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Email address: dquettavoice@gmail.com

Website: www.quettavoice.com

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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.

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 take steps to expand the initiative to other districts as well.

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 inferno stands at 50. Thursday, according to an official list shared by police surgeon Suminaiya Sved, a day after several bodies were found in a gutted crockery shop at the shop-

ing. 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 51 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 Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) 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:

Local government and Weather Impact Survey Bureau officials have been working around the clock, using heavy machinery, chemicals, and salt spreading techniques to clear roads. The continuous snowfall has been fully reopened for major traffic, with priority given to ensuring safe travel routes.



Public Safety Advisory:

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Chaman, Habib Ahmed Bangzai, 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 and ensured to remain safe. The teams from Chaman District Administration, DDMA, and PDMA are working diligently to restore normalcy.

Health and Emergency Preparedness:

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Chaman, Fida Baloch, District Health Officer (DHO) Dr. Naved Badin, and Medical Superintendent (MS) Nasir DHO Hospital Chaman, Owas, are monitoring the health staff, and are closely monitoring emergency preparedness in the area.

They have conducted site inspections on Kohdak Top and neighboring 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.

UN Resident Coordinator Commends Balochistan's Digital Health Reforms During Quetta Visit

News Desk:

United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan, Mr. Mohamed Yahya, has praised Balochistan for its rapid progress in digitizing its health sector. In a health system, describing it as a major step toward transparent governance and improved healthcare delivery.

During a three-day visit to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Quetta, the UN delegation reviewed key advancements under the Balochistan Health Management Information System (BHMS) and other digital health platforms.

Mr. Yahya appreciated the leadership of Director General Health Services Dr. Ghulam Farooq Roth and acknowledged the efforts of the provincial health department in adopting technology-driven solutions.

Highlighting the impact of digital health reforms, Mr. Yahya said modern data systems aid



strengthening health sector governance, supporting real-time and evidence-based decision-making, and enhancing service delivery, particularly in remote and underserved areas of Balochistan. He termed the province's progress encouraging and aligned with global best practices in public health management. The visit also reaffirmed the United Nations' continued support for provincial health sector reforms in Pakistan and underscored the importance of collaboration between the Government of Balochistan and international partners to build resilient and inclusive health systems. Balochistan's digital transformation in healthcare includes the implementation of DHIS2, AI-enabled FRAMS, HRMIS, and integrated complaint and planning management modules. These initiatives are part of a broader push toward digital health governance.

Commissioner Quetta Division Shahzeh Khan Kakar Inspects Plaza Damaged by Fire in Liaquat Bazaar



QUIETTA : Commissioner Quetta Division, Shahzeh Khan Kakar, today conducted inspection of the plaza in Liaquat Bazaar that was severely affected by a fire. During the visit, he was accompanied by President of the Balochistan Traders Association, Rahim Khan Kakar, along with other prominent traders and shopkeepers.

Key Highlights of the Visit:

Inspection of Affected Areas: Commissioner Kakar thoroughly examined various parts of the damaged plaza and shops. He was briefed by the

traders' association about the nature of the incident and the extensive losses incurred due to the fire. Meeting with Affected Traders: Commissioner Kakar met with the affected traders and shopkeepers to hear about their concerns.

He assured them of full support and stated that once the district administration and police completed the investigation and legal procedures, the authorities would forward recommendations to higher officials for compensation to the affected businesses. Government's Commitment to Sup-

port: Commissioner Kakar assured the traders that the Balochistan government would not leave them in distress and would provide all possible assistance. He emphasized that the government stands by the victims and is committed to restoring their losses. Efficient Rescue Operations:

Commissioner Kakar highlighted the quick and coordinated responses from various agencies, including Rescue 1122, Fire Brigade, District Administration, and other concerned departments.

Their prompt action helped control the

fire after several hours of intense effort. Fortunately, no loss of life was reported, though significant damage to commercial goods and properties occurred.

Financial Loss and Government's Support: The fire caused severe financial losses, damaging goods and property. The Commissioner assured that the government of Balochistan would take high-level steps to address these damages and provide the necessary compensation to the victims. Future Safety Measures:

Commissioner Kakar highlighted the efforts of all agencies involved in the firefighting operation and stressed that measures would be taken to strengthen safety protocols and prevent such incidents in the future.

