit ad hoc teachers for Mathematics, Science, and English.

'They forced us': PM Shehbaz says Pak-Afghan trade blockade result of Kabul's inaction against terrorists

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said Pakistan was "forced" to halt all trade with Afghanistan due to Kabul's inaction against terrorists operating from its soil.

The Pak-Afghan border has been closed for trade since mid-October 2025, when border clashes erupted. Successive rounds of talks on counter-terrorism mechanisms failed to produce a workable solution despite mediation by Turkey and Qatar.

"There is a complete blockade of Pak-Afghan trade. It should not have been there, but they forced us," the premier said while addressing a national workshop in Islamabad.

This time, it must be decided whether the government wants to live peacefully or not [...]. They are our brothers and sisters. If the Afghan government does not have an interest in this (peace with Pakistan), they should not operate from their territory."

Recalling ministers' subsequent rounds of talks that failed, he said, "Nothing came of it. We had only one demand that you commit to rein in all terrorist outfits and proxies, whether it's the TTP, BLA, or the resources provided to them by India's support."

"Unfortunately, they did not make any serious commitment," he added. In his address, the premier also spoke at length about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the surge in terrorism.

Calling the province a "beautiful region" of Pakistan, he praised its people, saying they "never hesitate to sacrifice their lives for their country". "Whatever happened as a result of the Afghan war is before you," the premier said, noting that Pakistan welcomed refugees from

that "political forces sympathize to KP" made sacrifices.

"By 2018, terrorism had been completely eradicated, and everyone knew this was achieved through great sacrifices," PM Shehbaz said.

He pointed out that in the wake of the 2014 Army Public School attack, the armed forces and the government decided that there would be "no good or bad Taliban". "Today, there is no such distinction," the premier asserted.

"But after 2018, what was the reason that this menace resurged?" he asked, adding that "we all know the answer very well."

"Numerous terrorists were released from Swat, and thousands of KP and the Centre's steps to include them in the national discourse."

"There is a cold war ongoing between the federal government and the KP government. This argument does not align with the facts," he said. The premier said he had spoken by phone with KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on the day he was elected and had offered him his "full support" for the development and prosperity of the province.

"He thanked me. [But] after that, he did not contact me again," PM Shehbaz noted, recalling that he had again invited the KP CM to work together during his address in Chitral later.

He affirmed that the Centre was engaged with the youth, pointing out multiple steps being taken by the IT ministry to unskill the youth.

Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as in other areas."

"Every day, there is a terrorist incident somewhere," he added.

While hailing the fact that there could be "no greater sacrifice" than that made by soldiers, he regretted that hatred was being spread on social media and that an "evil attempt is being made to defame the martyrs". "They spew venom against Pakistan in chorus with the country's enemies across the border," the premier minister said, adding that the nation would continue its fight against terrorism until it is completely eradicated.

During his address, the prime minister was also asked about the "disengagement" of KP and the Centre's steps to include them in the national discourse.

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in Pakistan. This was the main reason terrorism resurged in the country," PM Shehbaz said.

"Today, terrorism has once again dealt a major blow to Pakistan's development and prosperity, particularly in the border areas."

He said that the government was committed to ensuring the safety and security of its citizens and would continue to work towards a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan.

PM Shehbaz also announced that the government would be launching a series of initiatives to support the economic growth and development of the province, including the creation of new jobs and the improvement of infrastructure.

He said that the government was committed to ensuring the safety and security of its citizens and would continue to work towards a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan.



various meetings held with Afghan leaders, the premier lamented, "But what did Pakistan get in return?"

He recalled that "thousands of innocent Pakistanis" lost their lives to terrorism, and the Afghan border clashes of October 2025 and the

'Not possible without officials' involvement': PML-N senator on theft of Pakistanis' data

NEWS DESK: PML-N Senator Afanullah Khan on Tuesday alleged that there had to be some involvement of officials in the theft of Pakistanis' data, saying that it was available on the dark web.

The senator made the remarks during a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Interior, where he said: "All of Pakistanis' national data is on the dark web. And it is the latest data."

And it is this good data that we might not have such well-proposed data. For example, to determine consolidated data from the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and banks into a dataset," he said.

And you can get anyone's data for Rs500, and if you want that of the entire country, you will get it for Rs700-800. [Involvement of people inside the organisation, data theft at such a large scale is not possible. It is impossible. The data



of 240 million people cannot be stolen just like that."

Later, speaking to Dawn, the PML-N senator asserted that this data could not have been leaked without the involvement of officials in the Nadra and Immigration and Passports Directorate General.

In the meeting, Committee Chairperson and PTI Senator Faisal Saleem Rahman had asked Kazi whether any investigation had been carried out in this regard.

Kazi responded that

they are using social media," he said, adding that social media companies would not even share the Internet Protocol addresses of users operating accounts being used for terrorism.

Speaking on the matter, Senator Rahman suggested that the government should enter into a contract with social media platforms. He said that the government should not cooperate with the companies that do not cooperate with the government should be banned.

Senator Palwasha Khan endorsed these views, saying: "A ban should definitely be imposed."

Senator Rahman further pointed out that China had its own social media platforms and that "there is no need to employ the services of those [companies] that are not cooperating."

Chaudhry responded to the suggestion, saying that the big decision, you can take it. If we take it, it will be called an attack on the freedom of expression."

Supreme Court (SC) acquits man after 15 years in murder case

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan has acquitted a man after 15 years in a murder case arising from a dispute over Rs2,500, ordering his immediate release.

The verdict was announced by a three-member bench comprising Justice Hashim Khan Kakar, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar, and Justice Ishfaq Ibrahim. In its detailed

judgment, the court observed that the presence of the complainant at the crime scene was doubtful, noting that the incident allegedly occurred in complete darkness and no source of light

was mentioned in the record. The Supreme Court ruled that the incident did not occur in the manner described by the prosecution and termed the case mysterious in nature.

