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Rimpa Plaza declared structurally unsafe

NEWS DESK:

In the aftermath of the devastating fire at Gul Plaza, the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has declared the adjacent Rimpa Plaza structurally unsafe. Authorities have issued official notices to the management and shop owners, temporarily sealing the building last night to prevent any use of the damaged areas.

According to SBCA officials, debris from the Gul Plaza fire severely damaged several structural columns of Rimpa Plaza, creating significant safety risks for both life and property. As a precaution, all affected sections have been prohibited from use until structural repairs are completed under the supervision of a certified structural engineer. Concrete jacking-a specialised technical process aimed at restoring the load-bearing capacity of weakened columns-has already begun, with additional steel reinforcement and structural strengthening measures being implemented.

SBCA emphasised that the building will only be reopened after a full safety clearance is issued following comprehensive structural assessments and non-destructive testing. Any unauthorised use of the premises before official clearance will result in strict legal action under the Sindh Building Control regulations. SBCA checks 35 buildings for fire safety. The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has launched a province-wide enforcement drive to ensure strict compliance with fire safety laws in residential and commercial buildings. At least 35 buildings have been checked in Karachi in the first phase. On the directives of Sindh Local Government Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, fire safety notices have been issued across all regions of Sindh, making it clear that the action is not limited to Karachi alone. SBCA regional offices have been instructed to inspect buildings and take strict legal action in cases of non-compliance to safeguard lives and property. SBCA Director General Muzamil Hussain Halepoto said special technical teams have been constituted to assess the availability and functionality of firefighting equipment, emergency exits, fire alarm systems and overall emergency preparedness. He said inspections have been intensified following the tragic Gul Plaza fire, which exposed serious shortcomings in fire safety arrangements in both residential and commercial buildings.

47 Illegal Chromite Mines Shut Down in Pishin as Balochistan CM Vows Crackdown

Syed Ali Shah:

QUETTA: Chief Minister of Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has stated that all mineral resources of Balochistan belong to the people of the province, and illegal mining remains a serious and long-standing issue that is causing massive losses

to the national exchequer.

He said that in recent days, a successful operation was carried out against illegal chromite mining in Pishin district with the cooperation of the district administration and law enforcement agencies, resulting in the closure of 47 illegal mines. This action, he added, is part of the provincial

government's policy to protect mineral resources and ensure the rule of law.

According to the Chief Minister, the province earns less than Rs10 billion annually from the mines and minerals sector, mainly due to illegal mining, smuggling, and a weak regulatory framework. He emphasized that sustainable economic development of the province is not possible without curbing these illegal activities.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti announced that the provincial government is introducing a comprehensive and effective policy to reform the minerals sector, aimed at ensuring transparency, promoting legal mining,

protecting the rights of local communities, and significantly increasing provincial revenue.

He further stated that while the government will encourage investment within the legal framework, a zero-tolerance policy will be adopted against those involved in illegal mining.

Police arrest injured suspect after alleged shootout in Rawalpindi

NEWS DESK:

Police in Rawalpindi say one shooting suspect has been arrested and a stolen car and weapons recovered after an alleged encounter in the New Town area.

According to police, two men travelling in a car opened fire on a police team when officers signalled them to stop. During the exchange of fire, one suspect was injured and arrested, while the second managed to escape. The arrested suspect has been identified as Adnan. Police say a car stolen two months ago from the New Town area was recovered from his possession. A police constable, identified as Umar, was also struck by a bullet during the incident but remained unharmed due to wearing a bulletproof jacket. Senior police officers reached the scene following the incident, and a search operation is underway in the surrounding area to arrest the absconding suspect. The injured suspect was shifted to the hospital for medical treatment. Police said the arrested man was a known offender and had previously been involved in several car theft cases.

Sardar Muhammad Khondai, Munir Shahwani, Syed Muhammad Qaseem:

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Balochistan has wrapped up an extensive rescue operation in areas affected by heavy snowfall, ensuring the safety of travelers stranded amid harsh winter conditions, Adviser to the Chief Minister for Political and Media Affairs Shahid Rind said. "Our priority was to protect lives," Shahid Rind said, adding that rescue teams remained active despite severe cold and difficult terrain.

"Several vehicles stuck in snow were recovered, and passengers were promptly moved to safer locations. He noted that hundreds of travelers, including vulnerable groups, were rescued in time. "Swift coordination and timely response by PDMA and supporting teams helped avert potential



loss of life during extreme weather," he said.

Officials confirmed that the Ziarat Road was blocked due to intense snowfall, causing major disruption to traffic. Clearance work and rescue activities continued until all stranded motorists were safely assisted and relocated. Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti commended PDMA Balochistan for its effective response and praised the dedication of officers and field teams. "Their commitment and professionalism under challenging conditions reflect the government's resolve to safeguard citizens," the Chief Minister said.

In recognition of their efforts, the Chief Minister announced certificates of appreciation for officers and teams who supervised and carried out the rescue operation, acknowledging their exemplary performance during the emergency.

THE BALUCH VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan Government Abolishes Levies Force After 142 Years: Historic Merger with Police Sparks Debate

Editorial: In a landmark administrative reform, the Government of Balochistan has abolished the historic Levies Force after 142 years, merging it into the Balochistan Police. The decision, approved by the Balochistan Cabinet, aims to modernize the province's law enforcement system and enhance its law and order capacity — but it has also sparked reservations among Levies personnel and opposition from several political parties.

A Force Rooted in History

The Levies Force of Balochistan was established in 1883 by Sir Robert Sandeman, the British political agent and administrator of the region. The force's core responsibilities included maintaining law and order, protecting vital installations, and collecting taxes and livestock revenue in tribal areas.

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Previous Reform and Political Reversals
The merger of the Levies Force into the police is not unprecedented. During the tenure of General Pervez Musharraf, the force was initially merged with the police under then-Chief Minister Jam Muhammad Yousaf. However, the move was reversed in 2008 by

Nawab Aslam Raisani of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), restoring the Levies to their traditional structure.

Now, more than a decade later, the Balochistan Assembly has again legislated to merge the Levies with the police, signaling the government's intent to build a unified, modern, and well-equipped law enforcement system in the province.

Government's Stance: Modernization and Uniformity

The provincial government describes the decision as part of a larger strategy to ensure professional policing, better coordination, and modern security management.

Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti stated that integrating the Levies with the police will help enhance counterterrorism capacity, digital monitoring, and operational effectiveness.

"This merger will help establish one uniform policing system in Balochistan. The government will provide modern equipment and training to all personnel to effectively deal with terrorism and extremism," the Chief Minister said. Officials emphasize that the reform will strengthen institutional structure, reduce duplication, and ensure better governance in remote and conflict-prone districts.

Reservations and Political Opposition

However, the decision has not been met with universal approval. Levies personnel across several districts have expressed strong reservations, arguing

that the merger undermines their historical role, tribal identity, and trust-based relationship with local communities.

A number of political parties in Balochistan have also opposed the move, describing it as a "hasty and non-consultative decision." They claim that the Levies Force has historically played a crucial role in maintaining peace in tribal areas where the police system remains ineffective.

Critics argue that merging a tribal community-based security structure into a centralized police institution could disrupt local dynamics and alienate the public. Some parties have demanded a parliamentary review of the cabinet's decision before full implementation.

A Divisive but Defining Reform

Despite the opposition, the Balochistan Government remains firm on its stance, describing the merger as a step toward institutional modernization, national integration, and professional law enforcement.