The heavy rainfall had caused roads to be blocked and water to accumulate in several areas, prompting immediate action.

Polio Eradication Campaign in Naseerabad Division: 4 Lakh Children to be Vaccinated

NASEERABAD:

Commissioner of Naseerabad Division, Salahuddin Noorzi, has emphasized the importance of making the upcoming polio eradication campaign a success.

The campaign will run from February 2 to

February 6, with a target to vaccinate over 400,000 children in the region.

Noorzi stressed that achieving

that target requires

serious, effective, and

coordinated efforts from all involved.

Addressing the Divisional Task Force for Polio Eradication, Noorzi stated that no compromised would be tolerated during the campaign.

And a strict monitoring system will be in place to ensure the effectiveness of field teams.

He also highlighted that the micro-plans for polio vaccination must be meticulous.

Noorzi emphasized

the importance of focusing on the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) to protect children from not only polio but also other communicable diseases.

With the strong commitment from local officials, health experts, and the community, Naseerabad Division is taking a significant step forward in the fight against polio, ensuring a healthier future for its children.

Loralai Division Takes Swift Action After Rain:

LORALAI: Following the recent rainfall in Loralai, Chief Officer of the Municipal Committee, Mohibullah Khan Baloch, under the direct instructions of Commissioner of Loralai Division, Mawaliullah Khan, conducted a site inspection of the situation that emerged in the city.

The heavy rainfall had caused roads to be blocked and water to accumulate in several areas, prompting immediate action.

PAKISTAN AIRPORTS AUTHORITY (PAA)

پاکستان ائیر پورس ایئر اسٹریٹ

INVITATION OF APPLICATIONS FOR PRE-QUALIFICATION OF CONSTRUCTORS / FIRMS

1. The Pakistan Airports Authority (PA) is an Autonomous body having own funds to finance the cost of "Construction of Aviation Complex at Jamiah Avenue, Blue Area, Islamabad" to eligible bidders under the contract for which the invitation for Pre-qualification is issued.

2. The Pakistan Airports Authority (PA) invites applications for Pre-qualification of Contractors/ Joint Ventures for the Works 3rd "Construction of Aviation Complex at Jamiah Avenue, Blue Area, Islamabad".

3. Constructors/firms/ joint ventures shall have following requirements:

a. Local constructors applying individually shall have valid registration with Pakistan Engineering Council in Category A or B or C or D or E or F or G or H or I or J or K or L or M or N or O or P or Q or R or S or T or U or V or W or X or Y or Z.

b. Local contractors may form Joint Venture/ Consoritum with local partner; each partner must have local registration with Pakistan Engineering Council in Category C-A.

c. Foreign constructors having registration with Pakistan Engineering Council in F-C-A Category or F-C-B Category or F-C-C Category or F-C-D Category or F-C-E Category or F-C-F Category or F-C-G Category or F-C-H Category or F-C-I Category or F-C-J Category or F-C-K Category or F-C-L Category or F-C-M Category or F-C-N Category or F-C-O Category or F-C-P Category or F-C-Q Category or F-C-R Category or F-C-S Category or F-C-T Category or F-C-U Category or F-C-V Category or F-C-W Category or F-C-X Category or F-C-Y Category or F-C-Z Category.

d. The Joint Venture/ Consoritum collectively shall have at least Specialization Codes CE-01, CE-02, CE-09, CE-49, CE-50, BC-43, ME-41, ME-02, ME-03, EE-02, EE-03 and EE-04.

e. Pre-qualification documents as per regulations, containing detailed terms and conditions, and requirements for the project shall be issued by PA on its website.

f. Applications for Pre-qualification shall be submitted in sealed envelopes in triplicate copies as per regulations.

g. Applications for Pre-qualification shall be submitted electronically through E-PADS at least 10 hours before the deadline and hard copy must be delivered in sealed envelopes by hand to below mentioned address not later than 1500 hours on 20th February 2026 and be clearly marked "Application for Pre-qualification for "Construction of Aviation Tower at Jamiah Avenue, Blue Area, Islamabad".

h. PA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications according to PPRA rules and reserves the right to reject late applications.

i. Bidding Documents will be issued to the pre-qualified firms only.

j. Director (P & D),

Planning and Development Directorate,

Headquarters, Airport Authority, Terminus, JAP, Karachi;

Ph # (021) 99242773 Ext. 2061 Fax # (021) 99242683;

Email: director_pdp@paas.gov.pk, corrimgbranch@gmail.com

www.paa.gov.pk

PID-X-24825

PRQ No.3396/22-01-2026

Dear Director
POST GRADUATE MEDICAL
INSTITUTE QUETTA

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 concern over the continued absence of the minister for economic affairs and provincial secretaries.