Referring to the statement of the investigating officer, the court noted that the fatal shot was not fired by Naeem Arshad but by Shehbaz Ali. The recovered pistol from Shehbaz Ali was found to match the shell collected from the crime scene. The court further observed that Shehbaz Ali had already been acquitted by the trial court, and neither the state nor

the complainant challenged that acquittal. The apex court also remarked that the prosecution's failure to present key witnesses before the court created serious doubts about its case.

According to the case record, the incident took place on March 14, 2011, in Sahiwal, where Muhammad Anwar was shot dead at a cloth shop.

aging universities to accommodate Baloch students under their respective quota frameworks. He clarified that there was no ban or restriction on Baloch students' admissions to medical colleges, but minimum merit criteria applied, as medical education was a professional and sensitive field. Azam Nazeer Tarar said the matter could be further taken up with the Punjab government if needed, adding that senior adviser to the Punjab government Noshah Rehman had volunteered to pursue the issue at the provincial level.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif addressing National Workshop on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

China leads Pakistan's FDI inflows in first half of FY2026

ISLAMABAD (INP): China remained Pakistan's largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) during the first half of the current fiscal year, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday quoting data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Net FDI from China reached \$422.9 million during July-December FY2026, accounting for more than half of Pakistan's total net FDI of \$808.1 million for the six-month period.

Gross inflows from China stood at \$583.4 million, while outflows totaled \$160.5 million, leaving Beijing significantly ahead of all other partner countries.

Overall, Pakistan received \$1.81 billion in FDI gross inflows from all partners during the period, against outflows of \$1.01 billion.

The resulting net FDI of \$808.1 million represents a 43.2 per cent decline compared to the \$1.42 billion recorded during the same period in FY2025.

The country also recorded substantial

negative portfolio investment flows of \$600.6 million. When combined with FDI, the total foreign investment for the period stood at \$207.4 million. The monthly performance for December was particularly strained, while China invested a net \$114.1 million, massive outflows in other sectors pushed Pakistan's overall monthly net FDI into negative territory at -\$134.7 million.

This was a sharp reversal from the \$182.4 million in net inflows recorded in December 2024. Hong Kong SAR, a major vehicle for Chinese outbound investment, emerged as a notable contributor with a net investment of \$163.8 million during July-December FY2026.

Other significant investors included the United Arab Emirates (\$122.2 million) and Switzerland (\$106.8 million). In contrast, net inflows from the United Kingdom and the United States remained modest, while several advanced economies recorded net outflows.

PMD predicts cold, dry weather for most parts of country

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has predicted cold and dry weather for most parts of the country during next 24 hours, while very cold conditions are likely in hilly areas.

However, cloudy weather with light rain and light snowfall is expected at isolated places in upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. Moderate to dense fog is likely to develop over plain areas of Punjab and upper Sindh during night and morning hours.

Partly cloudy and cold weather is expected in Islamabad and surrounding areas. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, cold and dry weather is likely over most districts; however, cloudy conditions with light rain and light snowfall are expected in Chitral, Swat, Dir, Kohistan, Abbottabad, Kalam and surrounding areas.

Punjab will experience cold and dry weather in most districts, while very cold and partly cloudy conditions are likely in Murree, Galiyat and nearby areas. Moderate to dense fog may develop over Sialkot, Narowal, Jhelum, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Lahore, Sheikhupura, Okara, Pakpattan, Kasur, Khanewal, Faisalabad, Multan, Kot Addu, Bahawalnagar, Khanpur and Bahawalpur during night and morning hours. Cold and dry weather is also likely to prevail over most districts of Sindh, with fog expected over Sukkur, Rohri, Shikarpur, Kashmore, Shaheed Benazirabad, Dadu, Larkana, Tando Jam, Mohenjodaro and Jacobabad during night and morning hours.

In Balochistan, cold and dry weather is expected across most districts, while very cold conditions are likely in northern parts of the province. Very cold and cloudy weather is expected in Quetta, while light rain with light snowfall may occur at isolated places in Gilgit-Baltistan.

ISLAMABAD (INP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs - Rana Sanaullah on Tuesday urged all political parties to join hands for a "Charter of Stability of Pakistan (Misaq-e-Istehkam-e-Pakistan)," stating that the country's political, electoral, and institutional challenges could only be resolved through dialogue and consensus within Parliament.

Speaking in the Senate, he said the prime minister had repeatedly stressed an unconditional offer to the opposition to engage in dialogue, stressing that political disputes should be resolved politically rather than through confrontation.

Pakistan's history showed that prolonged political deadlock only weakened democratic institutions, he said. Rana Sanaullah said courts had also issued controversial decisions in the past, including the disqualification of elected prime ministers, adding that selective enforcement would not help heal political wounds. "If every side insists that only its grievances be addressed first, no dialogue can ever begin," he said.

He recalled that during the 1990s, bitter

political rivalry between major parties had eventually led to the Charter of Democracy, which helped stabilise the system. He said abandoning that spirit in favour of protests, sit-ins and confrontational politics had repeatedly destabilised the country.

The SAPM said political rhetoric calling for dragging elected leaders out of office had damaged democratic norms, noting that the same political leadership later sought unity during national crises such as terrorism and the APS tragedy.

He said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had demonstrated seriousness by personally reaching out to opposing benches, offering dialogue without conditions, including calls made on the floor of the House and gestures made after the passage of the budget.

Rana Sanaullah said opposition leaders in both the National Assembly and the Senate now had an opportunity to steer politics towards stability, adding that dialogue on judicial independence, political cases, electoral reforms and democratic norms must take place at the table of Parliament.

