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Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE



FIRs to Be Lodged Against Fake Degree Holders: CM Balochistan

Education Desk

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has ordered that FIRs be registered against fake degree holders serving in government departments, stating that no compromise will be made on merit, transparency, and rule of law.

The directive was issued while presiding over a high-level meeting to review the six-month performance of provincial departments and the progress of ongoing development projects.

The Chief Minister said the use of fake academic credentials undermines institutional credibility and deprives deserving candidates of their rightful

opportunities.

CM Balochistan directed the Education Department and relevant authorities to conduct thorough verification of academic degrees, particularly in contractual recruitments, and ensure 100 percent merit-based hiring.

He warned that officials found facilitating or protecting fake degree holders would also

face strict disciplinary and legal action.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister emphasized the importance of good governance and accountability, directing all departments to strengthen internal monitoring mechanisms.

He also instructed departments to expedite the resolution of public complaints and

ensure timely completion of development projects, stating that delays would not be tolerated.

The Chief Minister reiterated that the provincial government's top priority is public welfare, adding that transparent governance and strict adherence to merit are essential for restoring public confidence in state institutions.

Punjab launches first Green Policing Unit with electric patrol vehicles

NEWS DESK:

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has inaugurated Pakistan's first Green Policing Unit, introducing the country's first electric patrol vehicle for police operations, a move that officials said would help reduce fuel costs and carbon emissions. The initiative makes Punjab the first province to deploy electric vehicles for police patrolling.

During the inauguration ceremony, the chief minister inspected the electric patrol car and personally drove the vehicle.

She was briefed on various aspects of the Green Policing Unit and the electric vehicle initiative. Officials said modern BYD electric vehicles would be used for traffic management and routine patrolling duties in Lahore.

According to the briefing, the electric patrol vehicle has a driving range of up to 410 kilometres on a single charge and can be fast-charged from 30 to 80 per cent in approximately 30 minutes.

The vehicle is equipped with a public address system, police lights, a 360-degree surveillance camera and speed detection equipment.

Officials told the chief minister that 103 conventional patrol vehicles currently consume around 28,000 litres of fuel per month, costing approximately Rs7.42 million.

The use of electric vehicles is expected to save about 4,500 litres of fuel per vehicle annually, significantly reduce operational costs and ensure zero carbon emissions.

Maryam Nawaz directed authorities to gradually increase the number of electric vehicles.

in the Green Policing Unit and ordered steps to expand the initiative to other districts in phases.

She said the adoption of electric vehicles would help curb fuel expenses and promote zero carbon emissions, adding that green policing reflected the government's vision for cleaner air and improved governance.

Confirmed death toll of Gul Plaza inferno stands at 50

NEWS DESK:

The confirmed death toll of the Gul Plaza blaze stood at 50 on Thursday, according to an official list shared by police surgeon Summayya Syed, a day after several bodies were found in a gutted crockery shop at the shopping mall.

Initially, police had estimated that the remains, charred beyond recognition, were of 30 individuals. Karachi South Deputy Inspector General Syed Asad Raza had said that the death toll was estimated to have risen from 31 to 60 following the development, but he had also cautioned that a definite number could only be reached after DNA reports.

The list shared by Dr Syed on Thursday showed that the death of 50 individuals had been confirmed so far.

Meanwhile, a search operation at Gul Plaza continued. It was initiated on Sunday night after around 24-hour-long efforts to extinguish the fire that erupted on Saturday night.

The plaza, parts of which have collapsed due to the blaze, was a ground-plus-three-storey building with 1,200 shops spread over 8,000 square yards.

Snowfall Continues in Chaman and Northern Balochistan; Road Restoration Efforts in Full Swing

Sardar Muhammad Khondai, Syed Muhammad Qasem:

Heavy snowfall continues to blanket Chaman and several districts of Northern Balochistan, bringing with it a significant drop in temperatures. In response to the challenging weather conditions, the district administration of Chaman, National Highway Authority (NHA), and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) have successfully restored the Quetta-Chaman Highway, particularly around the Kohdak Top, ensuring safe passage for all types of traffic.

Key Developments:

Snowfall and Weather Impact: Since last night, snow has accumulated across both the plains and mountainous areas of Chaman, including Khawaja Imran, Toba Achakzai, Qilla Abdullah, Gulistan, Jungle Pir Ali Zai, Shelabagh, and Miri Adda.

The continuous snowfall has intensified the cold, pushing temperatures well below freezing, further impacting daily life and local transportation. Traffic Restoration Efforts: District adminis-



tration and relevant departments have been working around the clock, using heavy machinery, chemicals, and salt spreading techniques to clear roads.

The Quetta-Chaman Highway has been fully reopened for all traffic, with priority given to ensuring safe travel routes.

Public Safety Advisory:

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Chaman, Habib Ahmed Bangulzai, has urged the public to stay indoors during this extreme weather. He advised people to avoid unnecessary travel during the heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures. Emphasizing the importance of safety, he said, "When you have life, you have everything." He warned that icy roads increase the risk of vehicles skid-

ding, particularly in mountainous areas. He stressed that caution and preparedness are essential to avoid accidents and protect lives.

Ongoing Road Clearing Operations:

The operation to clear all major roads and national highways around Chaman is ongoing.

In addition to the Quetta-Chaman route, all local connecting roads are being actively cleared to ensure accessibility. The teams from Chaman District Administration, PDMA, and NHA are working diligently to restore normalcy.

Health and Emergency Preparedness:

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Chaman Fida Baloch, District Health Officer (DHO) Dr. Naveed Badini, and Medical Superintendent (MS) New DHQ Hospital Chaman, Owais, along with the health staff, are closely monitoring emergency preparedness in the area.

They have conducted site inspections on Kohdak Top and surrounding roads to ensure that medical and rescue services are ready to respond to any emergencies that may arise due to the snowstorm.

Appreciation for Efforts:

The Deputy Commissioner praised the efforts of the officers and staff involved in the snow clearance operations. He commended their hard work and dedication.