The Senate Secretariat has released 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 customs, while the imports of up to \$112.44 per unit, or about 700 per cent higher, were made by the World Bank for the SSEP. The difference was \$89.96 per unit. Investigations are underway into trade-based money laundering, tax evasion, fund layering and violations of foreign exchange rules.

According to the report, M/s Beyond Green Energy imported 10 consignments comprising 700,968 solar home system units be-



tween December 2024 and July 2025 through clearing agent M/s Vista Impex. The goods were declared under HS codes 8506.71, attracting zero customs duty, 18pc sales tax, 3pc additional sales tax and zero income tax. Declared unit values ranged from \$16.00 to \$23.4, and four consignments were cleared through the Green Chan-

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

under the SSEP with M/s Shenzhen LEMT Technology Development Co Ltd, China, revealed a contractual price of approximately \$112.44 per unit, including shipping 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 and shipping documents were also generated. In addition, general-evidence suggested third-party remittances

(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 Miftahul Aibro asked whether any suspensions of suspected officials had taken place and was informed that no such action 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 Abah Khan Cheema and senior bureaucrats, as well as the participation of 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 members, with PPP Senator Waqar Mehdhi remarking that he did not recall the minister ever attending a committee meeting and demanding that the minister's chair be removed.

Following the identification of discrepancies, the Sindh cabinet on Oct 9, 2025, referred the matter to the Enquiries and Anti-Corruption Establishment period ended on July 31, 2025, but around 30,000 solar kits out of 200,000 could not be distributed within the planned period. 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

Aurangzeb holds ADB talks on reforms at Davos

NEWS DESK: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mubashir Muhammed 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, regional 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 transition, citing renewed momentum in reforms and improving market confidence. He highlighted ADB's expanding engagement with 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 ADB had entered a more strategic phase. He said the past year marked a shift towards macroeconomic stability and that the positive trajectory was reflected in the economic indicators, pointing to a decline in inflation, declining foreign exchange reserves and improving fiscal health. He also highlighted the government's focus on infrastructure development, reflecting a 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 market liberalisation and the introduction of a new fiscal framework had contributed to a more stable and transparent economic environment.

In its Global Economic Prospects, January 2026 report, the World Bank noted that while growth across emerging markets has faced repeated floods, heatwaves and weather-related disruptions in recent years, inflation is still high, particularly in agriculture and public finances.

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

World Bank flags risks to economy

NEWS DESK: The World Bank has warned that escalating regional conflicts, climate shocks and clean energy policies could contribute to significant downside risks to economic recovery across the Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan and Central Asia (MENAAP) region. Pakistan among the most exposed economies due to its climate vulnerability and fragile environment.

Frontline market economies haven't lived up to potential since 2010, according to the report.

In its Global Economic Prospects, January 2026 report, the World Bank noted that while growth across emerging markets has faced repeated floods, heatwaves and weather-related disruptions in recent years, inflation is still high, particularly in agriculture and public finances.

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

landscape is particularly precarious. Classifications among climate-vulnerable emerging economies have faced repeated floods, heatwaves and weather-related disruptions in recent years, inflating lasting damage on agriculture and infrastructure and public finances.

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

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 and a potential banking shock, Pakistan's most recent, while not classified as a conflict economy in the strictest sense, remains exposed to regional instability, particularly in development linked to Afghanistan. Ongoing humanitarian and security challenges across the border raise the risk of spillovers through refu-

sting. Any deterioration in regional security conditions could undermine investor sentiment and damage exports to attract foreign capital, the report suggested.

Climate risks stand

out as a central concern.

The World Bank said that extreme weather events, floods in particular, can derail fragile recoveries by destroying crops, damaging transport infrastructure and forcing governments to divert scarce resources towards emergency relief.