Challenges could only be resolved through dialogue: Rana Sanaullah

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Security operations strictly under NAP: Talal Chaudhry

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry told the National Assembly on Tuesday that all security operations being carried out across the country were strictly in line with the unanimously agreed National Action Plan (NAP) and were being conducted in close coordination with provincial governments and relevant institutions. Speaking in the House, he recalled that the NAP was first formulated in 2014-15 and later reinforced under NAP-II, adding that all political parties and provincial governments had reached a consensus on the framework. He said intelligence-based operations were being conducted daily with the support of provincial authorities and law enforcement agencies. Referring to ongoing operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the erstwhile tribal areas, the minister said the provincial government was on board and that consultations had been held with district administrations, tribal elders, local leadership and provincial authorities before launching the operations.

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Pakistan, IDB sign three loan agreements worth \$603m

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) signed three loan agreements worth a total of \$603 million on Tuesday.

The agreements were signed by the Vice President of the Islamic Development Bank and the Secretary of the Economic Affairs Division, in the presence of Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahsan Khan Cheema, Federal Minister Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, and other senior officials.

The Islamic Development Bank will

provide \$475 million in financial assistance for the M-6 Sukkur to Hyderabad Motorway project. This motorway forms a key section of the proposed Peshawar to Karachi motorway.

Additionally, Pakistan signed an agreement with the ISDB to launch a poverty alleviation programme for families affected by floods. The programme's total cost is \$134.2 million, with the ISDB contributing \$118.4 million. The project will be implemented across 25 districts of the country.

For a separate initiative in Azad Kashmir aimed at out-of-school children, the ministry has completed its working and the PM will soon request to the UAE authorities for rollover of US\$ 3 billion loan. The Government of Pakistan has deposited the total US\$ 3 billion in the State Bank of Pakistan being used for the balance of payment, sources said.

Officials said that a \$1 billion tranche will mature on January 17, while another \$1 billion to mature on January 23. The next \$1 billion is expected to mature in July this year.

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan meets with the Ambassador of Indonesia to Pakistan, Chandra Warsenanto Sukotjo, to discuss strengthening bilateral trade, with a focus on rice, agriculture, and investment cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: First Lady Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari in a meeting with CEO Prime Hospital Healthcare Facility, Dr Shahzad Shafiq Musavi, at Aitwan e Sadr.

President Zardari condemns bomb blast in Kabul's Chinese restaurant

ISLAMABAD, Jan 20 (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari has strongly condemned the bomb blast at a Chinese restaurant in Kabul, which has resulted in the loss of several lives and left one Chinese national injured and one reported dead.

He expressed deep grief over the casualties and extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims.

The President

conveyed sincere sympathy to the injured and their families and prayed for their early recovery. He paid tribute to the spirit of Chinese citizens who have continued to work for the development of Afghanistan despite rising insecurity and serious risks to their lives.

President Zardari noted that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has failed to honour the commitments made under the Doha Peace

Agreement, particularly the obligation to prevent the use of Afghan soil for the export of terrorism.

He recalled that Pakistan has repeatedly stressed that no terrorist groups should be allowed safe havens in Afghanistan and that regional peace and security must be upheld. The President said that it is not just Pakistan but other neighbours of Afghanistan, including Tajikistan have re-

cently been affected by the terrorists operating out of Afghan soil.

The President further stated that the failure to establish a broad-based and inclusive government by the Taliban is contrary to the Doha Agreement. He emphasised that full implementation of the agreement, in letter and spirit, along with concrete steps to end cross-border terrorism, remains essential.

Punjab claims supply of 0.85m metric tonnes of wheat to provinces

NEWS DESK: The Punjab government claims to have supplied 850,000 metric tonnes of wheat to other provinces, of which a major chunk has been provided to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Punjab Director Food Amjad Hafeez says transportation of wheat is being carried out through a transparent permit system and the total estimated inter-provincial movement of wheat from Punjab stands between 1.4 and 1.5 million metric tonnes, while more than 700,000 metric tonnes have been supplied to Islamabad alone.

He clarified that there were no restrictions on the movement of wheat within Punjab, and inter-district transportation was fully allowed without any quota or administrative barriers. He explained that wherever a permit system was in place, it served only as a facilitative and monitoring mechanism to compile accurate data, discourage hoarding and profiteering, and support evidence-based



policy making.

"The system is not intended to disrupt trade or markets," he

added. He claimed that allegations regarding restrictions on wheat

transportation were baseless and contrary to ground realities. He said the gov-

ernment was utilising all available resources to ensure national food security and price sta-

bility. PTI Kissan Wing rejects claim, says only smuggled staple

reaches province. He, however, said measures were being taken to curb hoarding

and profiteering, while protecting the interests of farmers and consumers remained a top priority of the government. Meanwhile, PTI Punjab Kissan Wing general secretary MPA Ejaz Shafi has rejected the food director's claim that Punjab had given any wheat quota to the KP and only smuggled wheat reached the province.

He said the wheat price had risen to Rs5,000 per 40kg and if Punjab had supplied wheat to KP and Sindh, the prices could have risen to Rs10,000 per 40kg.

He lamented that hoarders, allegedly belonging to the incumbent government, had bought wheat from farmers at Rs1,800 to Rs2,000 per 40kg and hoarded the staple, now selling at more than the double prices in a matter of three to four months.

"The government pushed poor farmers against the wall during harvesting season and now the poor are compelled to purchase flour and roti at higher rates," he said.

Pakistan, China set to ink MoUs in 10 agri-sectors

NEWS DESK: Pakistan and China are set to sign multiple memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for private-sector joint venture investments worth millions of dollars across 10 key sectors of agriculture, it emerged from the Pakistan-China Agricultural Investment Conference held in Islamabad on Monday.

