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Armed forces, federal govt have not
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INTERNATIONAL
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SPORT
Babar,
Shaheen to
play for
Pakistan in
T20 World
Cup; Haris
Rauf left
out

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Balochistan to be safe not only for human beings but also for animals, CM Bugti

News Desk

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti, in an official statement, said that Balochistan is steadily becoming a safe province not only for humans but also for animals.

He stated that clear and strict directives have been issued to the Quetta Metropolitan Corporation (QMC) to ensure that dogs and cats are not killed under any circumstances and that fake or substandard vaccines are not administered.

The Chief Minister emphasized that international-standard TNVR (Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release) policy has been implemented in Quetta to manage the population of stray dogs and cats through a scientific, humane, and globally recognized method.

This approach focuses on sustainable animal population control while ensuring public health safety.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti further stated that the implementation process is being carried out with the cooperation of animal welfare organization "Panah

Quetta," which is actively supporting the authorities in animal handling, vaccination, neutering, and safe release across the city. He added that this initiative will play a significant role in the prevention of rabies and other zoonotic diseases, while also strengthening animal welfare standards and protecting public health. The Chief Minister reaffirmed the

provincial government's commitment to enforcing international SOPs, transparency, and humane practices in all animal management programs.

The Government of Balochistan remains dedicated to promoting responsible governance, animal rights, and community well-being through progressive and sustainable policies.

Rawalpindi's Ring Road project nears completion as revised cost awaits approval

NEWS DESK:

The multi-billion-rupee Rawalpindi Ring Road project is 80 per cent complete, but the deadline has been extended from the end of March to the end of April as the revised PC-1, which escalates the project cost to Rs53 billion, is yet to receive approval from the Punjab Planning and Development Board.

A senior official of the district administration told Dawn that the project is likely to be completed by the end of April or early May due to pending work on the Thalian Interchange, which will connect the Ring Road with the Motorway.

He said the revised PC-1 of Ring Road is pending with the Punjab Planning and Development Board, which is likely to take up the matter next week to decide whether it accepts the responses to its objections. The official said the Planning and Development Board raised objections over the price escalation, to which the Project Management Unit and the Rawalpindi Development Authority submitted detailed replies to justify the increase.

With over 80pc work completed, authorities expect Rs53bn project to be finished by April or early May, pending nod from Punjab P&D Board.

He added that a technical team of the Planning and Development Board visited the site last week and inspected the work. Following the visit, the board is expected to take up the issue in its next meeting, likely to be held next week. When contacted, Deputy Project Director of the Ring Road, Ashfaq Sulheri, told Dawn that work on the mega project was in full swing and more than 80 per cent of the work had been completed so far.

He said 90 per cent of the structural work had been completed, including all bridges such as the railway bridge, while asphalt work had been completed on a 22-kilometre stretch.

The total length of the Ring Road from Baamth to Thalian is 38 kilometres. He said the project is likely to be completed by the end of April as a few components still need to be addressed.

"We are making a new interchange at Thalian where the Ring Road will be connected with the Motorway, and its cost is Rs5 billion," he said.

"More than 18,000 vehicles will enter the Motorway from the Ring Road."

Death toll from Dera suicide blast rises to seven

NEWS DESK:

The death toll from a suicide attack at a wedding ceremony in Dera Ismail Khan has risen to seven, while seven others were injured, according to police and Rescue 1122 officials.

The attack took place on Friday night near Qureshi Mor during a wedding celebration at a house. Police said guests were engaged in traditional drum dancing when a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a room, triggering a powerful blast that caused part of the building to collapse.

Rescue 1122 officials said that multiple ambulances, along with fire and disaster response vehicles, were dispatched to the site immediately after reports of the explosion. The bodies and the injured were shifted to nearby hospitals, while rescue teams carried out debris-clearing operations. Police confirmed that those killed included Waheedullah alias Jigri, Inayatullah, Abdul Majid Lagri, Advocate Shahzad, Waheed, Rehmanullah, and the suicide bomber. Authorities said funeral prayers of the deceased were offered separately in their native areas.

NEWS DESK:

Security forces carried out a successful intelligence-based operation in Panjgur district of Balochistan on January 25, targeting the presence of terrorists linked to the Indian-backed group Fitna al Hindustan.

During the operation, security personnel effectively engaged the terrorists' hideout, leading to a fierce exchange of fire. As a result, three terrorists were killed, including local commander Farooq alias Soro, along with Adeel and Waseem.

A significant cache of weapons, ammunition, and explosives was recovered from the site. According to officials, the neutralized terrorists were actively involved in multiple terrorist activities in the region.

Following the operation, security forces launched a comprehensive sanitization exercise to ensure no remaining terrorists are present in the

ISPR: Major Counterterrorism Operation Conducted in Balochistan's Panjgur District



area. The nationwide counterterrorism campaign continues under the framework of "Azam-e-Istehkam," aimed at eliminating the threat of foreign-sponsored terrorism and strengthening internal security across Pakistan.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Education Crisis: Beyond Numbers and Empty Promises



Editorial: The Balochistan government's claim that around 45,000 children have returned to schools is being presented as a major breakthrough in addressing the province's deep-rooted education crisis. While any increase in enrollment deserves acknowledgment, this figure pales in comparison to the magnitude of the challenge. More than 3.1 million children in Balochistan remain out of school, a reality that exposes decades of neglect, mismanagement, and hollow commitments by successive provincial governments.

For years, education in Balochistan has been treated more as a slogan than a serious policy priority. Governments have consistently paid lip service to the issue, announcing plans, committees, and reforms that rarely translate into

meaningful change on the ground. The result is a broken system where thousands of schools remain without proper buildings, forcing children to study under open skies or abandon education altogether.

Shelterless schools are not an exception but a norm across vast parts of the province. Equally alarming is the issue of so-called "ghost teachers" and ineffective staffing.

Despite repeated claims of reforms under the School Based Recruitment (SBK) system, absenteeism, political interference, and lack of accountability continue to cripple public education. Reviewing recruitment processes is important, but without strict monitoring and enforcement, such reviews risk becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise.

The return of

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

If the Balochistan government is serious about change, it must move beyond statements and statistics. Massive investment in school infrastructure, transparent teacher management, community-based enrollment drives, and sustained political will are essential.

Without tangible action, promises will remain empty, and another generation of Balochistan's children will be left behind. Education cannot survive on rhetoric alone; it demands urgent, honest, and decisive action. School supplies

Abolition of the Food Department: A Commendable Step by the Chief Minister

Muhammad Asghar Harifal

Pakistan couldn't break with the bureaucratic machinery inherited from British colonial period. It was the apparatus that was extractive in nature and has, over time, become rigid, inefficient, and increasingly disconnected from contemporary realities. The democratic structure in any form, whatever, was already fragile while the coercive tendency of inherited colonial machinery further diminished the chances of public representation in state machinery. Worse, the politicians, inheriting powers after independence, were no less in awe from colonisers than the latter's educated and trained apparatchiks of bureaucracy. The colonial era, pervasive both in politicians and the bureaucracy, generated a fear of anarchy without the colonisers' designed state machinery.

Resultantly, instead of undergoing meaningful reform after independence, much of this system has ossified into a self-preserving structure. Those operating within it often fail to recognise its undemocratic origins, or else defend it due to vested interests. This resistance to change is reinforced by an education system that discourages innovation and critical thinking, and by weak democratic institutions that have been unable to enforce accountability or sustained reform. Now that mammoth structure is creaking under its own weight on its own.

Seen against this backdrop, the decision by the Chief Minister of Balochistan to abolish the Food and Zakat Departments is a bold and a long-awaited step. It represents a rare, non-conformist intervention in a governance culture that generally prioritises continuity over performance. The greatest weakness of Pakistan's bureaucratic system is



its devotion to the status quo—an instinct that shields outdated institutions from scrutiny. By challenging this inertia, the provincial government has sent an important signal: institutional permanence cannot be justified merely by tradition.

Such a step has the potential to generate a broader ripple effect within the administrative machinery. It may embolden officials and policymakers to pursue reform without fear of institutional backlash—a fear deeply embedded in government service, where deviation from established practice is often met with collective resistance. Breaking this pattern is essential if governance is to respond meaningfully to evolving economic and social conditions.

Historically, state control over food procurement and storage emerged in response to extraordinary circumstances. Organised storage of staple commodities, in particular wheat, has been associated with natural and man-made calamities and wartime exigencies. In British India, the existing structure of food and supply departments of the valley of Pakistan is institutionalised during

the Second World War to manage rationing, stabilise prices, and ensure uninterrupted supplies, especially for military and urban populations.

Until sugar de-rationing in 1984, even sugar distribution remained tightly controlled through rationing systems administered by these departments.

Among the provinces, only Punjab is broadly wheat-sufficient, producing nearly 70 percent of the country's output and supplying deficits elsewhere. Pakistan's annual wheat requirement stands at approximately 28 MMT. Balochistan, being sparsely populated, has the lowest requirement, with annual consumption estimated at around 1.8 MMT, while production ranges between 1.0 and 1.15 MMT. This deficit can be substantially reduced through yield-per-acre improvements and the solarisation of groundwater extraction, rather than through costly and inefficient procurement.

Regional dynamics further weaken the case for heavy state involvement in wheat markets. Afghanistan, which previously exerted demand

pressure on Pakistan's wheat supply, now meets nearly 70 percent of its requirements through domestic production and sources its remaining deficit—about 2 million tons—from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, and India. This shift has eased external pressure on Pakistan's wheat market and created space for greater private-sector participation, allowing the public sector to gradually exit direct wheat trade.