Supporters of the decision believe it will bring uniformity, transparency, and accountability across all districts, enabling the province to better combat militancy and improve coordination with federal security agencies such as the Frontier Corps (FC) and Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD).

The coming months will reveal whether this bold reform strengthens Balochistan's security apparatus or fuels administrative and political friction within the province. Without a collective

Addressing Poverty and Inequality: A Call for Sincere Leadership and Perpetual Reforms



By Amjad Rashid:

Poverty and inequality, much like natural disasters, afflict societies worldwide, including Pakistan. These are not natural phenomena but rather systemic issues rooted in human actions and policies. To eradicate this disease, national governments must craft comprehensive strategies aimed at safeguarding future generations from its scourge.

In Pakistan, the onus lies heavily on our political elite, spanning all parties, to recognize the gravity of the situation and redirect their efforts towards combating this man-made affliction. Without a collective

awakening and a shift in approach, the cure will remain elusive. Moreover, at the international level, institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and the UN must prioritize social and cultural rights over neoliberal agendas, especially as the global order undergoes significant decay.

The challenges of poverty alleviation, malnutrition, stunted growth, inadequate sanitation, and unemployment are pervasive across South Asia and Africa. Collaborative efforts between these regions, bolstered by partnerships with nations like China, hold promise in addressing these issues.

However, reliance on the failing neoliberal order is futile; instead, a paradigm shift towards sustainable solutions is imperative. In Pakistan, the establishment of robust local governance structures with financial decentralization is paramount.

Political elites possess a window of opportunity to empower local bodies and enact pro-poor policies. The Chinese model serves as a beacon of inspiration, demonstrating the efficacy of such strategies when implemented effectively.

Regional connectivity, underpinned by a long-term vision, emerges as a viable solution. It necessitates moving beyond the romanticized notions of democracy and socialism towards pragmatic approaches that address our unique challenges.

Special economic zones, coupled with initiatives for youth development and the expansion of remittances, offer short-term relief while perpetuating reforms to broaden the tax base and reduce dependency on electoral politics.

South Asia, in particular, requires a concerted effort towards prioritizing this agenda and steering Pakistan towards a brighter future.

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Energy shortage in Balochistan

Ajmal Khan
Poverty is not a static or fixed phenomenon. It is a multi-dimensional idea that encompasses quality in almost every sphere of life, ranging from calorie intake, life expectancy, living standards, literacy, and access to modern energy services. This type of poverty is always expressed from an income perspective. Sticking with the non-income dimensions of poverty, such as health, education and living standards, are as important as employment.

The two energy indicators of non-income dimensions, including electricity (no access to electricity) and cooking fuels (wood, dung and charcoal), constitute poverty. Goal no. 7 of SDGs contains universal access to modern energy services, increasing energy efficiency, and increasing renewable energy share. As we know, energy plays a vital role in the development process of a country, but in case of Pakistan, energy poverty is the largest single drain on Pakistan's economy.

When we talk about Balochistan, it is the direct and major victim of energy crisis, and has slowed down the growth of the province. Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, having an area of 347,190 km square and a population of 12,344,408 people. The major portion of the population live in rural areas, constituting 72.45%.

Only 36 Percent of Balochistan has access to energy. Balochistan is fac-

ing an acute energy shortage that has stopped the development not only in the economic and agriculture sector, but also in every walk of life. According to a document submitted to the National Assembly of Pakistan, only 36% of Balochistan is electrified, while the remaining 64% of Balochistan still doesn't have access to energy. Due to the scattered population living in rural areas, it is impossible to electrify them. In 2018, the total demand of Balochistan was 1650 MW, but supply was limited to 600 MW, and in 2019 the demand has been raised to 2500 MW.

Energy Projects in CPEC
Energy is the prominent component of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Almost 70% of the CPEC projects were related to the energy sector, which comprises thermal, hydal, coal and wind. Unfortunately, Balochistan is being left out of these projects.

Out of 13 mega projects related to energy, six projects are being located in Punjab, six in Sindh and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Once again, the energy-starved and downtrodden province has been ignored and not given its due share to fulfill its energy demands. The energy generated by these projects will not give any relief to the consumers in Balochistan.

The already installed transmission lines are inadequate, and the province does not have the capability and capacity to absorb

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enough to generate electricity. In this line, Pakistan Council of Renewable Energy Technologies (PCRET) has electrified 1600 villages along the coastal side of Sindh and Balochistan.

A study suggested that the coastal belt of Pakistan can produce 50,000 MW through wind resources. To minimize the cost of these projects, the government should encourage local manufacturers of wind turbines.

In this regard, to overcome the energy poverty in Balochistan, the federal government can play a vital role in alleviating energy poverty by using renewable energy resources in electrifying the rural areas of Balochistan keeping in view the solar radiance and wind speed, there is a huge potential for renewable energy in the province. They should not electrify the far-flung areas with conventional grid-based methods because it will maximize their cost as the traditional modes of energy are expensive, and in the long run, it cannot meet the energy demand for sustainable development. The government should provide the due share in CPEC related energy projects to the province.

Suppose the issues related to energy poverty are not taken seriously, the dream of achieving SDGs will never be achieved, and the already poverty-stricken province will observe more difficulties in the coming days.

The author is a research officer, member of Balochistan Think Tank Network.





'Inefficiencies' no reason to delay promotion: SC

NEWS DESK: The Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that government-run departments cannot invoke their own administrative inefficiencies and procedural delays as justification for failing to ensure timely promotions.

"Safeguarding an employee's right to be considered for promotion in a timely manner is a right," observed Justice Ayesha A. Malik, adding that the government departments cannot take shelter behind their inefficiencies and inactions by relying on Section 8(3) of the Punjab Civil Servants Act 1974, as they are responsible for ensuring timely promotions.

The observation came in an appeal of Fakhar Majed before the Supreme Court, which a three-judge bench comprising Justice Ayesha A. Malik, Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, and Justice Ishaq Ibrahim had taken up against a February 16, 2024, order of the Punjab Service Tribunal, which had dismissed his plea.

The Supreme

Court, however, ordered the Punjab Irrigation Department to grant promotion to the employee from 2012 and held the department responsible for an "unjustified", "negligent", and "inefficient" delay in processing his promotion for over a decade. The petitioner stated that he was entitled to a proforma promotion, effective January 18, 2010, as the vacancy for the post of draftsman (BPS-14) became available on that date. Court says civil servants should not suffer due to procedural delays, inaction of government departments.

The department, on the other hand, pleaded that in terms of Section 8 of the Act, the employee did not have any right to seek proforma promotion from the date of vacancy, rather, promotion was to be granted with immediate effect.

Petitioner Fakhar Majed was appointed on Oct 30, 1999, and later promoted to the post of draftsman (BPS-14) with effect from Jan 18, 2010.

through letters dated Dec 11, 2008, June 2, 2010, and Nov 12, 2011, for a period not exceeding one year under Rule 10(b) of the Punjab Civil Servants (Appointment & Condition of Services) Rules 1974 or till the arrival of regular incumbent whichever is earlier.

A Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) was convened in 2012, but his case was not considered. This became the subject matter of a dispute between the parties.

The employee was ultimately recommended for promotion to the post of draftsman by the DPC held on May 4, 2019, and thereafter promoted through an office order of May 7, 2019.

The petitioner claimed that he was not treated fairly and was denied the lawful right of being considered for promotion in 2012. The issue, therefore, is the petitioner's request for regular promotion to the post of draftsman (BPS-14) with effect from Jan 18, 2010.