Pakistan's devastating floods in recent years have already highlighted these vulnerabilities, with long-term effects still visible in rural households, food prices and public debt dynamics.

The report noted that climate risks often interact with economic 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 price 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, which could appear rapidly over the sharp rally triggered by geopolitical tensions, ongoing tariff wars and US inflation. Donald Trump's efforts to control Greenland.

According to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarahi Gems and Jewellers Association (APSGJA), based on interbank exchange rates, the domestic 10-gram gold rate rose to Rs434,123, up by Rs10,700 per tola.

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. The prices of 10-gram and one-tola gold have surged by Rs199,555 and Rs232,762, respec-

tively, while the international price has climbed by \$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 fluctuations in the past between the official rates announced by the association and open market rates prevailing at jewellers' stores. However, on Wednesday, jewellers were offering gold at Rs503,000-

per tola, also making large purchases of the yellow metal.

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

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

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 crude oil imports to stocks last week weighed on prices.

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

The contracts climbed more than 1pc on Wednesday following a rise of 1.5pc a day earlier, after Opec+ producer Kazakhstan halted output at its Tengiz and Kerev oilfields due to power distribution issues.

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

The cooling of the tattered currency of Greenland would reduce trade tensions between the US and Europe and is supportive of the US, but added that if Tehran re-

sumed its nuclear program.

Against the backdrop of Greenland and the receding prospect of Iran, oil prices should fall at least \$60 a barrel, said Tony Sycamore, an analyst with online broker IG.

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

Volodymyr Zelensky later in the day.

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

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



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

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

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

sumed its nuclear program.

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Babar Azam's BBL stint cut short, set to return to Pakistan for team camp

NEWS DESK: Babar Azam will miss the remainder of the Big Bash League as the Sydney Sixers announced Thursday that their opener had been recalled to Pakistan for national team camp ahead of a T20 series against Australia next week.

The announcement came just ahead of the Sixers' challenger final against Hobart Hurricanes today, with the winner to play Perth Scorchers in the BBL final in Perth on Sunday.

Babar thanked his team and coaches in a video message shared by the Sydney Sixers and BBL on social media.

"I have very much enjoyed my time here, and unfortunately, I'm going to leave the team because of national duty," he said. "I have a lot of things to take back home. Pakistan has yet to announce its squad for the three-match series



with Australia beginning January 29 in Lahore. The series will serve as a warm-up for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup next month.

So far, the Pakistan Cricket Board

(PCB) has not issued a statement on recalling Babar earlier this month.

According to Cricket, Babar had initially been available for the entire tournament and was not selected in Pakistan's three-match

T20 series against Sri Lanka earlier this month.

Sixers general manager Rachel Hayes confirmed that they had initially planned for Babar to play the entire tourna-

ment and were "simply grateful for the opportunity to have had Babar represent the club during his time in Australia".

All of Australia's

squad members who are still involved in the BBL will remain with their BBL teams until after the final on Jan 25.

With the rest of the squad flying to the UAE for a pre-tour camp on Jan 24,

The news comes just two days after Sixers captain Moises Henriques revealed that it took Babar "a couple of days" to settle after being "quite upset" at Steven Smith denying him a single against Cricinfo.

Sydney Thunder, Cricinfo reported.

Cricket Australia reported that commentator and former Australian batter Mark Waugh called for the Sixers to drop Babar when speaking to Fox Cricket Australia before Wednesday's Hurricanes-Stars Knockout match.

"Unfortunately, I'm going to have to drop Babar Azam. I don't think he's done enough at the top of the order."

"I know he's world-class, but you're thinking about winning this tournament, and so far he just hasn't done (enough)," Cricket Australia quoted Waugh as saying.

"I'm thinking about a new opener."

Babar finishes his first stint in the BBL with 202 runs from 11 games, averaging 18.36 and ending it just 103.06 despite making two half-centuries, according to Cricinfo.

Alcaraz, Sabalenka surge into AO



NEWS DESK:

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz fended off a series of "bombs" before winning the third round on Wednesday, where he was joined by Aryna Sabalenka and a gearless Coco Gauff.

Three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev also stayed alive, but he needed four sets to keep his Grand Slam dream on track at a cooler and overcast Melbourne Park after days of hot weather.