Moreover, under IMF-mandated structural reforms, Pakistan has committed to deregulating the food chain, including the withdrawal of federally determined wheat support prices. In the name of staple food subsidies and price stability, a convoluted procurement and subsidy system has evolved—one that may have served a purpose in its early years but has long since been overtaken by changes in agricultural technology and market structures.

Rather than supporting small farmers or boosting output, wheat subsidies have disproportionately benefited affluent and politically connected landlords. A subsidy-dependent class has emerged—economically powerful, politically influential, and closely aligned with entrenched interests.

With advancement in agricultural technology it is no longer an issue to meet a fraction of deficit through alternative means, rather than continuing with century old arrangements of storing a huge stock with poor management of public institutions.

In Balochistan, the limitations of this system are particularly stark. The province's maximum annual wheat procurement target has rarely exceeded 0.1 million tons—approximately 5% of total consumption—despite an available storage capacity

of about 0.18 million tons across more than 40 storage centres. Such a small procurement volume is insufficient to influence market prices, ensure supply stability, or incentivise increased production. Worse, government procurement has largely benefited influential farmers, having political clout, with minimal reach to smallholders. A government stock of barely five percent of consumption can neither stabilise prices nor guarantee sustained supply.

Put simply, limited government procurement does not drive agricultural production. What Pakistan requires is a meaningful scaling-up of productivity through improved inputs, better technology, expanded market access, and targeted farmer support—not the continuation of an outdated procurement model that delivers little beyond fiscal burden and rent-seeking opportunities.

Someone is likely to argue that abolishing the Food Department will undermine food security, in particular during periods of supply instability or price disruption. This concern, however valid, conflates institutional form with policy function. Food security is not dependent on the existence of a specific department, but on the effectiveness of the mechanisms deployed to ensure availability, affordability, and access. In practice, the Food Department's limited procurement—amounting to less than six percent of provincial consumption—has neither stabilised prices nor protected vulnerable consumers. Modern food security is better ensured through diversified supply chains, private-sector participation, strategic reserves managed by agile regulatory authorities, and targeted social protection programmes.

Quetta City, Proposed Master Plan

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

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

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

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

Geography and Soil

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

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



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

with pebbles and rock fragments and is suitable for vegetation. In the Hanna valley, the greater part of the valley floor is covered by barren rock about crops of low relief and dry mala bed.

The soil is restricted to the narrow banks and low terraces along the main stream.

However, the nature of the soil in Beliti

is silty clay which is not suitable for cultivation.

Similarly, the

Chiltan surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams.

The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides poor grazing for livestock.

Soil erosion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Five killed in GB, Balochistan amid cold wave

NEWS DESK: Four people were killed in Gilgit-Balistan when a tower collapsed on a house following heavy snowfall in Diamer, while one person died in Balochistan after a roof caved in due to down-pour in Zhob.

Police said a 'clock' observation tower near a residential home in Tangir Valley in Diamer collapsed on a house, resulting in the death of four members of a family and injuries to two other members.

Diamer Deputy Commissioner Ataur Rehman Kakar said heavy snowfall occurred in Tangir on Thursday, which might have caused the incident. According to police sources, the casualty could rise as the relief operation continued.

The Karakoram Highway (KHK), Balistan Road, Ghizer-Shandur Road and other roads were opened to traffic on Saturday, while link roads in various areas of the region, including Astore, Skardu, Chitral, Ghizer and Shigar, remained blocked. Met office forecasts more rain, snow in parts of country.

Due to the cold weather, people in Gilgit-Balistan continued to face difficulties, which were compounded by road closures and electricity shortages. The GB government issued a travel advisory for tourists, stating that heavy snowfall had been re-

ported in Hunza, Nagar, Ghizer, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Chitral, Chaman, and Diamer.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), meanwhile, predicted more rain and snowfall in various parts of the country till Tuesday. The advisory said that due to continuous snowfall, there was a risk that some roads in the upper and mountainous areas would be partially or completely closed. It asked tourists and residents to take precautions.

Zhob roof collapse
In Zhob, a child was killed and two sustained injuries in a roof-collapse incident, while more than six people were admitted to hospital after accidents caused by slippery road conditions following snowfall. In Quetta, the cold wave continued as Siberian winds lashed the provincial capital and other parts of northern and central Balochistan for the third day. The sky was clear on Saturday, but the weather remained extremely cold amid low gas pressure, adding to people's hardships.

Business centres and roads in Quetta presented a deserted look as businesspeople and consumers preferred to stay indoors. Traffic was also thin. LPG dealers, meanwhile, increased cylinder prices due to an increase in demand.

In order to provide relief, the Quetta Electric

Supply Company (QESCO) announced the suspension of load-shedding in Quetta and the surrounding areas of the provincial capital for one week due to the severe cold weather, but people were not getting power supply in other cities of the province.

Due to the intense cold, water in pipelines froze in Quetta, Kalat, Chaman and Ziarat, leading to a shortage of drinking water in several areas. However, highways and inter-provincial roads that were blocked due to snow were opened by the local administration, but authorities asked people to check weather updates before travelling.

In many parts of the province, life had come to a standstill, particularly in Chaman, Qila Abdullah, Ziarat, Pishin, Toba Achakzai and other areas, as temperatures in the upper and Pak-Afghan border regions dropped to as low as minus 12 degrees Celsius.

The Met Office predicted that in the next 24 hours, more light and heavy rain was expected with icy winds in various districts, including Quetta, Kalat, Khuzdar, Chaman, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Zhob, Pishin, Nauski, Kharan, Sibi, Nasirabad, Kachi, Washuk, Dalbandin and the coastal areas of Makran, while Kan Mahitarai, Muslim Bagh, Pishin, Toba Kakari, Toba Achakzai and Kalat could receive snowfall.

Armed forces, federal govt have not issued any orders for 'depopulation' of Tirah: information ministry

NEWS DESK: The Ministry of Information has said that neither the armed forces nor the federal government has issued any orders for the "depopulation" of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tirah Valley, where residents have been vacating their houses amid a planned military operation against militants.

The government has taken notice of misleading claims in circulation regarding alleged 'depopulation' from Tirah Valley on the orders of the army. "These assertions are baseless, malicious, and driven by ulterior motives aimed at creating alarm among the public. No directive has been issued for the depopulation of Tirah by the federal government and the armed forces," a post on the ministry's X account said on Sunday.

The ministry further maintained in its statement that law enforcement agencies had been routinely conducting targeted, intelligence-based operations, strictly against terrorist elements, with full care to avoid disruption to civilian life, for which no



migration is needed or being undertaken."

It may be noted that the local population is increasingly concerned over the presence of khawarij (a term that the state uses for terrorists) and desire peace and stability in Tirah, the ministry said.

It recalled that the KP government's Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department had issued a notification

for the release of funds — reportedly Rs4 billion — on December 26, 2025.

The ministry said the purpose for the release of the funds was stated to be the "anticipated temporary and voluntary movement of population from certain localities of Tirah (Bagh)". Moreover, the ministry continued, the provincial department had also requested the facilitation of advance

preparation and relief-related arrangements, including transportation, food support, cash as-

sistance, and establishment and management of transit and registration points. It further conveyed that the notification as stating that "the deputy commissioner, Khyber (where Tirah is located), has further conveyed that the proposed voluntary movement reflects the views

and preferences of the local population, articulated through a representative jirga convened at the district level, taking into account seasonal, logistical and contextual considerations, as well as an on-camp based modality." Hence, any stated position of the provincial government or their officials being conveyed to the media that the said migration

Three charged in UK over attacks on Imran's aide

NEWS DESK: British counter-terrorism police have charged three men in connection with a series of "highly targeted" attacks against Pakistani dissidents living in the United Kingdom, including a former adviser in the Imran Khan government.

The alleged assaults took place in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire between Dec 24 and 31 and were directed at two prominent supporters of the jailed former Pakistani prime minister, Mirza Shaukat Ali, a former accountant-police look over the investigation from local forces,

citing the deliberate and targeted na-



ture of the incidents. One of the victims, Mirza Shaukat Ali, 40, a former accountant-police look over the investigation from local forces,

citing the deliberate and targeted na-

firmed his identity. He told British media that he had been punished repeatedly and is now in hiding, fearing for his and his family's safety.

On Friday, police confirmed that three

British nationals had been charged. Karl Blackbyrd, 40, and Clark McAulay, 39, face charges of conspiracy to cause actual bodily harm in relation to separate incidents. A third man,

Donato Brammer, 21, has been charged in connection with the attack on Akbar's home and faces additional charges, including possession of a prohibited weapon and conspiracy to commit arson.

All three appeared before Westminster Magistrates' Court on Saturday.

Several other suspects have been arrested during coordinated raids across London, the Midlands and Essex and later released on bail. Police said the investigation remains ongoing and that detectives are keeping an open mind regarding motive and possible links between the attacks.

74,000 KP residents received free healthcare in other provinces last year

NEWS DESK: Around 74,000 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa residents received free treatment under the provincial government's health insurance scheme Sehat Card Plus in other provinces and regions of the country, mostly in Punjab, in 2025, shows official data.

Last year, 73,919 people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were admitted to hospitals in other provinces and regions under the SCP programme as they lived there due to employment and businesses. The province paid a total of Rs3.452 billion for the free treatment last year through the State Life Insurance Corporation, which is implementing the free healthcare initiative on behalf of the KP government.

The data reveals that Punjab remained the highest beneficiary for receiving Rs1.982 billion for treating 40,772 KP residents under the health insurance scheme.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has empanelled 804 hospitals countrywide for the treatment of residents on the production of computerised national identity cards.