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 Buner The tragic flash floods in the Buner 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 cartailed 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 organizations, 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 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 abandon 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 creativity of God's humankind. 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 enliven in their lives. But man-made intelligence is growing so rapidly that it has posed a grave threat to the creativity of God's humankind. 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

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

code and find errors in it. To sum up, AI has much potential to replace the human workforce.

Positive Impacts of AI: Along with negative impacts, AI can also be advantageous for humans if used for welfare purposes. In the following paragraphs, some advantages of AI are described if AI is used

the inner layer of an egg was stitched. Additionally, an AI Chatbot can also prescribe medicines and treatment for a disease based on the provided symptoms. In the coming years, AI will further advance itself in the medical field and people will take numerous benefits from it.

Prediction Based on Provided Data: Humans remain

need. 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 skilful 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.



PM Shehbaz, CDF Munir hold meetings on sidelines of World Economic Forum

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Asim Munir on Thursday held informal meetings with various world leaders on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

The two met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, according to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

PM Shehbaz and Field Marshal Munir also attended US President Donald Trump's address to world leaders at the WEF held on Wednesday.

Field Marshal Munir and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

Ishaq Dar met Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on the sidelines of the WEF, just before the signing ceremony for the Board of Peace Charter.

In a post on X, Dar said he and the field marshal met Fidan moments before the ceremony, writing, "Pakistan and Turkish nations share a strong bond which has stood the test of time and is cherished deeply by both nations."

The premier is on a three-day visit to the Swiss town (from January 20-22), and is leading a high-level delegation.

On Wednesday, the prime minister had a breakfast with the Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the WEF in Davos.

In the address, he said that export-led growth was the only way forward for Pakistan.

In his remarks, the premier said Pakistan "is moving forward with a sense of achievement and a sense of purpose," noting a drop in the inflation rate and a reduction in the policy rate.

The premier also met International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva.

According to the PMO, he briefed Georgieva on the improvement in Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators, stabilisation efforts and progress on institutional reforms.

PM Shehbaz stressed Pakistan's commitment to fiscal discipline, revenue mobilisation and sustainable development, the statement said.

The prime minister had also met Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa on the sidelines of the WEF.

Over 288,000 tickets issued under e-challan system in Karachi since October, Sindh IGP told

NEWS DESK: Over 288,000 e-tickets have been issued under the Traffic Regulation and Citation System (TRACS) since its launch in October last year, it emerged on Thursday.

Last year, the Sindh government had decided that e-challans for traffic violations would be delivered to vehicle owners' registered home addresses.

The system was officially inaugurated in October and drew a mix of praise and criticism from the public.

According to a press release issued from the office of Sindh Inspector General of Police (IG) Javed Akhtar Odho, in a meeting held at the Central Police Office Karachi today, the newly appointed IG reviewed the performance of the new traffic system.

During the meeting, the deputy inspector general of traffic police briefed Odho that "so far, over 288,000 e-tickets have been generated under TRACS," out of

which 52 per cent of the tickets had been delivered, while 48pc were still under process.

The IGP was informed that the "reason for the delay in delivery was due to refusal to accept tickets, change of address or incomplete address," and that redelivery was underway.

The IGP was further briefed that 71 per cent of the tickets issued had been paid by citizens, while a significant percentage were waived as they were first-time offences.

"So far, 7,681 complaints have been registered against the e-challan system, out of which 81pc have been resolved and another 19pc are under review," according to the briefing. It further emerged that 12,000 vehicles have been blacklisted under the ticketing system since October 27.

The IGP was briefed that under the new system, vehicles associated with "non-payment of ownership rights, fake number plates, incomplete

number plates, theft, mischief," and other illegal activities have been blacklisted.

IGP Odho also "directed traffic police to work in collaboration with district police to take action against the blacklisted vehicles," the press release said.

He also issued instructions that the data of blacklisted vehicles should be provided to Safe City cameras, Emergency Response Vehicles and the Anti-Vehicle Lifting Cell.

"Additional IG Karachi, prepare a comprehensive plan for action against blacklisted vehicles," IGP Odho said.

The statement added that he also directed traffic police to issue e-tickets through smartphones on an experimental basis.

He termed the use of technology essential to modern policing, adding that "extraordinary steps need to be taken to make policing simpler." During the meeting, it was also decided to impose a Rs100,000 fine on heavy vehicles without trackers.

The complainant, who operates a "cable network," alleged that he and his friends had met for tea at a restaurant on Wednesday night, when Salman and three others drew a pistol and started firing, resulting in a bullet injury to his thigh.

He further alleged that the suspect was spreading fake news against him on social media for "blackmailing purposes."

Subsequently, the Sindh home minister took notice of the arrest and sought details from the Korangi senior superintendent of police (SSP), according to a statement.

"Merit, transparency and impartiality should be given focus," Lanjar said in the statement, adding that all media organisations should be taken into confidence and that a thorough inquiry be conducted.

I assure my journalist brethren that merit and transparency will be

PTI slams govt's decision to join Trump's Board of Peace

NEWS DESK: The PTI on Thursday rejected the government's decision to join US President Donald Trump's 'Board of Peace' initiative, stating that any such decisions should be made following consultation with all stakeholders.

Originally meant to oversee peace in Gaza after Israel's two-year war on the Palestinian enclave, the Board of Peace's charter envisions a wider role in resolving international conflicts.

A group of leaders and senior officials from 19 countries — including Pakistan — gathered on stage on Thursday with Trump at a signing ceremony in Davos, Switzerland, to put their names to the founding charter of the body.

In a statement, the PTI said it did not accept the government's decision to join the Board of Peace.

The party emphasised that decisions of international significance should always be made following consultations with all



major political stakeholders and with full transparency.

The government should at least have discussed such a major decision openly within the available parliamentary structures before moving forward," the statement, posted on X, said.