Spanish superstar Alcaraz came through a tough arm-wrestle 7-6(7-4), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena, ending a run of four straight losses to German Quentin Hahn. He lost a tight first set but the result was never in doubt as he surged into the fourth set to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

But the top seed Alcaraz came through a tough arm-wrestle 7-6(7-4), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena, ending a run of four straight losses to German Quentin Hahn. He lost a tight first set but the result was never in doubt as he surged into the fourth set to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

It was a very tough match, happy I managed to fight," said the Russian, who faces Fabrice Martin of Hungary next.

American Tommy Paul, Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo and Tomas Etcheverry, Spain's Alejandro Davidovich and Russia's Andrey Rublev also safely negotiated the second round.

Alexander Zverev is in action in the evening session, while France's Alphonse Muller, the latest challenger in the German's decade-long quest for a first Grand Slam title. The world number 100, who reached the final last year to Jason Kubler, did not drop a set in his opening clash but said it was good to be stretched early in the

tournament. "Nice perfect."

Four-time major winner Sabalenka raced 6-0 clear of qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan, ranked 6702, on centre court in 44 minutes to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

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tournament. "Nice perfect," said the Russian, who faces Fabrice Martin of Hungary next.

"From the (first) set, it close the (first) set, it gives me confidence that my game is there, my focus is there," said Sabalenka, who is bidding for a second Australian Open title in four years. "Step by step. Super-happy with my win. There is always a little gap to improve."

Sabalenka has dropped only one game so far as she looks to make amends for her upset in last year's final to Madison Keys.

Asian Masters weightlifting event postponed due to unrest in Iran

NEWS DESK: The second Asian Masters Weightlifting and Grand Prix Championship, which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad next month, has been postponed due to the ongoing unrest in Iran.

The Asian Masters Weightlifting Association (PMWA) said on Wednesday that the event will now be held from April 20 to 25, 2026 in the Pakistani capital.

Quoting the International Masters Weightlifting Association (IMWA) secretariat, the PMWA stated that the IMWA after holding a meeting with it decided to postpone the event due to a number of reasons concerning Iran.

It is pertinent to mention here that most of Asian Masters Weightlifting Committee members are Iranians while Asian Masters Weightlifting secretariat is run through Iran, where currently there is no internet connectivity.

"From the 21 nations participating in the event one fourth are from Iran. It is uncertain if any Iranian will be [able] to leave their

country to travel to Pakistan for the event (originally) scheduled to be held from Feb 6 to 11, 2026.

"Fact is that other International Masters Athletes, coaches and technical officials' flights will be delayed or canceled.

Recently, most of the international/Asian airlines

cancelled

their

flights to or flying over Iranian air space," read the IMWA letter.

The letter further said

that registration will

open

to allow more athletes

to participate in the

Abhishek blitzes New Zealand in big India win

NEWS DESK: Opener Abhishek Sharma smashed an incendiary 84 to fashion India's 48-run victory against New Zealand in the first Twenty20 International in Nagpur on Wednesday.

Put into bat, India, who will begin their T20 World Cup title defense next month, racked up 238* with Abhishek hammering eight sixes in his 35-ball blitz.

Glen Phillips struck a rapid 78 New Zealand finished on 190-7 at Sharjah Cricket Association Stadium. Earlier, Abhishek, currently the top-ranked T20 batsman in the world, led India's charge with a blistering knock, followed by his opening partner Sanju Samson and number three Ishan Kishan.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav had 50* in 23 minutes, while he fell short of the mark again, he looked fluent in his 32. Hardik Pandya (25) departed after a

game before Rinku Singh provided the late assault, plundering 21 runs in the final over from Daryl Mitchell.

Rinku's unbroken 40 off 30 runs included three sixes. New Zealand slumped to 52-3 in the seventh over in their wobbly start to a steep chase.

Phillips counter-attacked in spectacular style, hitting sixes in his 40-ball blitz, and Mark Chapman (39) also stepped on the gas but

both fell to spin in quick succession as India regained control.

Spinner Axar Patel, who removed Phillips, left the field with a bleed on his head, but he came back over, but India had enough bowling resources to restrict New Zealand well behind their target.

The teams now move to Ranchi for the second T20 of the five-match series on Friday.