Official data reveals KP govt paid Rs3.45bn to hospitals in 2025 through State Life Insurance Corporation. Punjab has the highest number of empanelled hospitals, mostly in Lahore, while its every city has at least two or more hospitals for the treatment of KP residents. These hospitals total 478 in Punjab, 168 in KP, 85 in Balochistan, 28 in Gilgit-Balistan, 21 in Sindh and 17 each in Islamabad and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The data shows that hospitals in the federal capital earned revenue of Rs1.123 billion by providing treatment to 23,467 people under the SCP programme. In Sindh, 8,132 patients underwent treatment, with the KP government paying Rs295 million.

The provincial government spent Rs44 million on the treatment of its 1,080 residents in Balochistan, Rs4 million on 175 residents in Gilgit-Balistan and Rs4 million on 93 residents in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Officials in the

health department told Dawn that before the empanelment of hospitals in other provinces and regions, the KP residents settled outside the province in connection with business or jobs used to either pay for treatment on their own or return to the province to claim free services.

They add that in order to facilitate them, the government started empanelled hospitals in other provinces to access free care.

The officials said in all regions, the hospitals inducted for free treatment on SCP included both public and private sector where the people can go, they said.

They said most patients received free healthcare for general diseases whose treatment was available in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The care was sought for general surgical, neuro-surgical, orthopaedic, gynaecological, ophthalmological and ENT issues.

The officials said after the empanelment of hospitals in other provinces, a total of 350,000 people had received services outside KP on SCP.

Ban on entry of vehicles in Murree lifted

NEWS DESK: The district administration of Murree on Saturday lifted the ban on the entry of vehicles in the hill station, while electricity was restored in 76 per cent of the area with 60 per cent roads cleared of snow.

After two feet of snowfall on Friday, the district administration had imposed the ban on entry of vehicles. In the meanwhile, there was an electricity breakdown and lesco managed to restore supply in 76 per cent areas of Murree on Saturday.

Talking to Dawn, Deputy Commissioner Murree Agha Zahoor Shirazi said that the ban was lifted early on Saturday morning.

He said all main roads in Murree were open while work continued to clear link roads of snow.

He said that the district administration was working in coordination with other departments to clear the roads.

He said more rain and snowfall was expected in coming days and the administration had made proper arrangements to tackle the situation.

The DC said there was no shortage of food and hospitals had already made arrangements for life saving drugs.

He said electricity breakdown occurred in Murree, but supply was restored in 76 per cent of area.

He said immediate reopening of roads after snowfall was the top priority of the administration, which was made possible through timely and effective strategy.



He appealed to tourists to take precautionary measures during their journey, ensure the use of chains in their vehicles and fully cooperate with the administration and police.

The influx of tourists continued in Murree and all relevant institutions were on alert that any emergency situation can be dealt with immediately.

The areas where power supply has been restored were: Sunny Bank, Patriata, Upper Topa, TDCP and PAF, while 80 per cent areas in Kohat, 65 per cent in Barrian, 70 per cent areas in Numbal, 30 per cent in Ghani and Dehla are still without electricity. Some areas of Kuldana, Company Bagh, Pindi Point, Berote, Patriata and Keti Satian were also without electricity.

Meanwhile, a Na-

tional Highway and Motorway Police (NHMP) spokesperson said that the Murree Expressway had been opened to limited traffic due to an improvement in the weather conditions.

"However, due to the changing weather conditions and increasing rush, there is a possibility of closing the Expressway," the spokesperson added, requesting the public to avoid unnecessary travel.

He said that more rain and snowfall was predicted in Murree and Galiyat on Monday and Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the National Highway Authority (NHA) has restored the connectivity of national highways across the country despite challenges posed by heavy snowfall and an unprecedented influx of tourists.

Through proactive measures and round-

the-clock field operations, the authority has ensured that major travel arteries remain safe and accessible for the general public, a statement issued by NHA here on Saturday said.

In the regions of Murree and Galiyat, the NHA staff and heavy machinery remained mobilised day and night to counter the effects of continuous snowfall. Despite the extraordinary influx of tourists, the Murree Expressway was kept open for all types of traffic.

To prevent accidents caused by slippery road surfaces, teams conducted regular salt sprinkling operations, successfully maintaining smooth traffic flow and ensuring the safety of travellers.

Regarding regional updates, the NHA confirmed that all national highways in Balochistan, Gilgit-Balistan, and the North-

ern Areas are now fully clear for traffic.

Significant progress has been made on the N-25 at Khajak Top and the N-50 between Kan Mahitarai and Muslim Bagh, where road access has been completely restored for commuters, the authority further said. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the majority of the provincial road network is clear, intensive clearance activities are ongoing on the N-145 (Chitral-Garam Chashma Road).

Currently, the section from Chitral to Rogee is open for one-way traffic, while teams work tirelessly to clear multiple avalanches that occurred between Km 31 and 33.

While the stretch from Makardu to Gabor is fully restored, work continues on the Gabor-Satian section to clear remaining blockages.

Minister praises National Highway Authority (NHA's) performance

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan, has praised the National Highway Authority (NHA) for its exceptional performance in

keeping national highways and motorways operational despite severe snowfall and challenging weather conditions.

In a special statement, the Minister stated that the dedication shown by NHA staff in ensuring uninterrupted connectivity is truly commendable, said a press release.

Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. "Our hardworking workers

and field staff are the true assets of our organization, ensuring road restoration through their tireless efforts," the Minister remarked.

He added that timely interventions, including continuous salt sprinkling and the strategic deployment of heavy machinery on the Murree Expressway and other key arteries, played a vital role in preventing accidents and

maintaining safety. Looking ahead, Abdul Aleem Khan has issued strict directives to the NHA to remain fully prepared and on high alert for the upcoming spell of snowfall expected across the country.

He emphasized that providing uninterrupted access to highways and ensuring the convenience of the public is a top national priority.



MILITARY: Syed Ali Haider Gillani, Member Provincial Assembly Presenting Souvenir to Italian Ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Arnelin, at Gillani House.

Life in IIOJK paralyzed by military lockdown ahead of Republic Day

ISLAMABAD (INP): In the name of "security, Indian authorities have imposed a ruthless lockdown across Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) ahead of India's Republic day tomorrow on January 26, subjecting residents to constant searches, frisking, heavy surveillance and overwhelming military deployment, paralyzing normal life.

According to Kashmir Media Service, a multi-layered security grid has been established across the Kashmir Valley, with large deployments of Indian police and central armed paramilitary forces stationed at sensitive locations, major roads, markets, and public areas.

Additional check-

points have been set up and residents and commuters are being subjected to repeated frisking and inspections.

Inspector General of Police Kashmir, V. K. Birdi, stated that extensive security arrangements have been finalized around Bakshi Stadium in Srinagar, the venue for the main Republic Day function.

He added that aerial surveillance using drones is also part of the plan. "Sensitive areas in Kashmir have seen heightened security, including road blockades, vehicle checks, security cordons, and search operations," he said. Indian forces' personnel have intensified vehicle searches and identity checks, particularly in all the 20

districts of territory including Srinagar and other major towns.

Movement on key roads particularly near the Line of Control is being closely monitored, causing traffic disruptions and inconvenience to civilians. Night raids and patrolling have also been stepped up in several areas as part of what authorities describe as preventive security measures.

"To further bolster security, advanced surveillance technologies, including drones and high-resolution CCTV cameras, have been deployed to monitor official event venues," he said, adding that checkpoints have been set up in Srinagar and other towns and district headquarters, particularly at key entry points.

Residents say the recurring security clampdown ahead of Indian national events has turned daily life into an ordeal of harassment and fear.

They maintain that the presence of heavily armed forces, constant frisking and surveillance underline the militarized nature of the occupation rather than any genuine public celebration.

Kashmiris serve such occasions under heavy restrictions, viewing them as reminders of prolonged repression and denial of political rights in the occupied territory. The officials said heightened surveillance has been enforced in key areas, including Gurez, Uri, Karnah, Tangdhar and other areas in the Jammu region.

Lion attacks wildlife team in Faisalabad, one official injured

FAISALABAD (INP): A lion attacked a wildlife department team in Faisalabad's Jaranwala Road area, leaving one official seriously injured during a rescue operation.

According to officials, the wildlife team had reached Jalvi Market Darbar after receiving reports about the presence of lions in the area when a lion confined inside a cage suddenly attacked and mauled one of the team members.

The wildlife personnel were forced to retreat without capturing the animal, while the injured official was shifted to the Civil Hospital in critical condition.

The incident comes amid heightened concern over privately owned big cats in Punjab.

Following two

separate incidents in Lahore during the past week in which pet lions attacked and injured children, the Punjab government has launched a province-wide crackdown against individuals keeping lions and tigers in private custody.

During operations conducted in Lahore, Multan, Jhelum and other districts, wildlife authorities have recovered a total of 59 lions and tigers, and cases have been registered against their owners.

Wildlife officials

Govt decides to launch Sohna Punjab project after Suthra Punjab

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab government has decided to launch the Sohna Punjab project under the Punjab Development Program after Suthra Punjab.

The scope of development projects has been expanded across Punjab. Development projects worth Rs304 billion will be included in 52 cities under the Punjab Development Program. The Punjab government has approved development projects in 51 cities of Punjab have been approved in 11 cities by January 8, 2026, while development works have started under the Punjab Development Program. Financial evaluation has been completed in 17 cities of Punjab, and contractors have been mobilised. Financial evaluation has been finalised in 10 more cities where mobilisation

has been started. Financial bids of 13 cities of Punjab will be opened on January 22, 2026. A historic project of sewerage system in Punjab, a target of laying 5397 kilometres of sewer lines has been set. Various cities' 181 km of stormwater drainage projects have been included 56 new and 61 sewage disposal stations will be constructed and renovated. As many as 323 MGD capacity wastewater treatment plants will be included in various cities. About 6100 km of roads and streets will be constructed and renovated in the districts and 21 MW solarization project will be completed at various locations which will lead to significant energy savings. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has ordered the completion of the project to make Punjab more beautiful by June 2026.