The party added that Pakistan's participation in any international peace initiative should "complement and reinforce the United Na-

tions' multilateral system", rather than creating parallel power structures that could adversely affect global governance.

"Under former prime minister Imran Khan's leadership, [the] PTI has consistently emphasised that Pakistan's foreign policy must safeguard national sovereignty, uphold constitutional norms, and secure their legitimate rights," the

party said. It added that the PTI stood with Palestinians and, as such, "will not accept any plans against the wishes of the people of Palestine."

"We are deeply saddened and concerned by the atrocities and oppression they continue to face, and we strongly desire that the Palestinian people achieve their freedom and secure their legitimate rights," the PTI

added, reiterating their stance on the creation of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital. It added that this position was articulated by party founder Imran during his tenure as prime minister and reflected Pakistan's commitment to human rights and international law.

"[The] PTI calls upon the government of Pakistan to withdraw any formal participation in the Board of Peace until a complete consultative process has been conducted," the PTI said, outlining the various steps of the process.

These included thorough parliamentary scrutiny and debate, consultation with all major political leadership — including Imran — and conducting a referendum on the board's membership "to ensure public confidence".

"[The] PTI reiterates that Pakistan must continue to act as a responsible, principled, and peace-oriented nation."

President approves confirmation, extension of additional judges in three high courts

NEWS DESK: Ali Hadi and Muhammad Jaffer Raza.

In addition, a six-month extension was granted to Justices Khalid Hussain Shahani and Syed Faiz ul Hassan Shah.

In the Lahore High Court, 11 additional judges were confirmed.

They are Justices Hassan Nawaz Makhdoom, Malik Waqar Haider Awan, Sardar Akbar Ali, Syed Ahsan Raza Kazmi,

Iqbal Malik Wains, Muhammad Jawad Zafar, Khalid Ishaq, Tasneem Sultan, Riazat Ali Sahar, Muhammad Hasan, Abdul Hamid Bhugri, Jan Ali Junejo, Nisar Ahmad Bhanbhro, Ali Haider "Ada", Muhammad Osman

of Justice Tariq Mahmood Bajwa as an additional judge of the Lahore High Court.

For the Peshawar High Court, the confirmation of six additional judges was approved. They include Jus-



Justices Tariq Afridi, Abdul Fayaz, Salah ud Din Sadiq Ali, Syed Mudasser Ameer and Qazi Jawad Elhsanullah.

A six-month extension was granted to Justices

Farah Jamshed, Inam Ullah Khan and Aurangzeb.

The approvals complete a significant round of judicial confirmations and extensions across the three high courts.

Sindh home minister orders inquiry as journalist arrested for allegedly firing, injuring citizen in Karachi

NEWS DESK: Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar on Thursday ordered an inquiry after Model Colony police arrested journalist Shahab Salman for allegedly firing a gun and injuring a person.

The journalist's arrest came after a first information report (FIR) was registered against him under Sections 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention), 324 (attempted murder) and 337A(i) (causing a head injury) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

The complainant, who operates a "cable network," alleged that he and his friends had met for tea at a restaurant on Wednesday night, when Salman and three others drew a pistol and started firing, resulting in a bullet injury to his thigh.

He further alleged that the suspect was spreading fake news against him on social media for "blackmailing purposes."

Subsequently, the Sindh home minister took notice of the arrest and sought details from the Korangi senior superintendent of police (SSP), according to a statement.

"Merit, transparency and impartiality should be given focus," Lanjar said in the statement, adding that all media organisations should be taken into confidence and that a thorough inquiry be conducted.

I assure my journalist brethren that merit and transparency will be



ensured during police investigation," he added.

Meanwhile, a statement issued by the police said the Shah Faisal Colony senior superintendent of police (SP) investigation had been appointed as investigating officers for the inquiry.

The statement quoted the Korangi SSP as saying that the two officials should ensure merit and transparency in the inquiry and that a complaint by the journalist's wife should also be made a part of the probe.

Salman's wife had filed an application with the Model Colony police alleging that certain elements wanted to occupy the land of a bus terminal in Model

Colony. She said her husband had exposed the land grabbing "while performing his professional duties", leading the complainant to "threaten him".

"Suspects riding four motorcycles on Wednesday night arrived at the restaurant and threatened my husband," she alleged in her application.

"He (Salman) took out a licensed pistol and resorted to firing in self-defence," she said.

She further stated that they had sought protection from the police, which was not provided and accused the suspects of "being supported by political elements." She further alleged that the suspects beat her husband while

he was in police custody.

Meanwhile, separate statements issued by the Karachi Press Club (KPC) and Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ) condemned the arrest.

"Arresting a person who opened fire in self-defence instead of the attacker is worrying," the KUJ's president and secretary said in a joint statement.

It added that some elements had been threatening Salman for reporting the news over several days and that after opening fire in self-defence, Salman himself had approached the police for help but was refused.

"Not only did they file a case against him,

aiding the criminals, but they refused to grant his wife's application," the statement added.

"High-ranking police officials should take notice of this matter and bring justice to the journalist [and] the authorities should ensure a transparent investigation," the statement said.

The KPC also demanded that Salman be released immediately and that an impartial investigation be conducted into the incident.

"KPC President Fazil Jamili, Secretary Aslam Khan and the executive council have expressed deep concern over the attempted attack on Salman, a senior member of the press club, and his subsequent arrest," the statement said. It noted that Salman was a "responsible and professional journalist" and that if he were threatened or attacked, law enforcement agencies' first responsibility should be to provide protection to him and take action against the real suspects.

"Arresting a senior journalist on the basis of self-defence is upsetting and concerning, while the impression that the victim should be blamed instead of the complainant is also extremely dangerous," the statement said.

The KPC, alongside demanding Salman's release and a transparent probe, demanded the assurance that journalists would not face harassment or retaliation while carrying out their duties.



24 Punjab Police stenographers promoted

LAHORE (INP): The promotion process in Punjab Police is continuing at a fast pace, with 24 stenographers promoted to the rank of senior scale stenographer.