The sectors in which agreements are expected to be signed include agriculture, food processing, livestock, fisheries, agri-inputs, farm machinery, renewable energy, logistics, technology and value-added exports.

The conference drew strong participation from the private sectors of both countries, with 119 companies from China and 191 companies from Pakistan in attendance, reflecting growing bilateral commercial interest.

Agriculture has been officially elevated as a priority area of co-operation under the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The 10 priority sub-sectors identified for in-

vestment include agro-chemicals and inputs, agricultural machinery and solutions, food processing and value addition, meat and poultry, dairy inputs and processed products, fruits and vegetables, animal feed and related value chains, fisheries and aquaculture, cold chain systems and agricultural produce logistics, and food-grade packaging materials and equipment. Making a comprehensive presentation on Pakistan's agriculture sector, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research stated that it plans to sign more than 25 sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and export protocols with key trading partners, including China, in 2026.

Pakistan's agricultural landscape reflects a challenging paradox: despite fertile land, low labour costs and a large domestic market, the country faces an estimated productivity gap of \$95 billion due to low technology penetration and inadequate infrastructure. Addressing the conference, Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana

Tanveer Hussain said the ministry was fully committed to supporting Chinese investors, from facilitating regulatory processes to ensuring seamless coordination with all relevant government departments and institutions.

He said the government's objective was not merely to attract investment, but to make Pakistan a destination where Chinese enterprises could grow, innovate and succeed alongside Pakistani partners.

Addressing the conference, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan, being an agrarian economy, held immense and largely untapped potential in agriculture and could transform the sector not in years, but in months, by adopting modern technologies, improving productivity and strengthening cooperation with China.

He underlined the importance of deciding what to grow and export, developing value chains, cold storage and warehousing, and promoting value addition to make Pakistani produce globally competitive.

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's national transmission system, one of the largest in the world, suffers from a damaging mix of overloading, underutilisation, creating operational constraints that undermine merit-based power supply and impose an unquantifiable financial burden on consumers and the national economy, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has said.

In a detailed review of the national grid system, the regulator pointed out that the backbone of the transmission network — 500kV and 220kV lines — remained "mostly overloaded" at the close of FY2024-25. It said the National Grid Company (NGC) faced critical overloading in several sections of its 500kV and 220kV network, particularly during summer peak demand.

Many grid stations and power transformers are operating beyond 80 per cent of their rated capacity, risking equipment failure, voltage instability and outages," it said. In FY25, out of

192 transformers across 68 grid stations, 116 were overloaded, beyond 80pc, it added.

Providing a breakdown, Nepra said 30 of 47 transformers at the 500/220kV level were overloaded beyond 80pc. In addition, 86 of 143 transformers at the 220/132kV level were overloaded beyond the same threshold.

Regions with notable overloading included Hyderabad, Islamabad, Lahore and Multan, with persistent constraints at key grids like Gatti, New Multan, Sarfraz, Nagar, Muzaffargarh and Sheikhupura.

"These limitations

have led to reliance on expensive generation in violation of economic merit order (EMO) and rising project costs due to delays," it said.

Ironically, most of these grid stations at Rawat, Sheikhupura, Gatti, Multan, Yousafwala, Janshoro and Muzaffargarh have been in an overloaded condition since 2017-18 and onwards.

According to the review, these constraints have limited full power evacuation from the 1,300MW Sahiwal coal-fired plant, overreliance on Attock, Halmore, Sapphire and Liberty, limited transformation capacity in the

south-central corridor and aggravated bidirectional power flows in the network.

The regulator called for fast-tracking the completion of critical transmission projects, upgrading existing substations with higher-capacity transformers and reactive power support, and enhancing real-time grid monitoring to address persistent overloading in the transmission network.

It said the resulting financial burden could not be calculated under current conditions because assessing the severity and duration of overloading would require hourly digitised

operational data to determine how long a transformer or circuit operated beyond its rated capacity.

The regulator warned that transmission system constraints significantly impact the overall efficiency, reliability and affordability of electricity supply. When the transmission network lacks adequate capacity or flexibility, it restricts the flow of power from generation sources to demand centres.

"This leads to congestion, increased transmission losses and underutilisation of low-cost or renewable generation, ultimately raising the overall cost of electricity," Nepra said.

"Transmission constraints not only raise reliability concerns for consumers but also lead to higher electricity tariffs.

This is primarily because, in the absence of adequate transmission capacity, the system must rely on more expensive and less efficient power generation sources, even when cheaper alternatives are available but inaccessible," it explained.



OGDC announces fresh oil, gas discovery in K-P's Kohat district

NEWS DESK: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDC) on Tuesday announced another major oil and gas discovery at its exploratory well Baragzi X-01 (Slant) in the Nashpa Block in Kohat district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, underlining the area's growing importance for Pakistan's energy security.

The well, drilled to a depth of 5,170 metres, successfully tested the Samana Suk and Shinawari formations and is producing 3,100 barrels of oil per day and 8.15 million standard cubic feet of gas per day, OGDC said in a statement. The well flowed through a 32-64-inch choke at a wellhead pressure of 3,010 pounds per square inch gauge. In 2024, as part of OGDC's broader effort to assess the hydrocarbon potential of multiple formations in the Nashpa Block. These include Lockhart, Hangu, Lumshiwali, Samana Suk, Shinawari, Datta and Kngriah, with earlier evaluations already leading to discoveries in the Kngriah and Datta formations.



OGDC operates the Nashpa Exploration License with a 65% working interest, while Pakistan Petroleum Limited and Government Holdings Private Limited are joint venture partners. The company said the discoveries would have positive implications for Pakistan's national energy security. The continued success of exploration in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa comes as OGDC sets to tap Pakistan's tight and shale gas resources,

long seen as an underdeveloped domestic energy source. The company plans to accelerate shale gas exploration in 2026-27, starting with five- to six-well programme that could eventually expand to hundreds, or even more than 1,000, wells across the country. Officials said the new discoveries come at a critical time as Pakistan struggles with persistent energy shortages, and increased local production could offer some relief to the country's energy supply crisis.