FIA cybercrime officers accused of abducting families, extorting millions

NEWS DESK: A major corruption scandal has surfaced in the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA).

Guantanamo, as the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Composite Circle has registered a case against three of its own officers, along with their accomplices, on charges of corruption, bribery, extortion and abuse of authority.

Three government officials, among others, have been taken into custody.

The NCCIA, established to strengthen enforcement of cyber laws, has come under scrutiny after allegations emerged that its officers, in collusion with private individuals, struck deals worth millions of rupees with suspects involved in online fraud cases and released them after receiving illegal payments.

Following reports from intelligence agencies and a citizen's complaint, the FIA initiated action and registered an FIR.

According to the FIR, complainant

Muzammil Iqbal, a resident of Garden Town, Gujranwala, stated that he had received information that certain FIA Cyber Crime Wing officers were extracting huge sums from accused persons with the help of private associates.

He alleged that on February 2, 2025, unidentified men entered his house, introduced themselves as FIA officials, held family members hostage, seized mobile phones and subjected male members of the family to torture before blindfolding them and confining them to a room.

The complainant said 15 mobile phones, a laptop, a car, cash and ATM cards were taken away.

The family was later shifted to the FIA Cyber Crime office, where they were questioned about online business activities and cryptocurrency.

The FIR further states that the victims were forced to pay large amounts of cash, cryptocurrency and money through bank

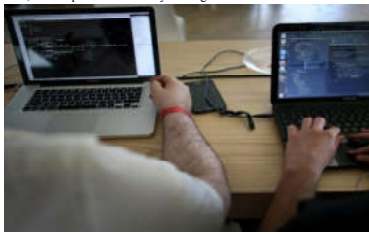
transactions at different times, while further payments were demanded to avoid legal action.

Some items were later returned, but cash and one mobile phone were not.

Another victim, Salman Raza, alleged that his family was abducted, tortured and a demand of Rs50 million was made.

Muzammil Iqbal claimed that after negotiations involving FIA personnel, a "deal" was finalised for Rs30 million, out of which Rs3 million in cash and around Rs1.5 million through bank and ATM transactions were paid before their release.

Following a preliminary inquiry, the FIA registered a case against FIA Cyber Crime Wing personnel Mujahid Ali, Shahroz and Ali Akbar, as well as their private accomplices Haji Waqar, Asim Mahmood and Usman Ali, under relevant sections of the Pakistan Penal Code, anti-corruption laws and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.



'Diplomatic win': In joint session, govt again defends decision to join Trump-led Board of Peace

NEWS DESK:

The government on Friday again defended its decision to join the Board of Peace led by US President Donald Trump, with Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal saying that Pakistan being at the "centre stage" along with its brother Muslim countries to contribute towards peace in Gaza and Palestine was a "diplomatic win".

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was among the leaders and senior officials of 19 countries, including Pakistan, who gathered in Davos on Thursday and put their names to the founding charter of the Board of Peace. A move that has been denounced by the opposition. Trump had originally proposed establishing the board when he announced his plan last September to end the onslaught in Gaza. It was originally meant to oversee peace in Gaza after Israel's two-year onslaught on the Palestinian enclave, but the board's charter envisioned a wider role in resolving international



conflicts. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Thursday had defended the move in the National Assembly, saying the country joined the body meant to oversee Gaza's rebuilding in the interest of the Palestinian people. The matter was again debated in a joint session of Parliament on Friday, summoned by President Asif Ali Zardari a day earlier, and

presided over by National Assembly (NA) Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq. Arguing in defence of the government's decision to join the board during the session, Iqbal said this "diplomatic win" should be celebrated. He began his speech by recalling nuclear tests by Pakistan in 1998. "We set an example of Pakistan's liberty and sovereignty when the then-US presi-

dent called five times [...] Pakistan was being pressurised from the world, but we took the decision [to conduct the tests] with courage," he said. Amid a noisy protest from the opposition benches, he asserted, "We don't need to be taught about Pakistan's defence and integrity. We are the defenders of Pakistan's freedom and sovereignty."

He went on to emphatically state that with the PML-N in power, "there can be no danger to Pakistan's integrity and sovereignty." Iqbal said the government and armed forces had proved during a four-day conflict with India in May that anyone intending to harm the country would get a befitting reply. "So nobody can taunt that we are cowards and negligent."

PTI seeks withdrawal of asset secrecy bill

NEWS DESK: PTI NA

Asad Chaiser, while speaking in the National Assembly on Thursday, raised objections to the bill ensuring the secrecy of lawmakers' assets passed a day earlier, saying parliamentarians were not above ordinary citizens. He announced PTI's dissociation from the bill and sought its withdrawal.

Under Section 137 of the Elections Act, all members of parliament and provincial assemblies are required to submit to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on or before Dec 31 each year, a statement of their assets and liabilities, including those of their spouses and dependent children. Section 138 of the Act requires the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette.

The proposed amendment to Section 138 seeks to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the Speaker of the

concerned Assembly or, as the case may be, the Chairman of the Senate may, on an application made by a member and for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the Commission if such publication would pose a serious threat to the life or safety of the member or, as the case may be, his family, for a period not exceeding one year at a time and subject to the condition that a complete and true statement of assets and liabilities shall be submitted confidentially to the Election Commission."

On Thursday, the House also passed the Income Tax Third Amendment Bill 2025, moved by Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani, who said it aimed to safeguard taxpayers' rights and



strengthen the Alternate Dispute Resolution Committee. NA passes Income Tax Third Amendment Bill.

The National Assembly was informed that billions of dollars in investment had been attracted through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal

Chaudhry said investments had come across multiple sectors, supported by initiatives such as the investment policy and revised visa policy.

Minister of State Bilal Azhar Kayani added that the SIFC functioned as a single window to promote investment and transparency.

Furthermore, seven new bills were laid before the assembly for consideration.

These included the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Authority Bill, the National Archives Amendment Bill, 2026, and the Abandoned Properties Management Amendment Bill, 2026.

Death toll from Karachi's Gul Plaza inferno reaches 71; search operation in 'final stages'

NEWS DESK: The death toll of Karachi's Gul Plaza blaze crossed 70 on Friday as rescuers found more remains from the rubble of the gutted shopping centre.

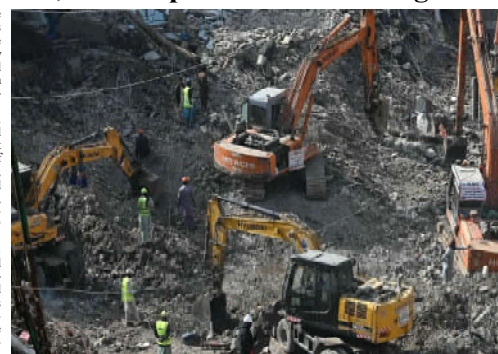
Police Surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed issued an updated list of 71 deceased. Of the 16 identified so far, nine were identified through DNA tests, which have been performed for 49 samples.

The deadly inferno, which erupted on the night of January 17 at the mall and took nearly two days to be fully extinguished, has left the ground-plus-three-storey building in ruins, with some sections collapsed.

As more bodies were recovered from different parts of the building, officials cautioned that the final toll can only be determined once the identification of the remains is completed.

Meanwhile, officials expressed the hope to complete their search efforts today. South Deputy Commissioner (DC) Javed Nahi Khoso told reporters that the search operation was in the "final stages".