According to a Punjab Police spokesperson a meeting of the Promotion board was held under the chairmanship of DIG Establishment-II Captain (ret'd) Liaqat Ali Malik.

The spokesperson said that 24 stenographers, who fulfilled the

eligibility requirements, were approved for promotion. AIG Adnan and Security Asad Ejaz Malhi has issued the formal promotion notifications. Congratulating the

promoted officers, IGP Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed them to continue performing their duties with greater dedication, integrity and professional commitment.

The promoted officers are Tanveer Rashid, Muhammad Faisal, Shahzad Muhammad Ahmad, Ali Gohar, Safdar Ali, Muhammad Imran, Yaseen Bashir, Abdul

Rehman, Abdul Rasheed, Mehboob Alam, Tariq Mahmood, Muhammad Shakoor, Muhammad Kashif, Muhammad Javed, Mohsin Raza, Azeem

Sarwar, Zahid Ahmad Khan, Zeshan Ali, Muhammad Adnan, Sajid Ali, Saddam Hussain Shah, Shahid Rasool, Waheed Ahmad and Muhammad Usman.



RAWALPIND: Daily wage laborers sit around bonfire to warm themselves during cold & cloudy weather at Raja Bazar.

Govt submits report to IHC seeking suspension of Imran Khan's X account

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government has submitted a report to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) regarding suspension of the X account of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan.

The PTA informed the court that it had asked social media companies to register with the authority in Pakistan, but these companies neither registered nor appointed focal persons in the country.

The court also told that social media companies registered in their home countries do not consider themselves bound by the laws of other states. Complaints from other countries, the PTA said, are reviewed by these platforms strictly under their own internal policies rather than local laws.

SC dismisses civil petition in long-standing land dispute

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan has dismissed a civil petition in a long-standing land dispute, refusing to grant leave to appeal against the impugned judgment.

According to a written detailed verdict issued by the Supreme Court, a two-member bench comprising Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan and Justice Shakil Ahmad announced the decision after hearing Civil Petition No. 3939 of 2025 filed by Masrat Safia Khanum and others.

The petition had challenged the Islamabad High Court's judgment dated June 3, 2025.

The court noted that the petitioners' predecessor, the late Mehboob Sultan, had filed a suit in 1991 seeking cancellation of a basic mutation No. 1670/1940. The suit had been dismissed at all stages, including the trial court, appellate court, and review proceedings.

Subsequently, two more suits of a similar nature were also de-

clared non-maintainable on different grounds. The Supreme Court observed that the petitioners had repeatedly filed litigation on the same cause of action, which is prohibited under civil law. Referring to the Doctrine of Election and relevant provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure, the court held that once a party chooses one forum, it cannot simultaneously or subsequently approach a parallel forum.

The verdict further stated that all three subordinate courts had unanimously held the petitioners to be legally disqualified, and the petitioners' counsel failed to raise any substantial legal point warranting interference by the Supreme Court.

Consequently, the court ruled that leave to appeal could not be granted. The Supreme Court dismissed the civil petition, holding that the case did not involve any legal defect or constitutional question, and therefore declined to grant leave to appeal.

Mohsin Naqvi praises Mufti Muneeb, others for their role in maintaining peace, stability in country

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry held a meeting with a delegation led by the Grand Mufti of Pakistan, Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman and other religious scholars for their role in maintaining peace and stability in the country.

He assured the delegation that their services of religious scholars for Pakistan are commendable. He added that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman plays an important role in keeping the nation united and emphasized, "We are all one, and Pakistan comes first."

Minister of State Talal Chaudhry said that the services of religious scholars for Pakistan are commendable. He added that Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman plays an important role in keeping the nation united and emphasized, "We are all one, and Pakistan comes first."

The delegation included Allama Liaquat Hussain Azhari, Mufti Abid Mubarak Madani, and Malik Muhammad Ibrahim. Federal Secretary Interior Muhammad Khurram Agha, IG Islamabad Police Ali Nasir Ravi, and other officials were also present on the occasion.

The committee will present viable recommendations for resolution.

Govt to focus on relief for salaried class in coming budget

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

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

According to the sources, alternative measures would be adopted to increase tax revenues while efforts to curb smuggling would be intensified. Action against tax evaders and non-filers would continue, with the Federal Board of Revenue stepping up enforcement.

A special wing of the FBR has been auditing non-filers who display lavish lifestyles on social media platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

The government believes that these measures will support economic growth, encourage industrial activity and provide much needed relief to salaried individuals amid ongoing fiscal challenges, concluded the sources.

India releases additional water into Sutlej, raise alarm near Kasur

LAHORE (INP): India's water aggression continued late last night when it released more water into the Sutlej River, resulting in a steady rise in water levels on the Pakistani side near Kasur.

According to the details, India has once again resorted to water aggression by releasing water into the Sutlej River under the cover of darkness, raising concerns of flooding and economic disruption downstream in Pakistan.

This is not the first instance of such action, as India has repeatedly been accused of using sudden water

levels on the Pakistani side near Bhikhi Wind in Kasur.

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Punjab had issued a flood alert for Ganda Singh Wala on the Sutlej River, warning of a moderate flood within two days due to upstream water releases.

In response, alerts have been issued to the Health, Irrigation, Communication and Works, Local Government, and Livestock Departments, directing them to remain on standby and ensure preparedness for any emergency situation arising from the rising water levels.

According to the latest PDMA report, the flow of water in the Sutlej River has reached 59,000 cusecs at Ganda Singh Wala and 31,000 cusecs at Head Sulemanki, triggering heightened monitoring by authorities.

Director General PDMA Irfan Ali Kathia said that water flows in the Sutlej and Ravi rivers largely depend on releases from across the border, emphasizing the vulnerability of downstream areas to sudden discharges.

The committee will present viable recommendations for resolution.

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According to the report, MQM-P Senior Deputy Convenor and Federal Minister of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, addressed a press conference on Thursday and said that

QUETTA: Provincial Health Minister Bukht Muhammad Kakar awarding certificate among doctors during closing day of Health Leadership Conference.