Analysts attribute the sharp fall to heightened geopolitical risks, including tensions with Iran, the brief conflict with India, and the broader Iran-Israel and US-Iran stand-off, which have made investors more cautious. The fragile sentiment was particularly evident in December, when net FDI turned negative. While inflows amounted to \$322.5m during the month, outflows stood at \$457.3m, resulting in a net outflow of \$135m. Market observers warned that

Foreign direct investment plunges 43pc

NEWS DESK: Foreign direct investment (FDI) plunged by 43 per cent during the first half of the current fiscal year, denting the government's hopes of attracting overseas capital amid growing regional uncertainty.

Data for July-December FY26 shows total FDI at \$808 million, down from \$1,425 billion in the corresponding period last year.

Analysts attribute the sharp fall to heightened geopolitical risks,

any escalation involving Iran could disrupt Pakistan's trade flows and further undermine investor confidence.

China remained the largest contributor, investing \$423m during the six-month period, followed by Hong Kong with \$164m.

Together, the two accounted for 73pc, or \$587m, of total FDI. Other notable inflows came from the United Arab Emirates (\$112m) and Switzerland (\$107m).

Heightened regional tensions weigh on investor sentiment. The subdued investment climate has also been reflected in the government's inability to attract foreign buyers for Pakistan International Airlines.

Officials have recently expressed optimism about potential exports of locally produced fighter jets to ease external liabilities, though no firm agreements have yet been finalised.

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Shoaib Malik announces retirement from HBL PSL

NEWS DESK: Shoaib Malik has announced his retirement from the Pakistan Super League (PSL), bringing an end to a playing journey that has run uninterrupted since the tournament's inception in 2016.

The decision comes ahead of the landmark PSL season 11, marking the close of a decade-long association between one of Pakistan's most enduring cricketers and its flagship T20 league.

Malik confirmed the news via his social media platforms, reflecting on the memories and relationships built over ten seasons of the PSL.

"I cherish every single moment and friendship I have made on and off the field throughout my 10 years of the Pakistan Super League as a player," Malik wrote. "It's time to call it a day."



However, my passion and motivation to serve for the betterment of cricket will always stay. Thank you PSL."

Few players have been as consistent a presence in the league as Malik. From the early days when the PSL was played in the UAE to its growth into a fully home-based tournament, Malik remained a regular fea-

ture, representing four franchises during his career: Karachi Kings, Multan Sultans, Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators.

His final appearance came for Quetta Gladiators in PSL 10, closing the loop on a career defined by adaptability and longevity. Statistically, Malik departs as one of the most prolific perform-

ers in PSL history. He is the fourth-highest run-scorer in the league, having amassed 2,350 runs in 92 matches at an impressive average of 33.09.

Often deployed in the middle order, Malik was valued for his ability to control innings, finish games and provide balance with his part-time offspin. He also claimed 17 wick-

ets in the tournament, underlining his all-round contribution.

Beyond the PSL, Malik's broader T20 record further contextualises his impact. He is the sixth-highest run-scorer in T20 cricket overall, with 13,571 runs, including 83 half-centuries, at a strike rate of 127.24 — numbers that speak to both durability and consistency across leagues worldwide.

While Malik's playing days in the PSL are over, his statement suggests this is not a farewell to cricket altogether. As the league enters a new era with expansion and structural changes, it does so without one of its most familiar figures — a player whose experience helped bridge generations and whose influence extended well beyond the scorecard.

Faheem continues legacy of excellence

NEWS DESK: Faheem Khan, a proud member of Pakistan's renowned squash family, continues to uphold the nation's rich sporting legacy through his remarkable contributions as both a player and a coach. Having represented Pakistan internationally as a player, Faheem Khan has now spent more than 25 years representing the Pakistani flag across the world as an elite squash coach, developing champions and inspiring young talent globally.

Currently serving as Head Squash Coach at Life Time King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, USA, Faheem Khan recently led his students to an outstanding and historic performance at the U.S. National Championships — JCT #4. Under his expert guidance, Life Time King of Prussia athletes achieved two national championship titles, marking a proud moment for the club and the squash community.

Armaan Ibrahim Burhan captured the Boys Under-15 National Championship, delivering a dominant performance throughout the tournament. Armaan's parents, both doctors originally from Lahore, Pakistan, have been settled in the United States for over 20 years and expressed immense pride in their son's achievement under Faheem Khan's mentorship. In another remarkable success, William Liu claimed the 2nd place at the prestigious U.S. Junior Open Squash Championships, one of the most competitive junior squash events in the world.

Over the years, Faheem Khan has produced numerous national and international-level players, many of whom have gone on to achieve success on major stages. His dedication, discipline, and passion for the sport continue to shape future champions while keeping Pakistan's squash heritage alive abroad.

The squash community takes immense pride in Faheem Khan's achievements. Through his tireless efforts and commitment, he continues to represent Pakistan with honor, keeping the green.



Asif storms into national snooker semis

NEWS DESK: Mohammad Asif dethroned defending champion Shahid Aftab in a last-16 thriller before powering into the semi-finals on a day of high drama that saw the title race blown wide open at the National Snooker Championship here at the NBP Sports Complex on Monday.

The three-time world champion Asif first staged a brilliant comeback to oust the title-holder Shahid 5-4 in a nail-biting pre-quarter-final. Trail- ing 4-2, Asif won three

consecutive frames, sealing the decider with a match-clinching 66 break.