"The search in the wreckage will be completed today," he said.



Stating that a total of 77 missing persons had been reported, he said the recovery efforts were being made under the supervision of the Sindh Building and Control Authority's (SBCA) team.

The director general (DG) of Sindh Rescue 1122, Brigadier (ret'd) Wajid Shighatullah Mahar, said rescue personnel reached the site.

The official further said that 15 to 20 people were rescued and evacuated when the blaze erupted.

"Either the fire safety system was not present in the building,

or it was not activated," Mahar said. He revealed that the latest technology had been used over the past three days to aid the search process.

Defending Rescue 1122's efforts, Mahar asserted that the teams had modern equipment.

The inferno had turned into a third-degree fire by the time rescue personnel reached the site.

However, he added, the police were still investigating why the fire spread quickly.

CM Murad briefed Sindh Assembly Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah also briefed

the provincial assembly on the incident during its proceedings today, with Mayor Murtaza Wahab in attendance.

He informed the assembly that the fire erupted at a ground-floor shop at 10:14pm on January 17, with the first call received by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) from a shop owner's son.

The first fire brigade was dispatched at 10:27pm from a fire station near the Civil Hospital Karachi, Murad said, adding that Rescue 1122 received the first call at 10:36pm.

IGP Balochistan Promotes Sports for Police Personnel's Physical and Mental Well-being

QUETTA: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Balochistan, Muhammad Tahir, emphasized the importance of promoting sports within the Balochistan Police, highlighting that providing athletes with all necessary facilities is a top priority.

He stressed that sports play a pivotal role in keeping society free from negative activities and contribute to the mental and physical strength of the youth. "He made these remarks during a cricket match held at the Police Training College (PTC), where he addressed the players.

The match was organized between the PTC Commandant and the trainees. IGP Balochistan praised the performance of the young police officers, noting that they are bringing honor to both the province and the



department on a national level. The participation of young police officers in sports not only improves discipline, tolerance, teamwork,

and professional skills but also provides a constructive outlet for the youth, guiding them away from societal vices," IGP Muhammad Tahir

stated. During his visit, the IGP interacted with the trainees playing cricket, football, and volleyball, acknowledging their enthusiasm,

dedication, and performance. His encouragement and appreciation helped uplift the spirits of the trainees.

In addition, futsal, football, and volleyball matches were organized, focusing on physical fitness, teamwork, and positive engagement. In the final

match of the cricket tournament, the PTC Commandant's team faced off against the trainees in an intense and thrilling contest. After hard-

fought matches, the Commandant's team emerged victorious in all three formats – cricket, football, and volleyball.

IGP Muhammad Tahir also participated as a special guest in the cricket match, further boosting the morale of the trainees.

The event was attended by Additional IGP and BC Commandant Ashfaq Ahmed, PTC Commandant Sherzad Akbar, PSO Ateez Ahmed, and other senior officers.

At the conclusion of the event, the IGP distributed awards to the outstanding performers in the sports events and reaffirmed his commitment to continuously promoting sports activities within the Balochistan Police, ensuring that such positive and healthy endeavors are sustained in the future.

Important Meeting of District Coordination Committee Held in Jaffarabad: Review of Ongoing Development Projects under B.S.D.I.

JAFFARABAD: An important meeting of the District Coordination Committee was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan, with the participation of district heads from various departments.

The meeting focused on the detailed review of ongoing development projects under the Balochistan Special Development Initiative (B.S.D.I.) Phase I and II.

During the session, each district head presented an update on the progress of their respective projects, highlighting



the challenges encountered and the stages of completion.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan directed that all ongoing schemes under B.S.D.I. be given special attention and completed within the

stipulated time frame. He emphasized that no compromise will be made on the quality of the development projects, urging the use of all available resources to ensure timely and high-quality services for the public.

The Deputy Commissioner also instructed the district heads to enhance coordination, expedite field monitoring activities, and submit regular progress reports to ensure the successful achievement of development objectives.

DC Sibi Chairs Meeting on Correction of Date of Birth in SAP System

SIBI: A meeting regarding the correction of Date of Birth in the SAP system of government employees was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Sibi, Major (R) Ilyas Kabazi.

The meeting was attended by committee members including Senior Accounts Officer Mir Gehrani Lashari, District Accounts Officer Abdul Sattar Lang, In-charge Local & Domestic Branch Ali Budar, along with the affected government employees.

The Deputy Commissioner Sibi personally reviewed all submitted cases and thoroughly examined the relevant documents.

The committee discussed the cases that were presented in the previous meeting, in which employees' dates of birth were incorrectly

recorded in the SAP system. Cases with complete and valid documentation were approved, while some cases were rejected due to incomplete records. Additionally, a few new cases were presented before the committee, which will be reviewed

in detail and decided upon in the upcoming meeting. Deputy Commissioner Sibi directed that all cases should be processed transparently and strictly in accordance with rules and regulations, ensuring timely relief for eligible government employees.

PPP Leader Haji Ali Madad Jatak Meets Citizens in Quetta to Address Public Issues

QUETTA: Senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) Haji Ali Madad Jatak held an important meeting at his residence in Quetta, where he interacted with a large number of tribal elders and citizens. During

the meeting, the attendees raised their concerns, issues, and suggestions, which Haji Ali Madad Jatak attentively listened to with seriousness and empathy.

Addressing the gathered citizens, Haji Ali Madad Jatak assured them that their issues would be taken

up with the relevant departments and high-ranking officials for prompt and effective solutions.

He emphasized that as a public representative, his foremost priority is to serve the people, protect their rights, and resolve their problems. Haji Ali Madad

Jatak further stated that the PPP has always believed in people-centered politics, and he would continue to highlight the concerns of the public on every forum. He pledged to remain committed to serving the people and fulfilling their trust in him.



District Education Group Committee Meeting Held in Gwadar

GWADAR: An important meeting of the District Education Group Committee was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Gwadar, Nageebullah Kakar, to review key education-related matters across the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Shakor, District Education Officer Zahid Hussain, District Officer Education (Female) Zaraton Bibi, District Officer Education (Male) Abdul Wahab Majeed, Principal Government Boys Degree College Naseer Baloch, Principal Government Girls Degree College Saheen Baloch, District Accounts Officer, Social Welfare Officer Ubaiddullah, District Manager NRSP Peer Jan Baloch, SDO B&R, Deputy DEOs from all tehsils, and representatives from UNICEF and RISM.

During the meeting, participants held a detailed discussion on the recent appointment of contract teachers (Phase IV). The Deputy Commissioner received a briefing regarding the activation of 12 additional schools in Gwadar district and issued clear instructions to ensure these schools are made functional at the earliest.

The meeting also reviewed ongoing development schemes and projects under BSDI and PSDP in educational institutions across the district. Key challenges facing schools were identified, and detailed discussions were held on further development works and provision of basic facilities in schools.

Deputy Commissioner Nageebullah Kakar emphasized the need to address the issue of student dropouts, discussing their causes, dropout rates, and effective measures to reduce the problem. Matters related to quality education, the current status of madrasahs, and their registration process were also reviewed. All stakeholders presented reports based on their field visits and performance assessments.

The Deputy Commissioner issued strict directives regarding salary deductions for absent teachers.



NOTICE INVITING TENDER

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Airport moved to privatisation list

NEWS DESK: The government has shelved a plan to outsource the management and operations of Islamabad International Airport to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after Abu Dhabi lost interest in the process.