MQM-P calls for federal control of Karachi with economic capital status

KARACHI (INP): The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) has demanded that Karachi be placed under federal control and declared the country's economic capital.

According to the report, MQM-P Senior Deputy Convenor and Federal Minister of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, addressed a press conference on Thursday and said that

Karachi should immediately be made the economic capital of Pakistan and brought directly under the control of the federation. He expressed a deep sorrow, grief and anger over the recent Gul Plaza tragedy in Karachi, where dozens of people were burnt alive, several others injured, and around 1,200 shops damaged after a massive fire led to the collapse of the building.

Mustafa Kamal said the city could no longer bear such losses. He said that the people of Karachi were looking towards the state for protection and governance. "How much more blood are we expected to give, how many more tragedies must we endure, and how many more bodies must we offer?" he asked. While lamenting the Gul Plaza incident, he questioned who would guarantee that it would be the last such tragedy in Karachi.

The MQM-P leader said the city was witnessing killings, children were falling into open gutters and manholes, and yet there was no effective governance to address these issues.

He further said that the 18th Constitutional Amendment was doing genocide to Karachiites and claimed that the amendment had brought no real benefit to the common people, particularly those living in Karachi.



QUETTA: Head of Aurat foundation Yasmin Mughal along with Israr Ahmed Umrani Assistant Inspector General (AIG) of Gender speaks on seminar "Violence on Woman" organized by Aurat foundation.

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) flags tax evasion in Sindh solar imports

NEWS DESK: Another episode of massive under-invoicing for tax evasion and trade-based money laundering through the import of solar kits came to light before a parliamentary committee, which expressed serious displeasure over the continued absence of the minister for economic affairs and provincial secretaries.

The Senate Secretariat released selected operational parts of a report presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Economic Affairs by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), detailing grave irregularities in the import of solar home system kits under the Sindh Solar Energy Project (SSEP).

The report revealed that solar kits were declared at \$16-\$23.4 per unit for tax purposes by contractors, while payments of up to \$12.44 per unit, or about 700 per cent higher, were made by the World Bank for the SSEP, reflecting a difference of \$89.96 per unit. Investigations are underway into the trade-based money laundering, tax evasion, fund layering and violations of foreign exchange rules.

According to the report, M/s Shenzen LEMI Technology Development Co Ltd, China, revealed a contractual price of approximately \$112.44 per kit, excluding duties and taxes. The World Bank reportedly paid this amount directly to the supplier, the FBR report said.

For tax purposes, the transactional value was worked out at



between December 2024 and July 2025 through clearing agent M/s Vista Impex. The goods were declared under HS Codes 8501.7210 and 8501.711, attracting zero customs duty, 18pc sales tax, 3pc additional sales tax and zero income tax. Declared unit values ranged from \$16.1 to \$23.4, and four consignments comprising 200,968 solar home system units be-

neel. Subsequent verification revealed that the goods' declarations (GDs) submitted to the Sindh government were either fake or tampered with, a fact officially conveyed on Oct 9, 2025. Further investigation showed that the same kits were supplied to the Sindh government at manifold higher prices. Official contracts

under the SSEP with M/s Shenzen LEMI Technology Development Co Ltd, China, revealed a contractual price of approximately \$112.44 per kit, excluding duties and taxes. The World Bank reportedly paid this amount directly to the supplier, the FBR report said.

For tax purposes, the transactional value was worked out at

\$103.08 per unit, leading to the forwarding of 10 contraventions to customs adjudication authorities. Show-cause notices have been issued and the matter is pending adjudication. The Senate committee was informed that fake invoices amounting to \$12.5 million were also generated. In addition, evidence suggested third-party remittances

routed through UAE-based entities, raising alarms of trade-based money laundering, foreign exchange violations and fund layering. The case has been referred for proceedings under the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010, while a comprehensive sales tax audit has been recommended. The committee was told that the SSEP implementation

period ended on July 31, 2025, but around 30,000 solar kits out of 200,000 could not be distributed within the planned period and would now be handled under a separate arrangement.

Following the identification of discrepancies, the Sindh cabinet had on Dec 1, 2025 referred the matter to the Enquiries and Anti-Corruption Establishment

(EACE). A forensic audit has also been approved and is underway, while the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has taken cognisance of the case and is actively investigating.

On these revelations, committee chairman Saifullah Abro asked whether any suspensions of suspected officials had taken place and was informed that no suspensions had occurred so far. He directed that a letter be written to the chief minister to ensure that all individuals involved were held accountable.

Minister's absence Earlier, the Senate panel expressed sharp criticism over the continued absence of Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema and senior bureaucrats, as well as the participation of junior officers from provincial governments, terming it a serious disregard for parliamentary oversight. An additional secretary from the Economic Affairs Division informed the committee that the minister was attending the World Economic Forum in Davos. The explanation failed to satisfy the senators, with PPP Senator Wasim Mehdi remarking that he did not recall the minister ever attending a committee meeting and demanding that the minister's chair be removed.

Aurangzeb holds ADB talks on reforms at Davos

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

According to an official statement issued on Wednesday, the finance minister met Masato Kanda, President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to review ongoing economic reforms and discuss ways to deepen the long-standing partnership between Pakistan and the multilateral lender. During the meeting, the ADB president said Pakistan was entering an important phase of economic transformation, citing renewed momentum in reforms and improving market confidence. He highlighted ADB's expanding engagement in Pakistan and reaffirmed the Bank's commitment to continued support through a close working relationship. Aurangzeb thanked the ADB presi-

dent for his support and guidance, noting that Pakistan's relationship with the Bank had entered a more strategic phase. He said the past year marked a shift towards macroeconomic stability and that the positive trajectory was continuing. The finance minister pointed to easing inflation, declining policy rates, strengthening foreign exchange reserves and improving investor sentiment as indicators reflecting renewed confidence in the reform process.