Heavy snowfall, landsliding kill 10 in KP: NDMA issues avalanches alert

PESHAWAR (INP): Northern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been gripped by intense cold and heavy snowfall, leaving at least 10 people dead in incidents involving landslides, avalanches and roof collapses over the past two days.

According to a preliminary report issued by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), the deceased include seven children and one woman, while rain and snowfall have caused partial damage to at least five houses in different areas.

The report said that in Balakot, a tourist couple from Faisalabad fell unconscious after gas accumulated inside their room. The husband later died, while the woman's condition was reported to be stable.

In Balochistan's Chaman district, the main road in the Toba Achakzai area remains closed due to snowfall, while in Mansehra all major highways blocked

by snow have been reopened for traffic. Hundreds of tourists stranded in Shogran Abbaspur area, a joint operation by the Pakistan Army and civil administration was launched after snowfall, resulting in the safe evacuation of 77 stranded residents to secure locations.

Given the risk of avalanches in mountainous and upper regions of the country, authorities have issued an alert, while the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has released a weather advisory for various areas until January 29.

The NDMA warned that due to an ongoing western weather system, further snowfall is likely over the next 24 to 48 hours, with heavy snowfall expected in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Kashmir and the mountainous and northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

As per the Met Office prediction, a west-

erly wind system will enter the country tonight. Rain and snowfall are expected in the country from today to Tuesday.

Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir and KP. Islamabad and Murree are expected to receive rain and snowfall.

Thunderstorms are expected in Haripur, Peshawar, Mardan, Nowshera and Kohat.

Snowfall is expected to block roads and cause slippage in Naran, Kaghan, Kalam and Chitral. Authorities have also warned of landslides and avalanches in the upper districts.

Meanwhile, more snowfall has been predicted in Balochistan. More snowfall is expected in Quetta, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Saifullah and Qila Abdullah.

Heavy rain with strong winds has been predicted in other areas, including Gwadar, Khuzdar, Awaran, Chagai, Panjgur and Kech.

Pakistan, US to launch joint operation against fake, fraud visa networks

ISLAMABAD (INP): Acknowledging that illegal immigration was a serious issue, Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday said that a massive crackdown was underway against those heading to the USA illegally and illegal immigration had come down by 47 per cent.

Naqvi informed the US official that passport holders at Awan-e-Sadr.

The minister said that those involved in fake visa and documents networks deserved no mercy and he was personally supervising the operation against such persons.

He further said that there was zero tolerance against mafia. "We will welcome the US cooperation in the crackdown against members of the mafia," he added.

Naqvi informed the US official that passport holders were being made foolproof with the help of latest technology.

Speaking on the occasion, Natalie said that the US attached special importance to its relations with Pakistan. "Our priorities are the same," she said, adding that an increase in bilateral cooperation would further strengthen relations between the two countries.

Several bandits surrender during operation in Kashmir

KASHMIRE (INP): Several wanted bandits laid down arms during a joint operation of police, rangers and other law enforcement agencies in Ghelgur riverine area in Kashmir-Kandhot district.

Several bandits wanted to Ghotki, Kashmir and Rahim Yar Khan districts surrendered during the operation. The bandits that lay down arms included bandit Akbar Kosh, Jeeal Kosh who were wanted to police in various crimes, SSP Murad Ghangro said.

Police officer said that the operation has been ongoing against Shar, Kosh and other notorious bandit gangs in Ghelgur riverine area.

Official said that the targeted operations will be continued until total cleansing of the criminal elements.

SSP Ghangro said that more than 15 bandits

have so far surrendered before the police. Police officials earlier said that Punjab and Sindh police have launched a grand operation against bandits in katcha area.

The police have cordoned off the bandits' infested areas and advancing with modern technology's assistance.

Officials said that 62 most wanted bandits have surrendered to police and over 50 facilities have also been arrested.

The bandits laid down arms included most wanted of Lund, Kosh, Lathani and Sekhani gangs, police said.

DIG Police Ghazi Salahuddin has said that "Two thousand policemen, eight drone teams, six bullet proof vehicles and dozens of armored carriers have been involved in the operation."



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, Ali Yousuf, Minister of Interior of Somalia; Mohsin Naqvi, Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control and Talal Chaudhry, Minister of State for Interior and Narcotics Control, witness the signing of the agreement abolishing visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders at Awan-e-Sadr.

71 die, 82 still missing on ninth day of rescue operation in Gul Plaza

KARACHI (INP): As many as 71 people lost their lives, and 82 are still missing till the ninth day of the search and rescue operation in Gul Plaza Karachi.

The rescue personnel also found the remains of one man on the third floor of Gul Plaza. Later, these human remains were shifted to the Civil Hospital for a DNA test.

Earlier, authorities registered a formal case in Nabi Bakhs Police Station over the Gul Plaza fire incident, with the government taking the role of complainant.

The FIR includes charges relating to negligence and carelessness, though no individuals have been held responsible yet, as the official investigation report has not been received.

The case has therefore been registered against "unknown" persons.

Police sources said multiple factors worsened the situation during the incident, including power outages and several locked doors within the building, which hindered evacuation and rescue efforts.

After filing the FIR, the authorities sealed the Gul Plaza premises, pending further investigation. Investigators also recovered four DVRs from the site, which are being analyzed for evidence regarding the fire's cause.

Valuables, including 1.5 kilograms of gold and over Rs100,000 in cash, were recovered and returned to their owners.

The officials report that 10-11 people remain missing, while the total number of missing has been revised to 82 after accounting for duplications and safe returns.

negligence and carelessness, and has been sealed after registration. Investigators also recovered four DVRs from the site, which are being analyzed for evidence regarding the fire's cause.

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HYDERABAD: Minister, University and Boards and Pro-Chancellor Muhammad Ismail Rahogha award Degrees to the Students during 24th Convocation of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro.

3,000 Doctors Recruited, 164 Basic Health Units Revived Across Balochistan

NEWS DESK:

The Balochistan government has completed the recruitment of 3,000 doctors on a contract basis, resulting in the restoration and operation of 164 Basic Health Units (BHUs) across the province, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti announced on Friday.

In a statement shared on social media platform X, the chief minister said the provincial government is implementing targeted health sector reforms to strengthen primary healthcare and ensure medical services reach communities at the grassroots level.

He emphasized that improving access to basic healthcare in remote and underdeveloped areas remains a central focus of the government's public health policy. CM Bugti said the revival of BHUs has brought much-needed relief to residents of far-flung districts where healthcare facilities were previously scarce or non-functional.

He added that



people living in areas affected by severe winter cold and intense summer heat can now seek primary medical treatment closer to their homes.

Highlighting the broader impact of the initiative, the chief minister said the reforms go beyond figures and represent real improvements in the quality of life and public well-being.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to further expanding healthcare infrastructure and services to ensure timely, accessible, and quality treatment for all citizens across Balochistan.

CM Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti Praises Security Forces for Successful Intelligence-Based Operation in Panjgur

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has expressed satisfaction over the successful intelligence-based operation carried out by security forces in district Panjgur, lauding their professional capabilities, courage, and timely action.

In a statement, the Chief Minister said that this successful operation against terrorists operating under Indian patronage is clear evidence that Pakistan's security forces and law enforcement agencies are fully prepared at all times to defend the country and protect its citizens.

He emphasized that the sacrifices rendered

by security forces in the fight against terrorism are unforgettable, and the entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with them.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti categorically stated that there is no place in Balochistan for state-hostile elements attempting to spread unrest.

He affirmed that counter-terrorism operations will continue without discrimination and with full force to ensure the protection of the lives and property of the people.

The Chief Minister further said that the provincial government will continue full cooperation with security forces

to further strengthen peace and law and order in the province.

He added that, under the National Action Plan approved by the Federal Apex Committee, the vision of "Azme-e-Istehkam" will be implemented to ensure the complete elimination of terrorism sponsored by foreign elements.

Reiterating his resolve, Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that no sacrifice will be spared for achieving sustainable peace, development, and prosperity in Balochistan.

He paid rich tribute to the security personnel who took part in the successful operation and extended his best wishes to them.



Rain, Thunderstorms and Snowfall Forecast Across Balochistan, Says Meteorological Department

QUETTA: According to the Regional Meteorological Center Balochistan, light to moderate rain accompanied by strong winds and thunderstorms is expected across several districts of the province on Sunday evening and night.

The districts likely to be affected include Gwadar (Jiwani, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara), Panjgur, Kharan, Nushki, and Washuk.

The weather system is expected to intensify after midnight.

spreading across the central, western, and northern parts of Balochistan. On Monday, moderate rain with thunderstorms and gusty winds is forecast in Gwadar (Jiwani, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara), Khuzdar, Kech, Chagai, Panjgur, Kalat, Washuk, Surab, Quetta, Zhob, Mastung, Kharan, Qila Saifullah, Nushki, Loralai (Musakhel), and Awaran.

In some areas of Gwadar, Kharazdar, Awaran, Chagai, Panjgur, and Kech, heavy rainfall is also expected at isolated locations.

Meanwhile, light

rain and strong winds are likely in Kachhi, Sibi, Ziarat, Hamar, Dukki, Kohlu, Jhal Magsi, and Loralai.

The Meteorological Department has also forecast light to moderate snowfall with strong winds from Monday to Tuesday in Quetta, Ziarat, Kalat, Chaman, Pishin, Harmazai, Khanoza, Kani Mehtarzi, Muslim Bagh, Loi Band, Qila Abdullah, and Gulistan.