The deadlock between the two countries emerged following repeated delays by the UAE in nominating an entity for the outsourcing of Islamabad International Airport.

The government has now approved a proposal to include Islamabad International Airport in the active privatisation list following the recent successful privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

Sources told The Express Tribune that despite initial interest shown by the UAE, it failed to communicate the name of the nominated entity for the outsourcing of the management and operations of Islamabad International Airport, indicating disinterest on the part of the UAE.

Official sources said the Pakistani side had sought a clear response from the UAE by sending a final call letter. In response, the UAE conveyed that it was



still unable to confirm any nominated entity.

It further said the UAE was not interested in continuing the process. Consequently, the government approved a proposal to include Islamabad International Airport in the active privatisation list, following the example of the highly successful privatisation of Pakistan

International Airlines.

Earlier, the government had not acceded to the UAE's request for inclusion of Jinnah International Airport (JIA), Karachi, and Allama Iqbal International Airport (AIAP), Lahore, in the draft government-to-government (G2G) framework agreement. Moreover, the Government of the UAE's re-

quest for privatisation of the air link between Abu Dhabi and Pakistan under the draft G2G framework agreement was not backed by the government of Pakistan. The government had also constituted a negotiation committee under the chairmanship of the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation and had di-

rected the relevant ministry to continue engagement with the UAE side for outsourcing of Islamabad Airport only. The Government of the United Arab Emirates had also conveyed its interest through its embassy in Islamabad in the management and operation of Islamabad International Airport.

The government had directed the ministry to seek clarity from the UAE side on the nominated entity to be mentioned in the draft framework agreement, while the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) had been nominated from the Pakistan side.

Multiple draft agreements were exchanged between the Pakistan Airports Authority and the UAE side. A delegation led by the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation, along with senior officers from the concerned ministries, had also visited Abu Dhabi to hold meetings with UAE officials to discuss and finalise the draft framework agreement. Meanwhile, the Privatisation Division

submitted a summary to the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) proposing the inclusion of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore airports in the active privatisation list for outsourcing.

The cabinet body approved the inclusion of Karachi and Lahore airports in the list, while Islamabad Airport was excluded for the time being.

The concerned ministry was also directed to seek a final response from the Government of the UAE within one week on its intent regarding the ongoing G2G process for outsourcing Islamabad Airport.

The UAE side conveyed that it was unable to specify the name of the nominated entity at that stage, stating that the commercial and technical governance requirements associated with the G2G framework agreement needed to be finalised first, after which the nominated entity would be shared.

In this regard, the concerned ministry argued that persistent delays by the UAE in nominating an entity were hampering the government's efforts to outsource the management and operations of Islamabad International Airport.

Sustainable growth key to economic transformation, says minister

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's journey towards a trillion-dollar economy is only possible through alignment of policy, capital industry, and institutions, said Minister for Board of Investment Quaiser Ahmed Sheikh, pointing out that fragmented progress cannot deliver sustainable growth.

Speaking at the Pakistan Leadership Conversation on Thursday, the minister emphasised collective acceleration, export-led growth, and investor-friendly reforms as key drivers for economic

transformation. Drawing lessons from China's development journey, Mr Sheikh highlighted how China's focus on value-added products and export-led growth transformed it into one of the world's leading exporters.

He stressed that Pakistan can replicate this success by upgrading its production base, improving quality standards, and moving up the global value chain.

He underlined that future-fit and skilled human capital is critical for sustainable development, adding that pro-

ductivity enhancement — not just headline GDP growth — must remain Pakistan's economic north star. He emphasised technology adoption, managerial capacity, and SME formalisation to strengthen competitiveness.

Highlighting digital transformation, Quaiser Ahmed Sheikh said that digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and fintech can enable Pakistan to leapfrog economically, provided adoption moves from pilot projects to large-scale platforms.



NEWS DESK: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has identified that Pakistan's push to modernise public services through artificial intelligence is confronting deep structural barriers, as fragmented data systems, weak inter-agency coordination, low digital literacy and limited institutional capacity continue to constrain access to government services and tax administration, raising concerns that technology-driven reforms may outpace the state's ability to implement them effectively.

These challenges were identified by Farzana Noshab, Lead Economics Officer at the Public Sector Management and Governance Sector Office of the ADB Sectors Group, and Yui Miyaki, Public Management Specialist (Taxation) at the ADB Sectors Department, in a blog post published on the ADB website.

"Improving government efficiency through AI depends less on developing new algorithms or complex models than

on allowing public officials to design the tools they use," they said.

The adoption of AI in public sector entities, along with the contribution of local players, including the input of government officers in developing AI-based solutions, is greatly needed in Pakistan to replace complicated and time-consuming processes, said Mehwish Salman Ali, CEO and Founder of Data Vault Pakistan and Zahanat AI.

She pointed out that local AI tools and chatbots are being encouraged in public sector departments, particularly to structure data at a faster pace and facilitate the public in service delivery.

However, she stressed that the integration of public and business data should remain within the country, housed in local data centres.

In Pakistan, attempts to modernise

public services often rely on external suppliers who design systems without fully understanding the needs of agencies or citizens. This approach can lead to slow adoption, limited ownership and systems that do not align with on-the-ground realities.

Instead of receiving pre-built solutions, government teams should define their needs and help shape system functions from the start. This approach al-

lows artificial intelligence to be introduced where it delivers the most value, the blog noted.

For instance, the Federal Board of Revenue has recently streamlined tax administration and filing procedures.

These reforms include launching a user-friendly electronic tax return form with autofill features and developing tailored forms for different taxpayer categories, including an upcoming Urdu version.

The online filing system has also been upgraded for real-time data sharing, while withholding tax payments have been automated and expanded to include digital invoicing.

These efforts reduced previously complex and numerous requirements to a limited number of straightforward steps.

This streamlining not only made compliance easier for citizens but also improved transparency and efficiency for officials, the blog said.



Intel forecasts weak quarter as AI server chip demand outstrips supply

NEWS DESK: Intel (INTC.O) said on Thursday it struggled to satisfy demand for its server chips used in AI data centres, and forecast quarterly revenue and profit below market estimates, sending shares down 13% in after-hours trading.

The forecast underscores the difficulties faced by Intel in predicting global chip markets, where the company's current products are the result of decisions made years ago.

The company, whose shares have risen 40% in the past month, recently launched a long-awaited laptop chip designed to reclaim its lead in personal computers just as a memory chip crunch is expected to depress sales across that industry.

Meanwhile, Intel executives said the company was caught off guard by surging demand for server central processors that accompany AI chips.

Despite running its factories at capacity, Intel cannot keep up with demand for the chips, leaving profitable data centre sales on the

table while the new PC chip squeezes its margins.

"In the short term, I'm disappointed that we are not able to fully meet the demand in our markets," Chief Executive Officer Lip-Bu Tan told analysts on a conference call. The company forecast current-quarter revenue between \$11.7 billion and \$12.7 billion, compared with analysts' average estimate of \$12.51 billion, according to data compiled by ISEGI.

It expects adjusted

earnings per share to break even in the first quarter, compared with expectations of adjusted earnings of 5 cents per share.

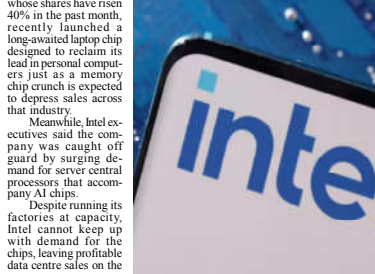
Investors and analysts have hoped that rapid data centre buildouts commissioned by large tech companies to advance their AI businesses will drive sales for Intel's traditional server chips that are used alongside Nvidia's (NVIDIA.O) market-leading graphics processing units (GPU).