The finance minister also briefed the ADB president on progress in structural reforms, particularly the government's focus on privatisation and private sector participation. He said recent initiatives had generated market interest and helped establish benchmarks, with additional projects in the pipeline across several sectors. Aurangzeb stressed the importance of continued engagement with development partners, including ADB, to support reforms and unlock growth. Discussions also covered reforms in the

energy sector and efforts to advance sustainable and clean energy solutions. The finance minister outlined measures aimed at improving efficiency and strengthening systems to support long-term economic sustainability. Both sides agreed to maintain close coordination to identify practical solutions for inclusive growth, while the ADB president emphasised the role of private sector participation and timely delivery of development outcomes. Separately, Aurangzeb met Hassan El Houry, Chairperson of Menzies Aviation, to discuss cooperation in the aviation sector. The meeting focused on airport services, operational efficiency and potential investment opportunities linked to Pakistan's reform and privatisation agenda.

The finance minister briefed El Houry on the government's privatisation plans, including progress related to Pakistan International Airlines, and plans to outsource operations at major airports in Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore.

World Bank flags risks to economy

NEWS DESK: The World Bank has warned that escalating regional conflicts, climate shocks and tighter global financial conditions pose significant downside risks to economic recovery across the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (MENAAP) region, with Pakistan among the most exposed economies due to its climate vulnerability and fragile security environment.

Frontier market economies haven't lived up to potential since 2010, the report said. In its Global Economic Prospects, January 2026 report, the World Bank noted that while growth across emerging markets proved more resilient than expected in 2025, the outlook remains clouded by heightened uncertainty.

For the MENAAP region, major risks include the re-escalation of armed conflicts, spillovers from geopolitical tensions, extreme weather events, volatile oil and commodity prices, and the possibility of tighter global financial conditions that could restrict capital flows to vulnerable economies. Pakistan's position within this risk

landscape is particularly precarious. Classified among climate-vulnerable emerging economies, the country has faced repeated floods, heatwaves and weather-related disruptions in recent years, inflicting lasting damage on agriculture, infrastructure and public finances.

The World Bank cautioned that climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe, increasing the likelihood of growth setbacks, inflationary pressures and fiscal stress for countries with limited policy

buffers, conditions that closely mirror Pakistan's current macroeconomic reality. The report highlighted that economies affected by fragility or conflict tend to experience deeper and more persistent economic scarring following shocks. Pakistan, while not classified as a conflict economy in the strictest sense, remains exposed to regional instability, particularly developments linked to Afghanistan. Ongoing humanitarian and security challenges across the border raise the risk of spillovers through refu-

gee pressures, trade disruptions and security-related spending, which can further strain Pakistan's already stretched fiscal position. According to the World Bank, renewed geopolitical tensions in the broader region could disrupt trade routes, investor confidence and commodity markets. For Pakistan, such disruptions would come at a sensitive time, as policymakers attempt to stabilise the economy following years of balance-of-payments IMF-backed fiscal ad-

justment. Any deterioration in regional security conditions could undermine investor sentiment and complicate efforts to attract foreign capital, the report suggested. Climate risks stand out as a central concern. The World Bank warned that extreme weather events, floods in particular, can derail fragile recovery by destroying crops, damaging transport and energy infrastructure, and forcing governments to divert scarce resources towards emergency relief and reconstruction. Pakistan's devastating floods in recent years have already highlighted these vulnerabilities, with long-term effects still visible in rural livelihoods, food prices and public debt dynamics. The report noted that climate shocks often interact with macroeconomic weaknesses, amplifying their impact in countries with high debt and limited fiscal space.

The World Bank also highlighted that in Pakistan, a current account deficit is projected to widen in FY2026/27, driven by a rise in import demand alongside strengthening growth and post-flood normalisation of remittance inflows.

Gold hits record Rs506,362 per tola

NEWS DESK: A whopping jump of \$127 per ounce in the international market to \$4,840 per ounce pushed the domestic gold (24 karat) rate to Rs506,362 per tola on Wednesday, the highest in the country's history, after an increase of Rs12,700 per tola from Tuesday's price.

The record-high rate has added to the burden on gold jewellery buyers during the ongoing peak wedding season, while investors appear upbeat over central banks' sharp rally triggered by geopolitical tensions, ongoing tariff wars and US President Donald Trump's efforts to control Greenland.

According to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association (APSGJA), based on interbank exchange rates, the domestic 10-gram gold rate rose to Rs434,123, up by Rs10,888 from Tuesday.

On Jan 1, the 10-gram and one-tola gold rates stood at Rs234,568 and Rs273,600, respectively, based on the global gold rate of \$2,624 per ounce. To date, prices of 10-gram and one-tola gold have surged by Rs190,555 and Rs232,762, respec-

tively, while the international price has climbed by \$2,216 per ounce. Gold currently leads in terms of returns among select asset classes, with stocks in second place.

It has been observed that local gold prices have shown wide disparities in the past between the official rates announced by the association and open market rates prevailing at jewellery shops. However, on Wednesday, jewellers were offering gold at Rs503,000-

505,500 per tola, lower than the association's rate of Rs506,362.

The price difference between the association and market rates depends on demand and supply, APSGJA President Qasim Shikarpuri said, adding that investors were currently driving the gold market rather than jewellery buyers.

Investors all over the world and in Pakistan are selling dollars to buy gold," he said, adding that central banks in various countries were

also making large purchases of the yellow metal.

He said there was no shortage of gold in the market despite heavy investor interest, claiming that the per-tola gold rate in Pakistan was selling under cost by Rs25,000 compared to rates in Dubai.

Silver In contrast, investors are also active in purchasing silver, which is currently in short supply due to high demand and is available at a hefty premium.

The contracts climbed more than 0.4pc on Wednesday following a rise of 1.5pc a day earlier, after Opec+ producer Kazakhstan halted output at its Tengiz and Koroiev oilfields due to power distribution issues.