Authorities have warned that heavy rainfall may cause flooding in urban streams and mountainous areas, particularly in Gwadar,

Jiwani, Pasni, Awaran, Chagai, and Kech. Snowfall may also lead to slippery roads, potentially disrupting traffic in several regions.

Relevant departments and local administrations have been advised to take precautionary measures and remain alert during the adverse weather conditions.

Over the past 24 hours, extremely cold weather prevailed in the northern and northwestern districts of the province.

The lowest temperature was recorded in Kalat at minus 8 degrees Celsius.



Gwadar: Contract Teachers Phase IV Appointment Orders Distributed in Dignified Ceremony

GWADAR: A dignified ceremony was held under the auspices of the Education Department, Government of Balochistan, for the distribution of appointment orders to Contract Teachers (Phase IV).

The ceremony was presided over by Deputy Commissioner Gwadar, Naqibullah Kakar, while the Special Guest was Member of the Provincial Assembly Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman Baloch.

Among the notable participants were Additional Deputy Commissioner General Dr. Abdul Shakoor, Director Development, Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Schools Balochistan and Coordinator Zero Non-Functional Schools

for Makran and Nasirabad Divisions Munir Ahmed Nawazizai, Chairman District Council Gwadar, Sheikh Mukhtar, District Education Officer Gwadar Zahid Hussain, District Officer Education Gwadar Abdul Wahab Majed, District Officer Education (Female) Zaratun Bibi, Deputy Divisional Director Makran Muhammad Karim, DDO-E Gwadar Farzan, DDO-E Pasni Mehnaz,

DDO-E Jiwani Abdul Rahim, DDO-E Gwadar Muhammad Hassan, along with other relevant officers.

Addressing the ceremony, Deputy Commissioner Naqibullah Kakar, MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman Baloch, and other speakers congratulated the newly ap-

pointed contract teachers on their appointments.

They expressed hope that the teachers would play an effective role in promoting education, improving educational standards, and contributing to social development in their respective areas.

The speakers emphasized that teachers should not only provide quality education to students but also focus on their moral and ethical upbringing.

They urged the teachers to perform their duties with dedication, hard work, and a strong sense of service, and to further improve the academic environment in schools so that a positive and healthy intellectual atmosphere can be established in society.

Deputy Commissioner Gwadar appreciated the Education Department team for completing the Phase IV recruitment process in a timely and transparent manner.

At the end of the ceremony, Deputy Commissioner Naqibullah Kakar and the distinguished guests, along with education officers, formally distributed appointment orders among the newly appointed contract teachers.

Gwadar news, Balochistan education department, contract teachers Phase IV, teacher appointment orders Gwadar, Deputy Commissioner Gwadar, Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman Baloch, education development in Gwadar.



Assistant Commissioner Ziarat Leads Life-Saving Rescue Operation Amid Heavy Snowfall

ZIARAT: On the special directives of Deputy Commissioner Ziarat Abdul Qudoos Achakzai,

Assistant Commissioner Ziarat Sajid-ur-Rehman Kordo, along with his team, set a commendable example of humanity and dedication to duty during extreme weather conditions.

Last night, the funeral of a woman from Zindara, who had passed away in Multan, was being transported via Loralai due to road closures.

However, near Kotul Sari, the funeral convoy faced severe difficulties because of heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures nearing minus 15 degrees Celsius. Women and children accompanying the funeral were stranded in extremely harsh and dangerous conditions, appearing helpless amid the intense cold.

In these critical circumstances, Assistant

Commissioner Ziarat and his team demonstrated exceptional courage, patience, and commitment by utilizing all available resources late into the night.

Despite ice-covered, glass-like slippery roads, the ambulance was carefully pulled using ropes and chains.

During the operation, the ropes broke several times, yet the team's determination

and humanitarian spirit never wavered.

After hours of relentless effort, the funeral ambulance was successfully and safely escorted across Kotul Sari and delivered to the deceased's ancestral village, Zindara.

This final journey through snow became a powerful symbol of compassion, empathy, and responsibility—an act on a freezing Ziarat night

that deeply touched hearts.

The funeral party was offered at 10:00 AM today at the Zindara graveyard.

The bereaved family expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the District Administration Ziarat, Assistant Commissioner Sajid-ur-Rehman Kordo, and his entire team, offering prayers for their safety and continued service.



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 the provincial health system, describing it as a major step toward transparent governance and improved healthcare delivery.

During a high-level 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 Hoth 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 are strengthening health sector governance, supporting real-time and evi-

dence-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 under-

scored the importance of collaboration between the Government of Balochistan and interna-

tional partners to build resilient and inclusive health systems.

Balochistan's digital transformation in healthcare includes the implementation of DHIS2, AI-enabled FRAMS, HRMS, and integrated complaint and pharmacy management modules. These initiatives are part of a broader push toward digital health governance.

positioning Balochistan as a leading example of innovation in public sector healthcare management in Pakistan.



Trade gap with nine neighbours widens 44.4pc in first half

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's trade deficit with nine neighbouring countries widened by 44.42 per cent to \$7.683 billion in the first half of FY26 compared to \$5.320bn during the same period last year.

The soaring deficit was mainly due to a decline in Pakistan's overall exports to regional countries, led by a drop in shipments to China, followed by Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Pakistan has suspended all kinds of trade, including exports, with Afghanistan since Oct 10, 2025.

In percentage terms, exports to India increased marginally, but in value terms, it is negligible. The shipments to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka registered negative growth during the period under review, according to the latest data compiled by the State Bank.

In FY25, the trade deficit with these nine neighbouring countries widened by 29.42pc to \$12.297bn, up from \$9.502bn in the preceding year.



The value of exports to Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and the

Maldives dipped 18.56pc to \$1.965bn in July-December, FY26 from \$2.413bn over the same period last year. Contrary to this, imports

surged 24.76pc to \$9.648bn in 6MFY26 from \$7.733bn over the same period last year. Imports surged 20.66pc to \$16.698bn in FY25

from \$13.838bn over the preceding year. Imports from China grew by 25.61pc to \$9.472bn in 6MFY26 from \$7.541bn over the

same period last year. The bulk of imports in the region is sourced from China, followed partially by India and Bangladesh.

Exports to China fell by 5.59pc to \$1.216bn in 6MFY26 from \$1.288bn over the same period last year. Imports from India dipped by 12.73pc to

\$97.734m in 6MFY26 from \$111.991m over the last year. In FY25, imports from India increased to \$220.58m from \$206.89m over the last year. Meanwhile, exports to India remained at \$2.926m in 6MFY26, up from \$0.399m over the last year.

Exports to Afghanistan dipped 36.61pc to \$219.489m in 6MFY26 from \$505.818m last year. Imports stood at \$6.321m in 6MFY26 against \$9.94m in FY25, a drop of 36.75pc.

Exports to Bangladesh declined by 7.54pc to \$358.499m in 6MFY26 from \$387.772m over the last year. In FY25, exports to Bangladesh increased by 19.08pc to \$787.35m from \$661.19m. Imports grew 7.41pc to \$36.882m in 6MFY26 from \$39.832m over the last year. Exports to Sri Lanka dipped by 27.13pc to \$163.173m in 6MFY26 from \$223.912m over the last year. Imports, however, rose 12.71pc to \$33.414m in 6MFY26 from \$29.647m over the last year.

Treasury bills attract \$114m in 16 days

NEWS DESK: The new calendar year began with record foreign investment in domestic bonds, as inflows into treasury bills during the first 16 days of January crossed \$114 million.

Latest data released by the State Bank of Pakistan showed the country received a record-high inflow in January, the largest monthly inflow recorded over the past six and a half months.

However, foreign direct investment (FDI) declined sharply during the first half of the current fiscal year (FY26), falling 43pc to \$40m from \$1.425bn in the same period last year.

Despite a booming equity market, foreign investors preferred T-bills, while the stock market continued to witness net foreign outflows during the six and a half months under review.

Data showed that during the first 16 days of January, inflows into T-bills amounted to \$114.7m, while outflows stood at \$18.5m. In contrast, the equity market saw inflows of just \$1.7m against outflows of \$61.5m during the same period.

Strong inflows attributed to stable exchange rate

During the first six

and a half months of FY26, total inflows into T-bills reached \$625m, while outflows amounted to \$408m. Over the same period, equity market inflows stood at \$164m, compared to outflows of \$459m.

Financial experts attributed the strong inflows largely to a stable exchange rate, which boosted investor confidence in repatriating profits and capital amid expectations of limited movement in the dollar rate.

The highest inflow during the first 16 days of January came from Bahrain at \$48m, followed by Singapore with \$28m, the UAE with \$15m and the UK with \$13m.

Compared to the buoyant stock market, inflows into T-bills remained significantly higher despite a decline in T-bill rates during the last two auctions held this month. The State Bank slashed T-bill rates by up to 31 basis points in the auction held on Jan 21. Yields on one-month papers were cut by 31bps to 9.8pc, three-month papers by 26bps to 9.89pc, six-month papers by 22bps to 9.94pc, and 12-month papers by 16bps to 10pc.

In the previous auction held on Jan 8, out-

off yields were reduced by 29bps, 34bps, 32bps and 33bps for one-month, three-month, six-month and 12-month papers, respectively.

As a result, T-bill rates are now largely in single digits, except for the 12-month paper, which carries a yield of 10pc.

Some experts partly attributed the high inflows to perceived macroeconomic stability. Faisal Mamsa, CEO of Tresmark, said Pakistan appeared stable on the surface, with inflation declining, foreign exchange reserves improving, a steady exchange rate and the KSE-100 index nearing 190,000 points. However, he noted that economic growth remained the weak link, with the cost of doing business around 4pc higher than regional peers and exports remaining stagnant.