Carrying that momentum into the evening session, Asif then dispatched second seed Mohammad Sajjad 5-2 in the quarter-finals. After trading the opening frames, Asif took control, crafting a decisive

106 break in the fifth frame to secure his semi-final berth.

Joining him in the final four is former national champion Asjad Iqbal, who produced the most dominant per-

formance of the day, sealing the decider with a match-clinching 66 break. Earlier, Mubashir ended the run of young prodigy Hasnain Akhtar 5-3, rallying with a 101 break of his own after dropping the first frame.

The day claimed other top seeds. Besides Shahid and Ahsan, sixth seed Sohail Shehzad and eighth seed A. Sattar also fell in the pre-quarter-finals.

Asjad faces Irfan in the first semi-final on Tuesday, followed by the clash between the resurgent Asif and Mubashir.

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Three Premier League talking points

NEWS DESK: Arsenal extended their lead at the top of the Premier League as title rivals Manchester City and Aston Villa slipped up. Tottenham boss Thomas Frank could be facing the sack after another dismal loss, while Liverpool's spluttering form continued.

AFP Sport looks at three talking points from the weekend's action: Arsenal retain upper hand As Arsenal digested their 0-0 draw at Nottingham Forest on Saturday, the overriding emotion was frustration at failing to take full advantage of Manchester City's 2-0 defeat at Manchester United earlier in the afternoon. But just 24 hours later, Mikel Arteta's side were feeling a lot more upbeat about their title charge thanks to Aston Villa's surprise 1-0 home loss against Everton.

Third-placed Villa could have closed to within four points of Arsenal with a victory but instead they sit seven points adrift. Successive goalless stalemates against Liverpool and Forest in the league have underlined Arsenal's occasional Achilles heel in attack.

But Gunners winger Noni Madueke is not

concerned. "We weren't clinical enough in front of goal. There is a long way to go. We know that we've been very consistent and we'll continue to do so," he said.

City, in second place following four league games without a win, are also seven points behind the leaders after losing to United in Michael Carrick's first game as boss. "We dropped many points in the last games but we are going to fight until the end," City midfielder Rodri said.

Frank on the brink Barraged by calls for his sacking from furious fans, Thomas Frank insisted he feels

"trust from everyone", but the Tottenham manager's faith may prove misguided.

Reports on Sunday said that Tottenham's hierarchy had met to discuss Frank's future in the aftermath of Saturday's dismal 2-1 home defeat against struggling West Ham. Tottenham's third successive defeat and eighth loss in 14 matches left them languishing in 14th place. Already out of both domestic cups, the north Londoners are in crisis just months after Frank was hired to replace the sacked Ange Postecoglou.

The former Brentford boss has irritated Tottenham supporters with his proaic tactics and their miserable results have pushed him to the brink.

Tottenham captain Cristian Romero called for unity after giving an acerbic verdict on the turmoil. "It is difficult and also a disaster moment for us, but especially in this moment, we need silence. Back in training, work hard every day and stay together," he said.

Van Dijk ready for Liverpool summit Virgil van Dijk plans to hold a players' meeting on Monday to address the issues that threaten to derail Liverpool's bid for Champions League qualification. Van Dijk was angry at the sloppiness which allowed lowly Burnley to equalise in the 1-1 draw at Anfield on Saturday.

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Tjen first Indonesian to win at Australian Open

NEWS DESK: Janice Tjen called it "special" after she pulled off an upset to become the first Indonesian to win a match at the Australian Open in 28 years on Tuesday.

Unseeded Tjen stunned Canadian 22nd seed Leylah Fernandez 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) to surge into the second round in Melbourne and add to her growing list of milestones.

Tjen, who this time last year was ranked 413 but is now the world number 59, is the first Indonesian to win a match at the major since Yayuk Basuki in 1998.

"I'm very happy to be a part of history and be able to get a win here for Indonesia," said the 23-year-old.

"It was special, especially being able to do it in front of my family here and there were a lot of Indonesians, and my close friends are also here."

Asked by AFP how her life had changed off court



since a breakthrough 2025, she said: "I get recognised a little bit here and there and I think it's nice, it's a nice feeling to be recognised."

In front of the vocal Indonesian fans Tjen made a lightning start, sealing the first set in 36 minutes to leave her higher-ranked opponent from Canada

stunned. Tjen seized an early break in the second set to put 2021 US Open runner-up Fernandez immediately on the back foot.

The fourth game of the second set threatened to be pivotal, Tjen digging her-

self out of a hole on her own serve to hold and go 3-1 up.

The 23-year-old Fernandez fought back, reeling off three games in a row to turn the tide.

The battling duo headed into a tiebreak, where Tjen powered into a 3-0 lead and never looked back, letting out a mighty roar when victory was confirmed. Tjen's career took off in 2025. She pulled off another surprise in upsetting Russian 24th seed Veronika Kudermetova as a qualifier at the US Open.

In New York she was the first Indonesian to play in the main singles draw of a Grand Slam since 2004. The Jakarta native lifted the title in Chennai last year -- the first Indonesian to win a WTA Tour singles crown since 2002. Reflecting on the support in Melbourne of Indonesian fans waving their red and white flag and chanting, Tjen said: "It's something special and feels a little bit like home."

"Knowing that a lot of Indonesians came out to support me today means a lot."

Sinner into Melbourne round two

NEWS DESK: Jannik Sinner stroled into the second round of the Australian Open on Tuesday when his opponent retired in the first time defending champion in full control.

The Italian second seed led 6-2, 6-1 when France's Hugo Gaston called it quits with an apparent injury after 68 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

Sinner faces Australian qualifier James Duckworth or Dino Prizmic of Croatia next.

"I saw that he was not serving at pace. It's not the way you want to win the match, but he's such a talented player," said Sinner.

"So I knew from the beginning that I had to play a very high level and was trying to be as aggressive as possible, which I've done."