On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump toned down his rhetoric about Greenland by ruling out the use of force and stepping back from tariff threats aimed at Europe.

The cooling of the rhetoric surrounding Greenland would reduce trade tensions between the US and Europe and is supportive of the glo-

Oil slips as investors assess supply outlook

NEWS DESK: Oil prices slipped on Thursday after gaining in previous sessions, as investors assessed the supply and demand outlook, while a report showing a rise in US crude and gasoline stocks last week weighed on prices.

Brent crude was down 28 cents, or 0.43 per cent, at \$64.96 a barrel at 07:49 GMT. West Texas Intermediate for March declined 19 cents, or 0.31pc, to \$60.43 a barrel.

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The cooling of the rhetoric surrounding Greenland would reduce trade tensions between the US and Europe and is supportive of the glo-

bal economy and oil demand, said Mingyu Gao, chief researcher for energy and chemicals at China Futures.

At the same time, the United States has not ruled out possible military involvement in Iran, which is also supporting oil prices," Gao said.

Trump said on Wednesday he hoped there would be no further US military action in Iran, but added the US would act if Tehran re-

sumed its nuclear program. Against the backdrop of Greenland and the receding prospect of action in Iran, oil prices should hold at around \$60 a barrel, said Tony Sycamore, an analyst with online broker IG.

Also on Wednesday, Trump said he believed "we're reasonably close" to a deal to end the war between Russia and Ukraine, adding he would meet Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy later in the day.

An end to the war would likely result in the removal of US sanctions on Russia, which would limit supply disruptions and weigh down prices.

The International Energy Agency revised its 2026 global oil demand growth forecasts higher on Wednesday in its latest monthly oil market report, suggesting a slightly narrower surplus for the market this year.



EU commission pledges 126m euros for Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan

NEWS DESK: The European Commission has allocated 126 million euros to address humanitarian needs in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan during 2026, part of an initial 1.9 billion euro aid budget aimed at combating global crises as major donors cut funds.

The allocation comes at a time when 239m people require assistance, the commission said in a press release on Wednesday. Additionally, more than 415m euros has been reserved for responding to sudden-onset emergencies and maintaining a strategic supply chain.

EC Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management Hadja Lahbib took this commitment to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to seek private sector finance and innovative solutions that can complement public funding.



"The humanitarian system is under unprecedented strain, and public funding alone will not meet the scale of the crisis," Lahbib said.

UNHCR projects displaced population will cross 136m by end of this year "Europe is taking action, committing an initial €1.9bn for 2026.

As the largest humanitarian donor, we are taking our political responsibility and leading the global response." Together with the

WEF, Lahbib will co-host an event on "New Alliances in Aid and Development". The commission noted the EU and its member states remain the

leading global humanitarian aid donor.

Displaced population Meanwhile, the UNHCR said in its "2025 Impact Report" that it responded to a

117.3m people were forcibly displaced worldwide, a five per cent decrease compared to the end of 2024. However, global projections indicate that the number of forcibly displaced, returnees and stateless people could reach 136.3m by the end of 2026.

The UN refugee agency said severe funding cuts affected every aspect of its work, including emergency response, forcing the organisation to reduce both the scale of its activities and its workforce by one-third. According to the agency, the need for international solidarity has reached a critical point.

Without increased and flexible funding, the UNHCR's ability to respond rapidly at the onset of new crises will be severely hit at a time when needs are escalating.

100 Democrats demand impeachment of US homeland security chief

NEWS DESK: The fatal shooting of an immigration rights activist earlier this month has triggered rapidly growing support among House Democrats for impeaching US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

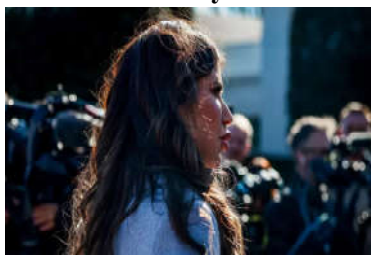
Within just seven days of its introduction, the number of co-sponsors backing the impeachment resolution has reached 100, sponsors of the resolution said on Wednesday.

Renee Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, was shot and killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer in Minneapolis on Jan 7 during a controversial enforcement action that has ignited protests and political backlash nationwide.

At a White House press briefing on Tuesday, US President Donald Trump described the shooting as a "tragedy" and said he "felt horribly" about Good's death. He acknowledged that "ICE is gonna make mistakes sometimes" and said he "understands both sides" of the incident.

The impeachment resolution, introduced by Rep. Robin Kelly of Illinois, accuses Ms Noem of obstructing Congress, violating the public trust and engaging in self-dealing — charges that have resonated with a growing number of Democratic lawmakers.

"Secretary Noem and her rogue agency



have caused destruction and devastation across the country," Ms Kelly said in a statement. "One hundred House Democrats from California to New York, Minnesota to Texas support my impeachment resolution because our communities have seen ICE's Gestapo-like tactics firsthand."

The articles of impeachment allege that Ms Noem attempted to unlawfully enter a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) facility used to detain undocumented immigrants and directed ICE to carry out "widespread warrantless arrests". The resolution claimed that she also urged ICE to "forgo due process, and use violence against United States citizens, lawful residents and other individuals".

The resolution also accuses the homeland security chief of

misusing her position for personal gain, including what critics say was the improper use of \$200 million in taxpayer funds to finance an ICE recruitment advertising campaign.

"As Secretary Noem continues to lie, obstruct Congress, and violate people's civil rights, the support for her impeachment only grows," Ms Kelly said, urging Republican lawmakers to "be on the right side of the law and our Constitution".

Democratic aides described the growing support as unprecedented during Mr Trump's second term, noting that several lawmakers previously hesitant about impeachment have now signed on.

Among them is Rep. Jared Huffman of California, who said the circumstances were "so extreme that a message needs to be sent," even

as he acknowledged the measure's slim prospects in the current Congress.