Scoreboard: INDIA:

S. Samson c Ravindra b Jamison 10 c T. Robinson c Dube b Varun21

A. Sharma c R. Ravindra b Sharma b Pandya 9 c G. Phillips c Dube b Patel78

I. Kishan c Chapman b Duffy8 c M. Chapman c Sharma b Varun29

R. Pandya c D. Mitchell c (sub) b Dube28

S. Dube c &b M. Santner not out20

K. Clarke c R. Singh b Dube28

J. Jamieson not out1

EXTRAS (W/22)

TOTAL (for seven wkt, 20 overs)190

1. DODG BATT: I. Sodhi, J. Duffy

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-18 (Samson), 2-27

(Ravindra), 3-126 (Yadav), 4-140 (Pandya), 5-168 (Dube), 6-185 (Pandya), 7-209 (Patel)

BOWLING: Duffy 4-0-72-3 (3w), Jamieson 4-0-54-2 (3w), Clarke 4-0-41, Pandya 3-0-38-4, Phillips 1-0-30-0, Santner 1-0-37-1, Mitchell 1-0-21-0 (1w)

RESULT: India won by 48 runs.

NEW ZEALAND: D. Conway c

Samson b. Singh0

PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Abhishek Sharma

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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 230 million euros in regular 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 Hadia Laabib took this commitment to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to seek private sector finance and innovative solutions that can complement public funding.

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

EU and its members states remain the leading global humanitarian aid donor.

Displaced population, the UNHCR said in its "2025 Impact Report" that it responded to a complex mix of new emergencies and long-standing crises in 2025 that forced millions from their homes.

By the end of June 2025, an estimated 117.3m people were forcibly displaced worldwide, five percent 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.

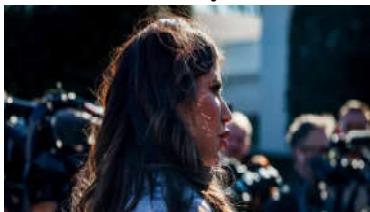
Within just seven days of its introduction, the number of co-sponsors backing their impeachment resolution has reached 100, sponsors of the resolution said on Wednesday.

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 a social backlash nationwide.

At a White House press briefing on Tuesday, US President Donald Trump described the shooting as "tragic" 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. Robbi Kelly of Illinois, accuses Ms Noem of "abetting 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 to Texas to 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 in Minnesota to "forcefully enter" and "misuse 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 about Congress and violate people's civil rights, we demand support for her impeachment now or grows," Ms Kelly said, urging Congress 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 it often took 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.

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 the resolution is now nearing half the party. A spokesperson for Ms Kelly said more offices and that additional sponsors were expected. The Department of Homeland Security has dismissed the impeachment drive as "silly," saying Democrats are "just shooting the focus on crime in their own districts."

While Democrats can force a vote on the measure, it often takes 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.

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

NEWS DESK : Bangladesh begins official campaigning on Thursday for its long-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 fake news.

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

Massive rallies are expected with hundreds of thousands of supporters gathering, as the frontrunners, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the larg-



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

BNP chief and prime ministerial candidate, Tariqul Islam, 60, who returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile, is due to address a series of rallies starting on Saturday. A large crowd of supporters lined both sides of the streets as Rahman prayed at the shrine on Wednesday night, cheering as his election

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

NEWS DESK: The US is due to officially exit the World Health Organization. This day 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 organization 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 departing.

On Thursday, a US State Department spokesperson said the WHO's failure to share information and manage its resources were "most re-

garding him in this case, 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.

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 paid the fees it owes for 2020 and 2025. Member states and partners

are urging the US to leave the WHO's executive board in February, a WHO spokesman told Reuters by email.

"This is a clear violation of US law," said Lawrence Gostin, 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 organizations and some of the WHO's work — said he did not expect the US to reconsider in the short-term.

Iran releases official death toll of 3,117 after weeks of violent nationwide protests

NEWS DESK: The Iranian government announced the official death toll from nationwide protests, placing the number of deaths above 15,000, the majority of them protesters.

Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, rejected those reports.

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

Weeks later, following a call for street protests by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 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 "terrorists" who allegedly attacked their property, including shops, banks and mosques.

Iranian officials said hundreds of leading protesters 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 annual summit was revoked.

Following the an-