"I'm very happy to be back in a very special place for me."

Sinner had made a sticky start, falling 40-0 down on his serve in the first game of the match, before rattling off three aces to hold.

It was about the only blip as the 24-year-old quickly found his devastating range to assert his authority over the 93rd-ranked Frenchman.

Sinner, who comfortably defeated Alexander Zverev in the final 12 months ago, raced to the first set in 37 minutes.

Gaston had brief treatment between sets from the trainer and when they resumed Sinner tightened his grip on the court.

Sinner romped

through the second set and Gaston shook hands.

Should he win three titles in a row in Melbourne, Sinner would join Novak Djokovic as the only man to have won the Australian Open to do so. Bencic makes light work of Boulter

In-form Belinda Bencic swatted aside erratic Katie Boulter for the loss of five games on Tuesday to fire a warning shot at the Australian Open. Tenth seed Belinda Bencic swatted aside Britain's Katie Boulter at the Australian Open. Switzerland's Bencic, back in the top 10 for the first time since having a baby, was emphatic in winning the

first set 6-0 in just 26 minutes on Margaret Court Arena.

The Briton made her work harder in the second set before the 10th seed came home 7-5.

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'Content to die': Afghanistan's hunger crisis worsens amid severe winters, aid reductions

NEWS DESK: In the dull glow of a single bulb lighting their tent on the outskirts of Kabul, Samiullah and his wife Bibi Rehana sit down to dry bread and tea, their only meal of the day, accompanied by their five children and three-month-old grandchild.

"We have reached a point where we are content with death," said 55-year-old Samiullah, whose family, including two older sons aged 18 and 20 and their wives, is among the millions deported by neighbouring Iran and Pakistan in the past year.

"Day by day, things are getting worse," he added, after their return to a war-torn nation where the United Nations' World Food Programme estimates 17 million battle acute hunger after massive cuts in international aid.

"Whatever happens to us has happened, but at least our children's lives should be better." He was one of the returned Afghans speaking before protests in Iran sparked a massive crackdown by the clerical establishment, killing more than 2,000 in ensuing violence. Samiullah said his family went virtually overnight from its



modest home in Iran to their makeshift tent, partially propped up by rocks and rubble, after a raid by Iranian authorities led to their arrests and then deportation. They salvaged a few belongings but were not able to carry out all their

savings, which would have carried them through the winter, Samiullah added. Reuters was unable to

reach authorities in Iran for comment. "Migrants who are newly returning to the country receive assistance as much as

possible," said Afghan administration spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, in areas from transport to housing, healthcare and food. It was impossible to eradicate poverty quickly in a country that suffered 40 years of conflict and the loss of all its revenue and resources, he added in a statement, despite an extensive rebuilding effort.

"Economic programmes take time and do not have an immediate impact on people's lives."

The WFP says Iran and Pakistan have expelled more than 2.5 million Afghans in massive deportation programs. Tehran ramped up deportations last year amid a flurry of accusations that they were spying for Israel. Authorities blamed the expulsions on concerns about the security and resources.

Islamabad accelerated deportations amid accusations that the Taliban was harbouring militants responsible for cross-border attacks on Pakistani soil, allegations Afghanistan has denied. As winter

spreads across Afghanistan's arid landscape, work opportunities have dried up, while the wave of returning Afghans has swelled the population by a tenth, said John Ayliffe, the WFP's country director. "Many of these Afghans were working in Iran and Pakistan, and they were sending back remittances," he told Reuters, adding that 3 million more people now face acute hunger. "Those remittances were a lifeline for Afghanistan." Cuts to global programmes since U.S. President Donald Trump returned to the White House have sapped the resources of organisations such as the WFP, while other donor countries have also scaled back, putting millions at risk worldwide. "Last year was the biggest malnutrition surge ever recorded in Afghanistan, and sadly, the prediction is that it's going to get worse," added Ayliffe, estimating that 200,000 more children would suffer acute malnutrition in 2026.

'Take a deep breath': US Treasury Secretary Bessent brushes off 'hysteria' over Greenland

NEWS DESK: US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent expressed confidence on Tuesday that the United States and European countries would find a solution over the US administration's aim to take over Greenland, brushing off "hysteria" about a possible trade war.

US President Donald Trump announced tariffs on Saturday on imports from European allies that oppose the United States taking over Greenland, an autonomous part of Denmark.

European countries say new tariffs would violate a trade deal reached with Trump last year, and EU leaders are set to discuss possible retaliation at an emergency summit in Brussels on Thursday.

One option is a package of tariffs on 93 billion euros (\$108 billion) of US imports that could automatically kick in on February 6 after a six-month suspension.

Bessent said the issue had only recently emerged and a solution would be found that ensures national security for the United States and Europe.

"It's been 48 hours. As I said, sit back, relax," Bessent told reporters on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

"I am confident that the leaders will not escalate and that this will work out in a manner that ends up in a very good place for all."

Asked about the prospect of a prolonged trade war between the United States and Europe, Bessent replied:

"Why are we jumping there? Why are you taking it to the worst case?... Calm down the hysteria. Take a

deep breath." Trump has repeatedly insisted he will settle for nothing less than ownership of Greenland. Leaders of both Denmark and Greenland have said the island is not for sale and does not want to be part of the United States.

Bessent dismissed the possibility that the EU would for the first time tap its Anti-Coercion Instrument, a powerful trade measure which could limit US access to public tenders, investments or banking activity, or restrict trade in services.

"Well, having worked with the Europeans, my guess is their next move will be to form a working group, the dreaded 'European working group'," Bessent said in an interview with CNBC.

"We've seen a lot of working groups." In his earlier briefing, Bessent also dismissed market speculation that European governments might sell US Treasury bonds they own as reserves, making it more expensive for the US government to finance itself.