"Pakistan's economic indicators in 2025 reflected a broad-based recovery, supported by easing inflation, improving macroeconomic stability, and a strong rebound in domestic demand," said a research report by Iopline Securities. On the macroeconomic front, inflation fell sharply to an average of 3.5pc, enabling monetary easing.

Airports outsourcing shifted to open bidding

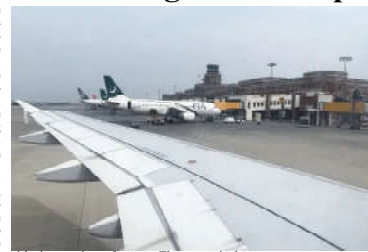
NEWS DESK: The Privatisation Commission announced on Saturday that the outsourcing operation for the country's three major airports — Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi — will move to an open bidding mode following a high level of interest from various investors.

The commission said the shift from a government-to-government (G2G) mode to open bidding aims to generate a competitive process wherein all domestic and foreign investors will have a level playing field to participate in the bidding process.

According to a commission statement, the envisaged competitive process priorities inclusivity by welcoming participation from all eligible entities, including those from partner nations, while affording equal opportunities to local and foreign investors.

This approach is designed to promote transparency and fair competition, deliver the most advantageous results for Pakistan's economy and reinforce relationships with international partners, the commission said.

The government has been actively con-



sidering options for Islamabad International Airport, Karachi's Jinnah International Airport and Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport through appropriate modes, including management contracts and long-term commercial concessions.

As part of this strategy, the Islamabad Airport has been included in the active privatisation program, consistent with the on-going process for the airports at Karachi and Lahore.

This follows constructive dialogue with entities from partner nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, as well as other international stakeholders.

The commission noted that the primary objectives are to enhance efficiency, improve service delivery, maximise revenue generation, upgrade infrastructure and attract private sector investment. These efforts align with the nation's economic vision to cultivate collaboration to modernise the aviation sector. Separately, the Privatisation Commission has invited technical and financial proposals for the appointment of a financial adviser for the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, aiming to secure a joint venture for mixed-use development of the elite Manhattan property owned by the Pakistan government.

According to the

commission's website, proposals can be submitted by Feb 16. The government intends for the transaction regarding the Roosevelt Hotel to be completed in one year. The commission intends to offer the property for setting up a joint venture project through the "best suited transaction structure and mode of privatisation".

The appointed financial adviser will be tasked with conducting market sounding to validate investor interest in the hotel.

The adviser must identify potentially interested parties and assess the level of interest in the transaction structure options covered in the transaction structure report and recommendations of

the earlier financial adviser.

Additionally, the financial adviser will develop and implement an effective marketing strategy with the approval of the Privatisation Commission.

This includes developing and implementing a plan for introducing the Roosevelt's site and project's image to bolster its value, "enabling expression of interest in the property from prospective investors".

The adviser will also be required to arrange meetings with potential investors in order to develop a better understanding of investor profiles and offer the investment climate.

Located in midtown on Madison Avenue, the Roosevelt Hotel is the only real estate entity on the govt's privatisation program.

The 19-storey property is considered among the elite hotels in Manhattan, comprising 1,025 rooms with a covered area of over 600,000 square feet. It is wholly owned by PIA Investments Ltd (PIAL), which is owned and managed by the Pakistan government.

Power sector: too many regulators

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's power sector does not suffer from a lack of oversight, it suffers from too much of it — poorly aligned. More regulators are not the answer to put the house in order. This is what is happening in the energy sector.

Every rupee on an electricity bill is shaped by a maze of regulators, auditors, market operators, cabinet committees and state-owned companies.

Yet despite this dense web of institutions, the sector remains financially broken, operationally weak and riddled with data inconsistencies.

The latest addition — the revival of Pakistan Electric Power Company (Pepeco) as Power Planning and Monitoring Company (PPMC) — raises a critical question: does Pakistan need another watchdog or does it need to fix the ones it already has?

Under the Power

Operator (ISMO), National Grid Company and Energy Infrastructure Development and Management Company — and the Central Power Purchasing Agency-Guaranteee (CPA-G).

Add to that, the Cabinet Committee on Energy, provincial cabinet committees, PPMC and above all an independent regulator that

sets prices and monitors the entire power sector — the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra).

Pepeco's revival via PPMC is a move that should worry an already scrutinised sector. Regional peers, while hav-

ing multiple bodies, have clearly defined functions which are adhered to, creating a strategy where all players act according to their role.

In Bangladesh, regulation is handled by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission with separate renewable energy and power procurement arms. Similarly, in the Philippines, the

Department of Energy sets policy while separate market regulatory, trading and state power asset arms.

The Power Division presents PPMC as a step towards transparency and better coordination across the power sector, but its creation

has sparked debate.

The company tasked with planning, performance monitoring and oversight across the value chain — from generation to distribution — naturally carries expectations of more coordinated decision-making. It leaves a broader policy question: is PPMC a meaningful step towards structural re-

form or does it risk adding complexity to an already crowded governance landscape?

Pakistan's power sector already has several institutions performing functions similar to those that PPMC now aims to centralise. Planning, oversight,



EU council president arrives in India to seal trade pact

NEWS DESK: European Council president Antonio Costa arrived in India on Sunday, as the EU and New Delhi seek to seal a free trade pact, capping nearly two decades of negotiations between the economic blocs.

Costa and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen are chief guests for this year's Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Monday before an EU-India summit on Tuesday, where they hope to shake hands on the accord, described as the "mother of all deals".

"President Costa is in New Delhi for the 16th EU-India summit taking place on Tuesday," the EU Council said on X. "The summit will be an opportunity to build on the EU-India strategic partnership and further strengthen collaboration across key policy areas."

India, the world's most populous nation, is on track to become the world's fourth-largest economy this year, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections.

India as an important market for the future, New Delhi sees the European bloc as an important source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of new jobs for its people. "We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement," Leyen said ahead of the summit.

Bilateral trade in goods reached €120 billion (\$139bn) in 2024, an increase of nearly 90 per cent over the past decade, according to EU figures, with further €60bn (\$69bn) in trade in

services. The pact would be a major win for Brussels and New Delhi as both seek to open up new markets in the face of US tariffs and Chinese export controls.

"The EU and India are moving closer together at the time when the rules-based international order is under unprecedented pressure through wars, coercion and economic fragmentation," the EU's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said on Wednesday.

Negotiations, however, are still ongoing with talks focusing on a

few sticking points, including the impact of the EU's carbon border tax on steel exports and safety and quality standards in the pharmaceutical and automotive sectors, according to people familiar with the discussions.

New Delhi, which has relied on Moscow for decades for key military hardware, has tried to cut its dependence on Russia in recent years by diversifying imports and pushing its own domestic manufacturing base. Europe is doing the same vis-à-vis the United States.



Babar, Shaheen to play for Pakistan in T20 World Cup; Haris Rauf left out

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) left out express pacer Haris Rauf from the 15-man squad named on Sunday for next month's ICC T20 World Cup jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, although former captains Babar Azeem and Shaheen Shah Afridi were named.

The announcement was made in a press conference by PCB High Performance Director and member of the men's national selection committee Aaqib Javed, who was speaking alongside skipper Salman and white-ball head coach Michael James Hesson at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

The 32-year-old Rauf finished with 20 wickets in the Big Bash League in Australia, but selector Aaqib Javed said he doesn't fit in the combination.

"Rauf has played a lot of cricket for Pakistan, but we kept conditions in Sri Lanka in mind while selecting the squad," Javed said in a press conference in Lahore.

Rauf is also the highest wicket-taker for Pakistan in T20 cricket with 133 in 94 matches.

Among the players, Salman, Faheem Ashraf, Khawaja, Mohammad Nafay, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Saibzada Farhan and Usman Khatri have received their maiden mega-event call-ups to the Pakistan squad, PCB said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Abrar Ahmed, Babar, Fakhar



Zaman, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shadab Khan and Usman Khan have played in at least one or more editions of the tournament since 2021, the statement added.

In the 20-team tournament, each team is set to play four group games before the Super Eight and Knockout Stage, all between February 7 and March 8.

Pakistan are also set to face Australia in a three-match T20 series at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore on January 29, 31 and Feb 1, with the

preparation camp starting today, the PCB statement said. Babar and Shaheen were also named in Pakistan's squad for the three-match series after being dropped from the T20 series against Sri Lanka last month.

When asked during the presser about Babar's inclusion in the World Cup squad despite "not meeting international standards", Javed said he has been "the most consistent batsman".

On Thursday, Babar announced that he would miss the remain-

der of the Big Bash League in Australia since he had been recalled to Pakistan for a national team camp ahead of the T20 series with Australia.

Salman, on being asked if Pakistan stood to gain an advantage similar to "the way India did during the previous ICC Champions Trophy, as all their matches were in the UAE," the captain admitted that Pakistan did have an advantage this time. However, he maintained that winning depended on whether the team played well.

As per the compromise, Pakistan are set to play all their matches at the upcoming T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka, though PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi said on Saturday their participation was still not confirmed.

Salman further said that "in the past three tournaments, the team had not performed well".

He continued: "When you play a world cup, it is always going to be tough. I you can not stay relaxed in any situation. I will be challenging, and we are both ready and excited for it."

When asked "why Muhammad Rizwan was not chosen to be in the squad despite having more experience in Sri Lanka than Babar," Javed said, "You have to take into account the

batting composition of your team — both the coach and captain think that Babar can play a vital role in the team — so it does not mean that one is being given a chance and the other is not, we have to look at how the team can have a more competitive batting line-up."

