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QUETTA VOICE



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 is-

sued 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 decision to seek approval from the end of March to the end of April as the revised PC-I, 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 Thalain Interchange, which will connect the Ring Road with the Motorway.

He said the revised PC-I 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 observations. 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 Rs3.3bn project to be finished by April or early May, pending nod from Punjab P&D Board.

In view of the 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, said the official. 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 is 38.5 km and its width 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 Thalain 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 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 Qasim Market during a wedding celebration in 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 to provide relief to the injured. The bodies and debris of the explosion. The bodies and debris of the explosion.

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

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 Fitrat al-Hind.

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 their commander Farooq alias Saro, along with Adeel and Wasim.

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 area. The nationwide counterterrorism campaign continues under the framework of "Azm-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 acknowledgement, 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 success under the School Based Recruitment (SBR) 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 should not be used to mask the harsh truth: millions are still deprived of their fundamental right to education.

Regrettably, instead of undergoing meaningful reform after independence, much of this system has ossified into a self-preserving structure that thrives on 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

Muhammad Asghar

Harif:

Pakistan continues to 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, inflexible, and increasingly disconnected from contemporary realities. The democratic structure in any form, whatever, was always a mirage. The coercive tendency of inherited colonial machinery further diminished the chances of public representation in state machinery. While the political and military powers after independence, were no less in awe from colonisers than the latter's educated and trained apparatchiks of bureaucracy. The same norms, pervaded both in politicians and the bureaucracy, generated a fear of anarchy without the colonisers' designed state machinery.

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pressure on Pakistan's wheat supply, now needs to be met through its reserves through domestic production and sources its remaining deficit—about 2 million tons—from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and India. This shift has eased external pressure on Pakistan's wheat market and created space for greater private-sector participation in the public sector to gradually exit direct wheat trade.

Moreover, under IMF-mandated structural reforms, Pakistan has continued to deregulate the food chain, including the withdrawal of federally determined wheat support prices. In its name, the government has stabilised prices, especially for military and urban populations.

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

Until sugar de-nationalisation in 1984, 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 sugar deficits elsewhere. Pakistan's annual wheat requirement stands at approximately 28 MMT.

Balochistan, being sparsely populated, has the lowest requirement to meet a balance of deficit through alternative means, rather than continuing with century-old arrangements of storing a large stock with minimal cost of public institutions.

In Balochistan, the limitations of this system are particularly stark. The province's maximum wheat procurement target has rarely exceeded 0.1 million tons—approximately 3% of total consumption—despite an available storage capaci-

ty of about 0.18 million tons across more than 400 warehouses. 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 that only 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 infrastructure, expanded market access, and targeted farmer support—not the continuation of an outdated procurement model that deflates prices beyond fiscal burden and rent-seeking opportunities.

Some are likely to argue that abolishing the Food Department will undermine food security, in particular during periods of price inflation or supply 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 designed to ensure availability, affordability, and access. In practice, the Food Department's limited procurement—amounting to less than seven percent of national consumption—has neither stabilised prices nor protected vulnerable consumers. Modern food security is better served through diversified supply, 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 Department (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 describe the soils of Quetta i.e. (1) piedmont plains (very deep and well-drained soil) (2) piedmont basins (3) saltinity and alkalinity (4) aridly 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 foot hills, the soil consists of sandy loam, mixed

with pebbles and rock fragments and is suitable for vegetation. In the Hanna val-

ley, the greater part of the valley floor is covered by barren rock boulders of low re-

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

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

Chiltan surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams.

The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides ideal 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 Sarish 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 use, condition 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-Baltistan when a two-storey residential house following heavy snowfall in Diamer, while one person died in Balochistan after a roof caved in due to downpour in Zhob.

In Diamer, a child died in 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 Afzal Rehman Kakar said heavy snowfall occurred in Tangir on Thursday, which brought down trees and caused the incident. According to police sources, the casualties could rise as the relief operation continued.

The Karakoram Highway, Gilgit-Baltistan 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, Ghizer and Shigar, remained blocked. Meteo forecasters made more rain snow in parts of country.

Due to the cold weather, roads in Gilgit-Baltistan continued to face difficulties, which were compounded by road closures and electricity shortages. The GB government has issued a travel advisory for tourists, stating that heavy snowfall had been relieved; the Quetta Electric

corded in Hunza, Nagar, Ghizer, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Ghanche, Kharmang and Diamer.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) meanwhile predicted more rain and snowfall in various parts of the country till Tuesday. It 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, and tourists and vehicles on these roads that were blocked due to snow were opened by the local administration, but authorities asked people to change their routes due to continuous snowfall.

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

The sky was clear on Saturday, but the weather remained extremely cold amid low pressure, adding to people's hardships. Business centres and roads in Quetta remained closed 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 (Oesco) 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, the provincial government has issued a ban on inter-provincial roads that were blocked due to snow being opened by the local administration, but authorities asked people to change their routes due to continuous snowfall.

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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 ministry said that it has taken notice of misleading claims in circulation regarding alleged 'depopulation' from Tirah Valley on the orders of the armed forces as 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 that the government agencies had been routinely conducting 'targeted, intelligence-based operations, strict against terrorist elements with full regard 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 the military and voluntary movement of population from certain localities of Tirah.

The ministry said that the KP government's Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department had issued a notification

for the release of funds reportedly Re1 billion on December 26, 2025.