With 213 members in the House Democratic caucus, backing for the resolution is now nearing half the party. A spokesperson for Ms Kelly said more offices were reviewing the text and that additional co-sponsors were expected. The Department of Homeland Security has dismissed the impeachment drive as "silly," saying Democrats should instead focus on crime in their own districts.

While Democrats can force a vote in the House, the effort faces long odds in the Republican-controlled chamber. Any conviction in the Senate would require a two-thirds majority, a threshold widely seen as unattainable under current political alignments.

US set to exit WHO despite legal challenge and global health warnings

NEWS DESK: The US is due to officially exit the World Health Organisation on Thursday, in the face of warnings it will hit both US health and global health and also in violation of a US law that requires Washington to pay the UN health agency \$260 million in fees that it owes.

President Donald Trump gave notice that the US would quit the organisation on the first day of his presidency in 2025, via an executive order. Under US law, it has to give one-year notice and pay all outstanding fees before departure.

On Thursday, a US State Department spokesperson said the WHO's failure to contain, manage and share information had cost the US trillions of dollars, and the president had exercised his authority to pause the future transfer of any US government funds, support, or resources to the WHO.

"The American people have paid more than enough to this or-



ganization and this economic hit is beyond a down payment on any financial obligations to the organisation," the spokesperson said by email.

Over the last year, many global health experts have urged a rethink, including most recently WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "I hope the US will reconsider and rejoin WHO," he told reporters at a press conference earlier this month.

"Withdrawing from the WHO is a loss for the United States, and it's a loss for the rest of the world."

The WHO also said that the US has not yet paid the fees it owes for 2024 and 2025. Member states are set to discuss the US departure and how it will be handled at the WHO's executive board in February, a WHO spokesperson told Reuters by email.

"This is a clear violation of US law," said Lawrence Gostin, found-

ing director of the O'Neill Institute for Global Health Law at Georgetown University in Washington, a close observer of the WHO. "But Trump is highly likely to get away with it."

Speaking to Reuters at Davos, Bill Gates — chair of the Gates Foundation, a major funder of global health initiatives and some of the WHO's work — said he did not expect the US to reconsider in the short-term.

Bangladesh launches election campaign ahead of first polls since Hasina's ouster

NEWS DESK: Bangladesh begins official campaigning on Thursday for hugely anticipated general elections next month, the first since the 2024 uprising ended the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina.

The South Asian nation of 170 million people votes on February 12 for 350 lawmakers, ushering in new leadership after prolonged political turmoil following the overthrow of Hasina's government, reshaping domestic and regional power dynamics.

It comes against the backdrop of insecurity — including the murder last month of a student leader of the anti-Hasina protests — as well as warnings of a "flood" of online disinformation.

European Union election observers say the vote will be the "biggest democratic process of 2026".

Mass rallies are expected with hundreds of thousands of supporters gathering, as the front-runners, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the large-



est Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, formally launch their campaigns.

BNP chief and prime ministerial hopeful Tarique Rahman, 60, who returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile, is due to address a string of rallies starting in the north-eastern city of Sylhet.

Rahman assumed formal leadership of the BNP after the death in December of his mother,

80-year-old former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

Bangladesh, home to one of the world's largest Muslim-majority populations, has a significant Sufi following, and parties have traditionally launched campaigns in Sylhet, home to the centuries-old shrine of Shah Jalal.

Lines of supporters lined both sides of the streets as Rahman prayed at the shrine on Wednesday night, cheering as his election

bus passed by, with his countrywide roadshow of rallies to begin later Thursday.

Jamaat-e-Islami, which opposes Sufi mystical interpretations of the Koran, begins its campaign in the capital Dhaka, in the constituency of its leader, Shafiqur Rahman.

Ideologically aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamists are seeking a return to formal politics after years of bans and crackdowns.

NEWS DESK: The Iranian government announced the official death toll from nationwide protests, state media reported Wednesday.

The Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, a government body responsible for overseeing those killed in conflicts since the 1979 revolution, said 3,117 people were killed, with 2,427 security personnel and civilians.

The figures are based on information received from the Iranian Legal Medicine Organisation, a forensic body affiliated with the country's judiciary, it said in a statement.

The foundation said the deaths took place in "terrorist incidents" in recent days that were "reminiscent of the brutal and savage crimes of ISIS (Daesh)."

Many of the victims were "passersby who were killed as part of deliberate killing campaigns or fell victim to indiscriminate terrorist gunfire and what it described as blind brutality," it said.

Others, it added, were among protesters who were shot within crowds by "organised terrorist elements."

It is the first official death toll released by the government since protests broke out in late December in Tehran and later spread to cities across the country.

Previously, some human rights

organisations outside Iran had published their own estimates, placing the number of deaths above 15,000, the majority of them protesters.

Iranian officials, including President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, rejected those reports.

Protests erupted in Iran amid worsening economic conditions, particularly the sharp depreciation of the national currency and soaring inflation.

Weeks later, following a call for street protests by Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's former monarch, violence and street clashes between protesters and security personnel were reported in several cities, including Tehran.

Authorities have accused the United

States and Israel of supporting "rioters" and "terrorists" who allegedly attacked public and private property, including shops, banks and mosques.

Police said hundreds accused of leading the protests had been arrested, while the judiciary vowed that there would be "no leniency" toward those responsible for violence and vandalism.

The US and several European countries have imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran for a "crackdown on protesters."

Iranian diplomats have been banned from European Parliament buildings, and Araghchi's invitation to the World Economic Forum's Davos summit was revoked.

Following the an-

nouncement of the official death toll, the Supreme National Security Council, the top security body, issued a statement saying it concluded, based on intelligence monitoring and assessments, that the events in recent weeks were a continuation of the 12-day war last June, blaming the US and Israel.

"The United States and the Zionist regime changed their tactics and targeted the social cohesion of the Iranian people, believing this would lay the groundwork for breaking the national will of Iran," it said.

It added that Washington and Tel Aviv had sought to push protesters toward violence in cities across the country, causing damage to the population and the nation.