Demand for AI sur-

prised some of the cloud-computing giants, which have had to scramble in order to upgrade ageing fleets of chips because of an "erosion in networking performance," finance chief David Zinsner told Reuters in an interview.

They were all a little bit caught off guard," Zinsner said. Intel has held off on investing heavily in its next-generation manufacturing process known as 14A, while waiting for a large customer, Zinsner said.

Telenor has been a



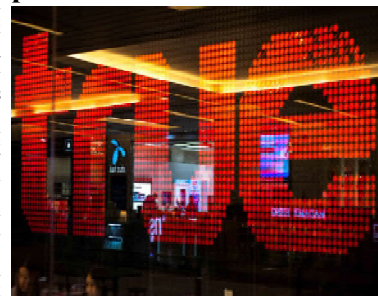
Telenor sells its stake in Thailand's True Corporation for \$3.9 billion

NEWS DESK: Telenor said on Thursday it would sell its 30.3 per cent stake in Thailand's True Corporation for \$3.92 billion, its second divestment from Asia in recent months, lifting the Norwegian group's shares 8 pc.

Telenor said it had signed an agreement with Arise Digital Technology Company, owned by Khun Suphachai Chearavanont, to sell 24.95 pc in True and then its remaining 5.35 pc stake two years after the closing of the initial deal.

Telenor has been a major investor in Asian telecoms since the 1990s, building operations in Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Pakistan, but has recently said it is open to deals as the industry matures.

May also do deals in Malaysia, but the completion of the sale of Telenor Pakistan in December, and the agreement to sell our shares in True we have taken big steps in delivering that strategy. Telenor CEO Benedicte



Schibred Famer said in an interview.

"We know we're going to be focusing on delivering value to our remaining assets in Malaysia and Bangladesh. And then over time, we'll see if we can find structural opportunities for those as well," Wist said. True is one of Thailand's biggest telecom operators with around 60 million customers.

Telenor will book an accounting gain of 14.7b Norwegian crowns at

the current exchange rate at the closing of the initial stake sale and said it aimed to provide further information next month on the use of the proceeds.

The divestment, which is expected to close within a few months, is projected to boost Telenor's return on capital employed and underpins the company's goal of focusing more of its business in the Nordic region, it said.

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Real Madrid (RMA) are football's biggest earners

NEWS DESK: Real Madrid remained the biggest-earning club in world football during the 2024-25 season while Liverpool for the first time generated the most revenues in the Premier League, according to an annual financial list published on Thursday.

The Spanish club topped Deloitte's Football Money League with 1.16 billion euros (\$1.36 billion) of revenue despite not winning either La Liga or the Champions League.

The only club to make more than \$1 billion in the past two seasons, Real Madrid benefited in 2024-25 from a whopping 23% rise in commercial revenue - driven by merchandise and corporate partners - to 594 million euros, the Deloitte figures showed, opens new tab.

Perennial rivals and reigning La Liga champions Barcelona were the second highest earners with 975 million euros, back in the top three for the first time in five years. Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich



ranked third with 861 million euros, ahead of Champions League winners Paris St-Germain on 837 million euros.

Liverpool's fifth place in the global money list, with 836 million euros of revenues from the season they

won the Premier League, was the strongest performance of any English club in the 29-year history of the rankings.

Manchester City dropped to sixth with 829 million euros, followed by this season's Premier League leaders

Arsenal on 822 million. Manchester United's slide

Manchester United, who finished a lowly 15th in the Premier League last season, fell from fourth to eighth in revenues with 793 million euros - their lowest-ever

position in the Money Cup and League Cup.

"If you went back 10 or 15 years, Manchester United's revenue outlook for the current season will worsen due to their absence from European competition and

early exits from the FA Cup and League Cup.

"We used to be the benchmark for the market. I don't think that remains the case."

Six Premier League sides made the global top 10, with Tottenham ninth on 673 million euros and Chelsea 10th on

584 million. Overall, revenue for the top 20 clubs rose 11% to a record 12.4 billion euros. Commercial income increased to 5.3 billion euros, driven by expanded stadium usage on non-matchdays, rising sponsorship deals and improved retail operations.

Matchday revenue grew the fastest, up 16% to 2.4 billion euros, while broadcast revenue rose 10%, helped by the expanded FIFA Club World Cup in the United States last summer.

Deloitte said the rise of some Saudi Pro League clubs and Inter Miami from Major League Soccer could challenge the financial hegemony of Europe's major sides in the future.

"Squads filled with star players have had a major impact on the global profile of clubs and both leagues," it said. "For the MLS in particular, capitalising on this opportunity following the 2026 FIFA World Cup could be the key to unlocking a new market of football fans in the United States."

Pakistan unveil 16-member squad for T20I series against Australia

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Cricket Board has named a 16-member squad for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Australia at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore. The matches will take place on 29, 31 January, 1 February and will begin at 4pm PKT.

Babar Azam and Shaheen Shah Afridi have returned to the T20I squad after missing the three-match away series against Sri Lanka in early January.

Shadab Khan will continue to build on his

comeback in the previous T20I series and will form part of a strong spin-bowling contingent along with Abrar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz and Usman Tariq. Pakistan squad and player support personnel are expected to convene in Lahore on Saturday, 24 January and will begin their preparations for the series the following day.

Australia are set to arrive in Pakistan on Wednesday, 28 February and will play just their second series in the format on Paki-

stan soil after a solitary T20I in April 2022 at Gaddafi Stadium.

16-member squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq.

Player support personnel: Naveed

Akram Cheema (team manager), Mike Hesson (head coach), Ashley Noffke (bowling coach), Shane McDermott (fielding coach), Hani Malik (batting coach), Cliffe Deacon (physiotherapist), Grant Luden (strength and conditioning coach), Talha Ejaz (performance analyst), Syed Naeem Ahmed (media manager), Lt. Col. (r) Usman Anwar (security manager), Dr Wajid Ali Bhatti (team doctor), Dr Raheel Karim (psychiatrist) and Muhammad Ehsan (masseur).



Inter have chance to extend Serie A lead

NEWS DESK: Inter Milan will expect to stretch their lead atop Serie A when they host second-bottom side Pisa on Friday with a fixture that on paper offers a clear chance to put pressure on their rivals who face each other in some mouth-watering matches.

While Inter kick off the weekend with an easy game, on paper at least, Sunday sees a couple of blockbuster clashes as title-chasers AC Milan visit AS Roma and Napoli travel to Juventus.

Inter lead Milan by three points, while Napoli, who are third having returned to winning ways after a run of draws, are six points off the pace and Roma a further point back in fourth.

Juve are now 10 points adrift of top spot in fifth after a surprising 1-0 defeat at struggling Cagliari last time out.

Cristian Chivu's Inter side suffered a 3-1 home defeat by Champions League pacesetters Arsenal on Tuesday but they have won eight of

their last nine Serie A matches. Pisa have only one league victory this season.

Chivu's main challenge will be managing the demands of a congested schedule while ensuring his key players remain fresh.

Denzel Dumfries and Hakan Calhanoglu are expected to remain unavailable for selection, while several other first-team regulars could be rotated with another crucial Champions

League fixture looming on Wednesday at Borussia Dortmund.