"(US government debt) is the most liquid market, it is the basis for all financial transactions and I am sure that the European governments will continue holding it," Bessent said.



United State (US) invites Russia, Israel, Poland to Gaza 'Board of Peace'

NEWS DESK: The White House on Monday extended invitations to leaders from Russia, Poland and Israel to join a so-called "Board of Peace" which aims to address global conflicts and manage governance and reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

While others weigh participation, Central Asian leaders moved quickly to accept. The press secretaries of Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev confirmed their leaders' readiness to join the board.

Both leaders have been courted by Trump, who invited them to the G20 summit in Miami.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said on Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin received an invitation to join the board, which would be chaired by Trump.

"President Putin also received an invitation to join this Board of Peace," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. He said Russia was seeking to "clarify all the nuances" of the offer with Washington but did not



specify if Putin was inclined to join.

Last October, Putin praised Trump's efforts, noting that "he's really doing a lot to resolve these complex crises". Additionally, Israel has received an invitation, though it is unclear whether it has been accepted.

Furthermore, Polish president's foreign policy adviser said that President Karol Nawrocki of Poland has also been extended an invitation.

As Washington canvasses for participants, Britain signalled its willingness to play a role. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Monday

that the UK was in discussions with allies on the terms of the initiative.

Speaking at a press conference, Starmer indicated Britain is ready to assist in the second phase of the ceasefire in Gaza, particularly regarding the US-led board.

However, the initiative faces significant internal headwinds within Israel. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich on Monday urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to shut down the US-led Civil Military Coordination Centre (CMCC) established last October to support the peace plan.

"The time has come to dismantle the headquarters in Kiryat Gat," Smotrich said in remarks distributed by his office, referring to the facility where international personnel work on post-war planning. Smotrich, a far-right cabinet member, argued that Britain, Egypt and other nations "hostile to Israel" should be removed from the coordination centre. "Mr Prime Minister, it's either us or them," Smotrich said. "Either full Israeli control, the destruction of Hamas, and the continued long-term suppression of terrorism, or permanent Israeli settlement."

Iran says internet to return 'gradually' after 11-day blackout

NEWS DESK: Internet access in Iran will "gradually" return to normal this week, a senior official said on Monday, as the government faces international fallout from an 11-day economic hardship.

Tehran ramped up deportations last year amid a flurry of accusations that they were spying for Israel. Authorities blamed the expulsions on concerns about the security and resources.

Islamabad accelerated deportations amid accusations that the Taliban was harbouring militants responsible for cross-border attacks on Pakistani soil, allegations Afghanistan has denied. As winter

spreads across Afghanistan's arid landscape, work opportunities have dried up, while the wave of returning Afghans has swelled the population by a tenth, said John Ayliffe, the WFP's country director. "Many of these Afghans were working in Iran and Pakistan, and they were sending back remittances," he told Reuters, adding that 3 million more people now face acute hunger. "Those remittances were a lifeline for Afghanistan." Cuts to global programmes since U.S. President Donald Trump returned to the White House have sapped the resources of organisations such as the WFP, while other donor countries have also scaled back, putting millions at risk worldwide. "Last year was the biggest malnutrition surge ever recorded in Afghanistan, and sadly, the prediction is that it's going to get worse," added Ayliffe, estimating that 200,000 more children would suffer acute malnutrition in 2026.

"The internet will gradually return to normal operations this week," Hossein Afshin, Iran's vice president for science, technology and the knowledge economy, said on Monday on state television.

The government imposed a nationwide communications black-

out earlier this month amid huge demonstrations triggered by anger over economic hardship. Limited internet access briefly returned on Sunday for some foreign websites such as Google, but opening links from search results remained impossible as of Monday.

The shutdown began on Jan 8. Norway-based Iran Human Rights said it has verified the deaths of 3,428 protesters killed by security forces, confirming cases through sources within the Islamic Republic's health and medical system, witnesses and independent sources.

The NGO warned the true toll is likely far higher. The media cannot independently confirm the figure, and Iranian officials have not provided an exact death toll.

Iran's foreign minister will not be attending the Davos summit in Switzerland this week, the organisers said, stressing it would not be "right" after the recent deadly crackdown on protesters in Iran.

The scale of the protests has prompted calls for more action on gun control and antisemitism.

The gun control laws are expected to pass with the support of the Greens party despite opposition from the conservative Liberal-National coalition. The anti-hate bill campaign after the 1996 massacre in Tasmania's Port Arthur, in which a lone gunman killed 35 people. They also toughen background checks for gun licences issued by Australian states, making use of information from the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation. Australia had a record 4.1 million firearms last year, the government said on Sunday, with more than 1.1 million of those in New South Wales, its most populous state and the site of the Bondi attack.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese recalled parliament early from this summer break for this week's special two-day

session to toughen curbs after the shooting shocked the nation and prompted calls for more action on gun control and antisemitism.

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Australia's parliament backs sweeping gun, anti-hate reforms after Bondi attack

NEWS DESK: Australia's lower house of parliament has passed new laws for a national gun buyback, tighter background checks for gun licences and a crackdown on hate crimes, in response to the country's worst mass shooting in decades at a Jewish festival last month.

Two bills for stricter gun control and anti-hate measures passed on Tuesday by the House of Representatives in a special parliamentary session will now go to the upper house Senate, for debate.

The gun control laws are expected to pass with the support of the Greens party despite opposition from the conservative Liberal-National coalition. The anti-hate bill campaign after the 1996 massacre in Tasmania's Port Arthur, in which a lone gunman killed 35 people. They also toughen background checks for gun licences issued by Australian states, making use of information from the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation. Australia had a record 4.1 million firearms last year, the government said on Sunday, with more than 1.1 million of those in New South Wales, its most populous state and the site of the Bondi attack.

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