He went on to say that the argument had "no logic".

"You have to look at who fits better in the squad and which player can make the team better," he added.

Head coach Hesson, responding to a question about the inclusion of Khawaja, Nafay and Usman Khan as the wicket keepers despite Nafay's "inexperience, and Usman's 'poor performance'," maintained that "Usman Khan has been exceptional since he has come back in the squad".

"His wicket-keeping has probably been better than expected," Hesson said.

He continued: "As for Khawaja Nafay, we looked at Saibzada Farhan as the backup keeper, but unfortunately, he became a bit vulnerable to injury with the extra load from a keeping perspective. That was something we had to want to risk."

The head coach stressed that Farhan was a "big player" for the team. "The fact that we would have to put him in a difficult situation forced our hand a little bit [...] that is where Nafay came in as a power player," the head coach

said. "We are very comfortable with the two keeping options we have," he added.

Salman, in response to a question over whether Babar's "performance was a cause for concern", said that the player's performance "has not been as bad as you people portray it to be, his performance in the Big Bash did not go well, but it was in different conditions".

"I think since his comeback, he has been performing well in the T20s and all that matters to me is that he performs well for Pakistan," the captain added.

Detailing the batting plan, the captain said that "other than the openers, the rest of the line can only be decided given what the situation is". "In T20, other than openers, you have no idea what situation you will find yourself in," he added.

Speaking about the line-up, Javed maintained that it was the same squad "which had been in continuity for the past three to four series". "It is not like we have formed a special or different team for the World Cup. However, different conditions are always taken into account, and changes can be made," he said.

Head coach Hesson, talking about Rauf's exclusion from the squad, said, "Firstly, when we decided to take three seamers to Sri Lanka, there were obviously going to be some unlucky seamers."

Wins for SNGPL, SBP and KRL in President's Trophy

NEWS DESK: Sut Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) won their respective matches while the game between the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) ended in a draw as the fifth round of the President's Trophy Grade-I ended in Karachi on Saturday.

Wapda (93 points), SNGPL (91) and KRL (90) are the top three teams on the table, making the next two rounds in terms of qualification for the final. PTV (77) are fourth. All four teams have won three games each. SNGPL topped to a thumping 10-wicket victory over Ghani Glass as they chased a slim 39-run target at the National Bank Stadium.

Earlier, Ghani Glass resumed their second innings from overnight score of 125-1 following on and with 126 more runs left to surmount before setting a target.

Ghani Glass' opener Khawaja Ahran struck 141 — his maiden first-class century — in the follow-on effort. Ghani Glass' batting crumbled

after the second-wicket stand of 196 between Ahran and Hamid Butt (77) ended.

In a spectacular collapse Ghani went from 202-1 to 289 all out. Earlier had incurred a 251-run first-innings deficit replying to SNGPL's 452.

Sajid Khan and Mohammad Ali picked up three wickets each while Shah Nawaz Dahani and Shehzad Gul claimed two each.

Shehzad was named player-of-the-match for his nine wickets in the game.

SBP routed Sahr Associates by nine wickets, as they chased a 63-run target at the SBP Sports Complex.

Mohammad Huraire (25 not out) and

Abdullah Fazal (24 not out) shared a 45-run unbeaten stand.

Sahr Associates began the day from overnight second-innings score of 44-3 but slumped to 122 all out with SBP's Mohammad Abbas taking 5-38.

SBP's first-innings lead of 60 made sure they chased a small target to bag their second win in the event.

KRL also bagged a nine-wicket win over PTV at the UBL Sports Complex. Openers Saad Baig (40 not out) and Shahzaib Khan (27) gave KRL a solid 54-run start, which completed the job for their team who were chasing a 75-run target.

Earlier, fast bowler Mohammad Hamza grabbed seven wickets

for 39 to help KRL bundle out PTV for 94.

The defending champions had resumed the day at 27-3 and an overnight lead of seven after their first-innings total of 41-4 was matched by KRL's 434.

Wapda and OGDCL played out a draw after the former were set a 220-run target and had reached 88-3, when the time ran out at the KCCA Stadium.

Earlier, OGDCL's Danish Aziz started with 101 not out in their second innings total of 267-8 declared. OGDCL had conceded a 48-run first-innings deficit and were 117-6 at the close of play on day three. With just a 69-run second-innings lead and four wickets in the bag.

NEWS DESK: Kylian Mbappe struck twice in the second half as Real Madrid secured a 2-0 victory at Villarreal on Saturday, climbing above Barcelona to take provisional pole position in La Liga.

The win moved Alvaro Arbeloa's side to 51 points, two clear of second-placed Barcelona, who host bottom club Oviedo on Sunday. Villarreal are fourth, level on 41 with Atletico Madrid.

Real dominated from the outset, with Vinicius Jr causing endless problems on the left flank.

The Brazilian's pivotal moment came just after halftime when he weaved past defenders in the 47th minute and fed Mbappe inside the penalty area, leaving the French forward an easy finish from close range.

Real continued to control the tempo and Mbappe sealed the win in stoppage time, converting from the penalty spot after being clumsily fouled inside the box.

In a compelling encounter in the first half, Real dictated the rhythm while the home side tried to hit back with quick counter attacks.

Vinicius came close-

est to a breakthrough in the first half, narrowly missing the target with a low shot in the 40th minute after a surging run.

Villarreal's best



chance came through their Senegal midfielder Pape Gueye's powerful effort from the edge of the box that went just wide on the stroke of halftime.

The second half began with drama two minutes in when Gueye's misplaced pass was intercepted by Vinicius.

The Brazilian darted into the box, reached the byline and cut the ball back for Mbappe. Villarreal's defence managed a partial clearance but Mbappe reacted

quickest, smashing the rebound into the net for his first goal of the evening.

Villarreal's best chance came in the 62nd minute when Gerard

Moreno, unmarked inside the box after a precise Dani Parejo pass, blasted his first-time shot over the crossbar.

Real sealed the win in stoppage time. Vinicius released Mbappe with a perfectly weighted pass and as the Frenchman charged into the box he was brought down from behind by Alfonso Pedraza.

Mbappe, the league's top scorer, stepped up to calmly chip the resulting penalty into the middle of

Real Madrid TV. "They are very disruptive. We try to get them to touch the ball as much as possible, explore situations where Vini can go out wide and Kylian can break into space."

"We are very happy to have them in this form, they are the first two who are pressing, helping the midfielders, showing the solidarity we need from them, and we are very happy that the reward comes in the form of goals."

Kazakh player could not help but smile when she finally got on the board to make it 4-1.

Howeever, Punitseva handed Jovic victory with her 19th unforced error on match point. Up next for Jovic is a quarter-final against top seed and twice champion Aryna Sabalenka. "I'm just going to try to keep taking care of my side of the net. Obviously she's a great player, but that's what I want," Jovic said.

"I said last year I hope to be able to play her this year because you definitely want to continue to rack up the games, though the

games, though the

games, though the

games, though the

Tottenham's Frank faces more fan anger

NEWS DESK: Embattled Tottenham Hotspur manager Thomas Frank endured abuse from his own fans for the second week running after his struggling side scrambled a late 2-2 draw at Burnley on Saturday.

The London club were heading for a third successive Premier League defeat when Cristian Romero's 89th-minute header at least spared them from ignominy against 19th-placed Burnley.

It did not spare Frank though as visiting fans again turned on the Dane as they did at home against West Ham United last weekend, chanting 'sacked in the morning' as he made his way off the Turf Moor pitch.

Tottenham's 2-0 win over

Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League on Tuesday had lifted the gloom a little, but failing to beat a Burnley side who have not won a league game since October means Frank's prospects remain bleak.

Asked about the reaction of the fans, Frank said: "I think the message to the fans, as I've said the whole time, is that we're working very hard to make sure everything is going in the right direction and we'll keep doing that."

Tottenham led through

Micky van de Ven's goal but Burnley hit back to level before the break through Axel Tuanzebe and then went ahead in the 76th minute when substitute Lyle Foster found the net after a goalmouth scramble.

Xavi Simons hit the

woodwork for Tottenham as they mounted a late siege before Romero thumped in a header.

"I think we took some of the confidence from the game against Dortmund into the game," Frank said. "I think first half we were good. I think actually we were very good, dominating the game in the first half, creating a lot of chances, opportunities, could have gone 2-0, more or less if not for sight, then definitely in a very good way to try to win a football match."

Then unfortunately it lacked with two moments where we didn't defend it well enough. We did more than enough to get the equaliser and over the game more than enough to win it. But unfortunately not."

Frank said he was "disappointed" but "not surprised" by the reaction of the fans.

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Jovic dumps out Putintseva in 53 min

NEWS DESK: American 18-year-old Iva Jovic dished out a dominant 6-0 6-1 win over Yulia Putintseva in just 53 minutes at the Australian Open on Sunday to reach the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam for the first time.

Fans at John Cain Arena had barely settled in as 29th seed Jovic swept aside Putintseva in a display of precision and relentless pressure. "Obviously the scoreline is favourable but it doesn't matter how you get it done, I felt like I let her come back a little bit, it would become a dogfight. So I just tried to keep it as far away as

possible and just so happy to be in the quarter-finals."

Jovic set the tone from the first game, dictating play with clean winners off both wings while Putintseva struggled to find any rhythm, plagued by a cascade of errors.

Putintseva, who had taunted a raucous crowd of Turkish supporters after winning her last match, won only nine points in a brutal opening set, handing it to the American with a double fault on set point. Her frustration began to boil over in the second set as she glared at her team while Jovic continued to rack up the games, though the

games, though the

games, though the

Eight dead, more than 80 missing in Indonesia landslide

NEWS DESK: A pre-dawn landslide killed at least eight people and left more than 80 missing on Indonesia's main island of Java on Saturday, a disaster official said.