Inter are 14th in the Champions League table and have guaranteed a playoff spot with only a slim chance of finishing in the top eight to go straight into the last 16.

Milan face unpredictable Roma in Rome on Sunday, rivals Milan face a far sterner test against an unpredictable Roma side led by Gian Piero

Gasperini.

Massimiliano Allegri's team are in impressive form, with one defeat in 21 Serie A matches, and genuine title contenders.

One worry is the fitness of midfielder Alexis Saelemaekers, who has an adductor problem and remains a doubt for the match.

The Belgian could be a significant absentee after his influential display in Sunday's 1-0 home win over Lecce in

which his assist for Nicolas Fullkrug secured all three points.

The other standout fixture comes in Turin, where Juve welcome champions Napoli in a game that will be shaped as much by fatigue and player availability as current form.

Antonio Conte's Napoli are showing signs of the physical strain that can derail a title challenge, which Inter saw last season when a congested schedule eroded their consistency.

Inter's fall-off came at the decisive stage of the campaign, culminating in the loss of the Serie A crown and an embarrassing 5-0 defeat by Paris St Germain in the Champions League final.

Napoli's 1-1 draw at FC Copenhagen in their midweek Champions League clash highlighted the growing difficulty of sustaining performance across competitions.

A mounting injury crisis is restricting their rotation options.

Kane double fires Bayern into Champions League last 16



NEWS DESK: Harry Kane scored twice in three second-half minutes as Bayern Munich saw off Union Saint-Gilloise 2-0 on Wednesday to reach the last 16 of the Champions League.

Bayern joined Arsenal in sealing a top-eight finish in the 36-team table with a game to spare, avoiding a potential two-legged knockout play-off round.

The six-time European champions sit second in the standings behind Arsenal ahead of their last league-place outing at PSV Eindhoven next week.

Kane headed in from a corner before winning and converting a penalty to put the hosts firmly in control.

The England captain had a chance for a hat-trick but missed a late spot-kick, after

Bayern centre-back Kim Min-jae had been dismissed for a second yellow card.

"Coming back into the second half we wanted to show more intensity and I think we did that," Kane told DAZN.

"We scored at the right times, were a bit unlucky with the red card but even after that when we went down to 10 men we controlled the game well and earned the three points."

Bayern's Champions League defeat at Arsenal remains their only loss in all competitions this season, in which they have also already opened up an 11-point lead in the Bundesliga.

Kane's second goal was his 34th of the campaign, bringing Bayern's total tally to 103 strikes from 29

games.

Bayern were sluggish in the opening half, perhaps unsettled by the absence of their 9,300-strong ultra contingent, with the lower stand closed due to a UEFA sanction for setting off pyrotechnics.

"We're used to that from the Covid period, of course, but fundamentally we always want the fans there in a sold-out stadium - unfortunately it wasn't possible today," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told DAZN.

The best chance of the opening half fell to Belgian champions Union SG.

With half an hour played, an unmarked Promise David got away from the Bayern defence and had just Neuer to beat, but headed his effort directly at the goalkeeper. Bayern needed a

set-piece to break the deadlock with 52 minutes gone. Michael Olise lofted the ball into the six-yard area and Kane found space at the near post to head his side in front.

One minute later, Kane was felled by Union "keeper Kjell Scherpen and stepped up to double Bayern's lead. Kim, handed a rare start with Dayot Upamecano out sick, was sent off in the 63rd minute, picking up a second yellow for yanking Raul Floruz's arm as the winger went on the attack.

But the red card did not disrupt Bayern's flow.

Kane uncharacteristically blasted a penalty against the bar with 10 minutes left, while Olise chipped another opportunity over with just Scherpen to beat.

Vine, Narvaez complete one-two for UAE Team Emirates XRG

NEWS DESK: Former winner Jay Vine and defending champion Jonathan Narvaez completed a one-two for UAE Team Emirates XRG to dominate the second stage of the four Down Under near Adelaide on Thursday.

Australia's Vine, the 2023 winner, powered up the Corkscrew Hill the second time with Vine on the wheel.

Narvaez, who appeared to be gasping to keep up with Vine on the demanding final Corkscrew climb, paid tribute to his teammate.

"Jay was really strong, I was just a passenger on his wheel on the climb," he said.

Such was Vine's dominance that Narvaez clapped him in tribute as they crossed the finish line of the 148.1km stage with Swiss champion Mauro Schmid (Team Jayco AlUla) third, 58 seconds adrift of the pair.

Vine took the lead in the race general classification by six seconds from Narvaez with Schmid third 1min 5sec behind the leader.

"It's been on my

mind since the last time I wore the ochre leader's jersey, it's so incredible to win on such a hard stage," Vine said.

"We have such a strong position now with me and Jonny (Narvaez) and being led out by Adam Yates is pretty incredible as well."

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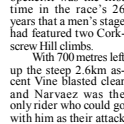
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"He prepared really well for this race and we are happy to get the victory and, of course, we are looking to win the GC." It was a huge statement by the powerful UAE team with three stages left in the UCI World Tour season opener. It was the first time in the race's 26 years that a men's stage had featured two Corkscrew Hill climbs.

With 700 metres left up the steep 2.6km ascent Pine blasted clear and Narvaez was the only rider who could go with him as their attack scattered the peloton.



Trump says United States (US) 'armada' headed toward Gulf

NEWS DESK: President Donald Trump said a US "armada" was heading toward the Gulf and that Washington was watching Iran closely, even after downplaying the prospect of imminent military action and saying Tehran appeared interested in talks.

Trump has repeatedly left open the option of new military action against Iran after Washington backed and joined Israel's 12-day war in June aimed at degrading Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

The prospect of immediate American action seemed to recede in recent days, with both sides insisting on giving diplomacy a chance.

On his way back from the World Economic Forum in Davos, the president told reporters on Air Force One the United States was sending a "massive fleet" toward Iran "just in case".

"We're watching Iran," he said. "I'd rather not see anything happen but we're watching them very closely."



Addressing the WEF on Thursday, Trump said the United States attacked Iranian uranium enrichment sites last year to prevent Tehran from making a nuclear weapon. Iran denies its nuclear

programme is aimed at seeking the bomb. "Can't let that happen," Trump said, adding: "And Iran does want to talk, and we'll talk."

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards had also warned Washington Thursday that the force had its "finger on the trigger."

A fortnight of protests starting in late December shook Iran's leadership under supreme leader Ayatollah

Ali Khamenei, but the movement has petered out in the face of a crackdown, accompanied by an unprecedented internet blackout.

Last week, Trump pulled back from a threat to strike Iran over its deadly crackdown on the protests after the White House said Tehran had halted planned executions of demonstrators.

In a standoff marked by seething rhetoric, Trump had on Tuesday

warned Iran's leaders the United States would "wipe them off the face of this Earth" if there was any attack on its life in response to a strike targeting Khamenei.

An Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in a

speech Thursday, accused the United States and Israel of stoking the protests as a "cowardly revenge... for the defeat in the 12-Day War".

Legitimate targets? Guards commander General Mohammad Pakpour warned Israel and the United States "to avoid any miscalculations" and learn from "what they learned in the 12-day imposed war, so that they do not face a more painful and regrettable fate".

"The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and dear Iran have their finger on the trigger, more prepared than ever, ready to carry out the orders and measures of the supreme commander-in-chief," he was quoted by state television on the IRGC's national day Ali Abdollahi Alabadi, head of Iran's joint command headquarters, meanwhile, warned that if America attacked, "all US interests, bases and centres of influence" would be "legitimate targets" for Iranian forces.

BD launches drives for first post-Hasina polls

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

Tens of thousands of flag-waving supporters of key frontrunner Tarique Rahman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) crowded the streets of the northern city of Sylhet, chanting his name.

"We have liberated the country from autocratic rule," prime ministerial hopeful Rahman, who returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile, told crowds of BNP loyalists. "Now we must establish the rights of the people."

Rahman vowed to create jobs for "millions of unemployed youth" and support women's economic independence.

Key rival Jamaat-e-Islami — the largest Islamist party in the Muslim-majority nation of 170 million — began its campaign in the capital Dhaka, after being crushed during Hasina's 15 years



in power.

Jamaat's leader Shafiqur Rahman said he wanted to clamp down on corruption and build a nation where "people from all races, religions and communities will be treated equally".

Among the sea of Jamaat supporters was Kakoli Akter, 36, who said it was the first election rally she had ever attended.

Although eligible to vote since 2008, she said this would be the first time she would cast a ballot, as she

"We came here to pray for the party," she said.

The South Asian nation votes on Febru-

ary 12 to elect 350 lawmakers, polls that will bring in new leadership after prolonged turmoil following the ouster of Hasina's government, reshaping domestic politics and regional dynamics.

Progress of reform? Rahman, 60, better known in Bangladesh as Tarique Zia, assumed leadership of the BNP following the death of his mother, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who died in December at the age of 80.

Bangladesh, home to one of the world's largest Muslim-majority populations, has a significant Sunni following, and the BNP's Rahman fol-

lowed tradition to launch his campaigns in Sylhet, home to the centuries-old shrine of Shah Jalal.

N e w M u h a m m a d Yunus, the 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who returned from exile in August 2024 at the behest of protesters to lead a caretaker government as "chief adviser", will step down after the polls. Yunus said he inherited a "completely broken" political system, and championed a reform charter he argues is vital to prevent a return to authoritarian rule, with a referendum on the changes to be held on the same day as polling.

Japan suspends restart of world's biggest nuclear plant

NEWS DESK: The restart of the world's largest nuclear power plant was suspended in Japan on Thursday, with the operator saying it does not know when the problem would be solved.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata province had been closed since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, but operators to relaunch it had begun on Wednesday after it received the final green light from the nuclear regulator.

However, its operator, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), said today that "an alarm from the monitoring system... sounded during the reactor startup procedures", causing it to suspend operations.

"We don't expect this to be solved within a day or two. There is no telling at the moment how long it will take," site superintendent Takeyuki Inagaki told a news conference.

"We will for now fully focus on trying to identify the cause of what happened," he said.



The alarm that went off prompted TEPCO to investigate the malfunctioning electrical equipment, spokesman Takashi Kobayashi told AFP.

And "once it became clear that it would take time, we decided to reinstate the control rods in a planned manner," he said, adding that the reactor "is stable and there is no radioactive impact outside". Control rods are a

device used to control the nuclear chain reaction in the reactor core, which can be accelerated by slightly withdrawing them, or slowed down or stopped completely by inserting them deeper.

The restart, initially scheduled for Tuesday, had been pushed back after another technical issue related to the rods' removal was detected last weekend — a problem that was resolved on

Sunday, according to TEPCO.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the world's biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven was restarted. The facility was taken offline when Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

Venezuela unveils plans to open oil sector to private investment

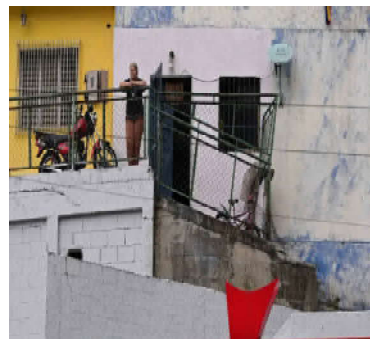
NEWS DESK: Venezuela's parliament on Thursday began debating plans to throw open the country's lucrative oil sector to private investment, less than three weeks after the US ouster of Nicolas Maduro.

Until now, private companies were only allowed to operate in joint ventures with state-owned oil firm PDVSA, which insisted on holding a majority.

The bill under debate allows for "private companies domiciled in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela"

to engage in oil exploration and extraction.

The Trump administration is allowing China to purchase Venezuelan oil but not at "unfair, undercut" prices at which Venezuela sold the crude before the US re-



moved its leader Nicolas Maduro, an administration official said.

Thanks to President (Donald) Trump's decisive and successful law enforcement operation.

The people of Venezuela will collect

a fair price for their oil from China and other nations rather than a corrupt, cheap price, the official said.

Oil executives and potential investors, as part of Washington's ambitious \$100 billion reconstruction plan for

Venezuela's energy industry. Are demanding autonomy to produce and export oil, and receive the cash sale proceeds after Hugo Chavez's nationalisations and assets expropriations two decades ago.

TikTok establishes joint venture to end US ban threat

NEWS DESK: TikTok announced on Thursday that it has established a majority American-owned joint venture to operate its US business, allowing the company to avoid a ban over its data ownership.

The video-sharing app is a global digital entertainment powerhouse, but its massive appeal and links to China have raised concerns over privacy and national security.

The TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC will serve more than 200 million users and 7.5m businesses while implementing strict safeguards for data protection and content moderation, the company said.

The new structure responds to a law passed under US President Donald Trump's predecessor Joe Biden that forced Chinese-owned ByteDance to sell TikTok's US operations or face a ban in its biggest market.

Trump welcomed and claimed credit for the deal, but also thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for approving it.

"I am so happy to have helped in saving TikTok," Trump said in a post on Truth Social late Thursday.

"It will now be owned by a group of Great American Patriots and Investors, the Biggest in the World, and will be an important Voice." "I would also like to thank President Xi, of

China, for working with us and, ultimately, approving the Deal," he added.

Cybersecurity audit ByteDance retains a 19.9 per cent stake in the joint venture — keeping its ownership below the 20 per cent threshold stipulated by the law.

Three investors — Silver Lake, Oracle and Abu Dhabi-based Al Investment fund MGX — each hold 15 per cent stakes.

Oracle's executive chairman, Larry Ellison, is a longtime Trump ally. Other investors include Dell Family Office, affiliates of Susquehanna International Group and General Atlantic.

The joint venture will retain decision-making authority over trust and safety policies and content moderation for US users.

But TikTok's global entities will manage international product integration and commercial activities including e-commerce and advertising.

Under the arrangement, US user data will be stored in Oracle's secure cloud environment, with cybersecurity audited by third-party experts and adhering to federal standards, TikTok said.

Jasmine Enberg, co-CEO of Scalable, a media company focused on the creator economy, said TikTok users would be relieved by the deal but that there were "still big questions about how this will all play out."

"Behind the scenes, TikTok is likely working hard to assure advertisers that it will remain business as normal," she told AFP.

"While the need for users to download a new app seems unlikely, brand partners will want to know that their TikTok strategies won't be disrupted."

Elision in spotlight The joint venture will be governed by a seven-member, majority-American board including TikTok CEO Shou Chew and executives from investment firms.

TikTok executive Adam Presser was appointed CEO of the new entity, with Will Farrell serving as chief security officer.

The 2024 law came as US policymakers, including Trump in his first presidency, warned that China could use TikTok to mine Americans' data or exert influence through its algorithm.