Triggered by heavy rainfall, it struck villages in Java's West Bandung region in the early hours — at around 2.30am (1930 GMT Friday) and buried residential areas.

Floods and landslides are common across the vast archipelago during the rainy season, which typically runs from October to March.

"There was a rumbling noise, like thunder," Oyoh, a resident of Pasirjalu village who, like many Indonesians, only has one name, told AFP.

"It had been raining non-stop since the morning, and then it [the landslide] happened. I immediately felt scared."

Triggered by heavy rainfall, it struck villages in Java's West Bandung region. The 52-year-old had



been evacuated to the village's government office along with dozens of others, mainly women and children.

She said her house survived the landslide, but her niece, her niece's husband and their two children were

missing. Abdul Muhari, a spokesman for the national disaster agency, confirmed that eight

people were killed and 82 were unaccounted for. West Bandung's mayor Jero Riche told reporters that the

military, police and volunteers were assisting in the search. However, he warned that the terrain

was extremely difficult and the ground remained unstable.

The local search and rescue agency said it was conducting manual excavation, spraying the soil with water pumps and using drones to search for the victims.

The disaster comes after tropical storms and intense monsoon rains late last year triggered flooding and landslides that killed around 1,200 people and displaced more than 240,000 in Indonesia's Sumatra island, according to official figures.

Environmentalists and experts and the government have pointed to the role forest loss played in the flooding and landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages.

Forests help absorb rainfall and stabilise the ground held by their roots, and their absence makes areas more prone to flash flooding and landslides, David

Gaveau, founder of conservation start-up The TreeMap, told AFP in December.

Indonesia lost more than 240,000 hectares of primary forest in 2024, according to analysis by The TreeMap's Nusantara Atlas project.

It is regularly among the countries with the largest annual forest loss as mining, plantations and fires have caused the clearance of large tracts of lush vegetation in recent decades, NGOs have said.

The government filed multiple lawsuits following the Sumatra floods, seeking more than \$200 million in damages against six firms.

It also stripped more than two dozen permits this week from forestry, mining and hydroelectric companies in Sumatra.

This month, torrential rains battered Indonesia's Siau island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people.

Snow, heavy rain kill 61 in three days in Afghanistan

NEWS DESK: Snow and heavy rain have killed 61 people in Afghanistan in the past three days, disaster officials said on Saturday, with a major road and power also cut in several provinces.

The deaths occurred mainly in central and northern provinces between Wednesday and Friday, according to a map released by Afghanistan's disaster management authority (ANDMA).

The "initial figures of casualties and destruction" also include 110 injured people and 458 houses that were either partially or fully destroyed, ANDMA said on social media platform X.

A total of 360 families were affected, said a spokesman who asked people in a video message to avoid unnecessary travel on snowy roads.

The spokesman also told AFP that most of the casualties were caused by roof collapses and avalanches, while many also died from frostbite in sub-zero temperatures.

The emergency



department in the southern province of Kandahar said six children were killed when the roof of their home collapsed in strong wind and heavy rain on Wednesday.

Houses were also damaged in other districts.

The Salang highway, one of Afghanistan's main roads, has been closed, authorities in Farwan province north of Kabul said. The highway is a vital connection to Afghanistan's northern provinces.

Food supplies were also distributed to travellers stuck on a mountain pass in central Bamyan province, west of the capital.

A transmission line importing electricity from Uzbekistan was also damaged on Thursday, leaving households in almost 12 provinces without power.

"The technical teams are ready but cannot reach the area because of the blockade of Salang pass," said Mohammad Sadiq, the spokesman for Afghanistan's national power utility DABS.

The heavy snow and rain also destroyed shops and killed livestock in different parts of the predominantly rural country.

"Snow and rain, when managed properly, contribute posi-

tively to Afghanistan's environment and livelihoods," the Kabul Times daily wrote in an editorial.

"However, without sufficient preparation and timely intervention, these natural phenomena can quickly turn into sources of tragedy," it said.

Around half of Afghanistan's population of more than 40 million people will need humanitarian assistance this year, according to the United Nations, after a sharp drop in foreign assistance in recent years.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes and drought also often compound the daily struggle to survive.

US storm leaves 230,000 without power, forces thousands of flight cancellations

NEWS DESK: More than 4,000 flights were cancelled in the US on Saturday ahead of a monster winter storm that had already cut power to more than 230,000 customers as far west as Texas and threatened to paralyse eastern states with heavy snowfall.

Forecasters said snow, sleet, freezing rain and dangerously frigid temperatures would sweep the eastern two-thirds of the nation on Sunday and into the week.

Calling the storms "historic", President Donald Trump on Saturday approved federal emergency disaster declarations in South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Indiana, and West Virginia.

"We will continue to monitor, and stay in touch with all states in the path of this storm. Stay Safe, and Stay Warm," Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social.

"Crippling to locally catastrophic impacts"

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have declared weather emergencies, the Department of Homeland Security said. "We do have tens of thousands of people in affected states in the South that have lost power," DHS Secretary Kristi Noem said on Saturday.

"We have utility crews that are working to restore that as quick as possible."

The number of outages continued to rise. As of 2:44am EST on Sunday, some 230,000 US customers had no electricity, the bulk of them in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee and New Mexico, according to

PowerOutage.com.

The Department of Energy on Saturday issued an emergency order authorising the Electric Reliability Council of Texas to deploy backup generation resources at data centres and other major facilities, aiming to limit blackouts in the state.

On Sunday, the Department of Emergency issued an emergency order to authorise grid operator PJM Interconnection to run "specified resources" in the mid-Atlantic region, regardless of limits due to state laws or environmental permits.

The National Weather Service warned of an unusually expansive and long-duration

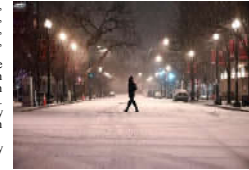
winter storm that would bring widespread heavy ice accumulation in the Southeast, where "crippling to locally catastrophic impacts" can be expected.

Weather service forecasters predicted record cold temperatures and dangerously cold wind chills descending further into the Great Plains region by Monday.

As of 10:21pm EST, more than 4,000 US flights scheduled for Saturday had been cancelled, according to flight tracking website FlightAware.

More than 9,400 US flights originally set for Sunday also have been cancelled. Airlines grid operators scramble to prepare Major US airlines warned passengers to stay alert for abrupt flight changes and cancellations.

On Saturday, Delta Air Lines continued to adjust its schedule and made additional cancellations in the morning for Atlanta and along the East Coast, including in Boston and New York City.



Israeli drone attacks kill three Palestinians, two of them teens

NEWS DESK: Israeli forces on Saturday killed two Palestinian teenagers in a drone strike near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, while another drone strike killed another Palestinian in Jabalia area, Gaza's civil defence said.

The civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue service under Hamas authority, said the drone strike killed the two teenagers near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza.

The territory's Al Shifa Hospital said it received the two bodies, adding they were two boys aged 13 and 15.

The Israeli military claimed the pair had posed an "immediate threat" to its soldiers.

Another fatality was also reported in a separate incident when an Israeli quadcopter struck a group of civilians in Jabalia, in northern Gaza, leaving one Palestinian dead, the civil defence agency said. It did not provide details on the person killed in that incident.

Israeli forces have killed at least 477 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect, according to Gaza's health ministry. Israeli media restrictions in Gaza and other areas mean casualty figures cannot be verified.

US envoys in Israel Meanwhile, US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were in Israel on Saturday to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mainly to discuss Gaza, two people briefed on the matter said.

The US on Thursday announced plans



for a "New Gaza" rebuilt from scratch, to include residential towers, data centres and seaside resorts. The project forms part of President Donald Trump's push to advance an October ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas that has been shaken by repeated violations.

A spokesman for the Israeli prime

minister's office confirmed that the meeting was planned but did not provide details.

US asks Italy to join Gaza force In a related development, the US asked Italy to join the International Stabilisation Force for Gaza as a founding member, Bloomberg News reported on Saturday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Federal agents fatally shoot second person in Minneapolis amid immigration crackdown

NEWS DESK: A man shot by federal agents in Minneapolis on Saturday has died, local and federal officials said, the second fatal shooting involving federal agents this month during a surge in immigration enforcement in the northern US city.

The man, who has not been identified, was armed with a handgun and two magazines, the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement. Meanwhile, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said the man was a 37-year-old city resident who was believed to be a US citizen. He did not release the name of the man, who he said was a lawful gun owner with no criminal record.

A video circulating on social media and aired on cable news stations showed people wearing masks and tactical vests wrestling with the man on a snow-covered street before shots are heard. In the video, the man falls to the



ground, and several more shots are heard. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz called for an immediate end to the Trump administration's immigration enforcement operations in the state.

"I just spoke with the White House after another horrific shooting by federal agents this morning," Walz wrote on social media platform X. "This is sickening. The president must end this operation. Pull the thousands of violent, untrained officers out of Minnesota."

Now, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey on Saturday called on US President Donald Trump to end the sweeping immigration crackdown in the northern city after the shooting. "I just saw a video of more than six masked agents pummeling one of our constituents and shooting him to death," Frey told a press conference.

"To President Trump: this is a moment to act like a leader. Put Minneapolis, put America first in

this moment — let's achieve peace. Let's end this operation."

Tina Smith, a Democratic US senator from Minnesota, called the shooting "catastrophic". Minneapolis officials urged calm as the incident is investigated. Video from the area showed immigration agents deploying tear gas on a growing crowd of onlookers.

"We ask the public to remain calm and avoid the immediate area," a post by the City of Minneapolis read.