The ministry said the purpose for the release of the funds was to facilitate voluntary and permanent migration of the population from certain localities of Tirah (Bagh)." Moreover, the ministry continued, the provincial department had also "requested the facilitation of advance preparedness and relief-related arrangements, including transportation, food support, cash assistance, and establishment and management of training and rehabilitation centres." The ministry quoted the notification as stating that, "the deputy commissioner, Khyber (where Tirah is located), has further conveyed that the proposed voluntary move-

ment 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 other considerations, as well as a on-camp-based modality." Hence, any stated position of the provincial government or their officials being conveyed to the media that the same 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 assault took place in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire between Dec 26 and 31. The three were charged with two prominent supporters of the jailed former Pakistani prime minister, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, a former accountability adviser in Mr Khan's cabinet.

It is not clear if the

three men are the same as the three British nationals had been charged. Karl Blackbird, 40, and Clark McAulay, 39, face charges of conspiracy to cause actual bodily harm in relation to separate incidents. A third man, an attacker con-

firmed his identity. He

was held British media that he had been punched repeatedly and is now in hiding, fearing for his and his family's safety.

On Friday, police confirmed that three

men had been charged in connection with the attacks on Imran Khan's aide.

Mr Khan, who was in the UK at the time of the attacks, has been charged with conspiracy to cause actual bodily harm.

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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 Bangla-desh. 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



ing 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 \$2.733bn over the same period last year. Imports surged 20.66pc to \$16.698bn in FY25

surged 24.76pc to \$9.648bn in 6MFY26 from \$7.733bn over the same period last year. Imports grew by 25.61pc to \$16.64m, com-

pared to \$13.838bn over the preceding 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 \$111.196m over the last year. FY25 exports 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 dropped 56.61pc to \$219.49m in 6MFY26 from \$505.818m last year. Imports stood at \$6.321m in 6MFY26 against \$9.994m in FY25, a drop of 36.75pc.

Exports to Bangla-desh declined by 7.52pc to \$358.499m in 6MFY26 from \$307.772m over the last year. In FY25, exports to Bangla-desh increased by 19.08pc to \$787.735m from \$661.19m. Imports grew 7.41pc to \$36.882m in 6MFY26 from \$30.881m over the last year.

Exports to Sri Lanka dipped by 27.13pc to \$163.73m in 6MFY26

from \$223.12m 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.

Official 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, falling by 43pc to \$803m from \$1.425bn in the same period last year.

Despite a booming equity market, foreign investment in equities rose, 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 \$17m 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 has helped to enhance 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 \$43m, 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 in the 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 9.26pc, two 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, cut-

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 line with yields on one-month papers, except for the 12-month paper, which carries a yield of 10pc.

Some experts partly attribute the high inflows to the economic stability of Faisla Masa, CEO of Tresmark, said Pakistan appeared stable on the surface, with inflation declining, foreign exchange rates stabilising, a steady exchange rate and the KSE-100 index nearing 190,000 points. However, he noted that economic growth was still sluggish with the cost of doing business around 34pc higher than in T-bill rates during the last two auctions held in the month.

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

and a half months of the year. The 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 prioritises the development of doing business friendly 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 programme, consistent with the ongoing process for the airports at Karachi and Lahore.

This follows constructive dialogue with entities from partner nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Turkey 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 investments. These efforts align with the nation's economic vision to cultivate collaboration to modernise the aviation sector. Separately, the privatisation committee invited technical and financial proposals for the appointment of a financial advisor for the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, aiming to secure a joint venture to mix-used development of the elite Manhattan property owned by the Pakistan government.

According to the

commission's website, proposals can be submitted by Feb 14. The commission intends to finalise 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 advisor 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

commission.

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-India summit was held 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".

The company tasked with planning, performance monitoring and oversight across the value chain — from generation to distribution — capping nearly two decades of negotiations between the economic behemoths.

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 is the world's most populous nation, is one of the world's fastest growing economies this year, and is the second largest economy in the world, home to 1.4 billion people. "We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement," Leyen said ahead of the summit.

While the EU eyes



India as an important market for the future, New Delhi sees the European Union as a major source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of 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 in 2024, an increase of nearly 90 per cent over the past decade, according to EU figures, with a further €60bn (\$69bn) in trade in

few sticking points, including the impact of the EU's carbon border tax, rules on 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 its imports and pushing its own domestic manufacturing base. Europe is doing the same vis-à-vis the United States.

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 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 power sector is financially broken, operationally weak and riddled with data inconsistencies.

The latest addition — the revival of Pakistan Electric Power Corporation (PEPCO) 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 Division — the main responsible federal division — are the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra), the National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC) — now divided into the Independent System and Market

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

Peopled arrival 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.

Regulation applied by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission with separate renewable energy and power procurement arms. Similarly, in the Philippines, the

PPMC as a meaningful step towards structural re-

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

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) left out 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. The two former captains Babar Azam 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 strict and while selecting the squad, Javed told a press conference in Lahore.

Rauf is also the highest wicket-taker for Pakistan in T20 cricket with 100 wickets.

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

Meanwhile, Abrar Ahmed, Babar, Fakhar



Zaman, Mohammad Naveed, 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 said.

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 T20I 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 2021 edition of the T20I series.

When asked during the presser about Babar's inclusion in the World Cup squad despite "not being a top international standard", 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 T20I series with Australia.

Salman, on being asked if Pakistan had an advantage similar to "the way India did during the previous ICC Champions Trophy, as all their matches were in the UAE", "no", he said, adding that Pakistan did have an advantage this time. However, he maintained that winning depended on whether the team played well.

"India won because

they played good cricket. If we do the same, we will win as well," Salman said.

Following India's star for the Champions Trophy 2025, a "huge" workload had been imposed upon whereby India played all its matches in Dubai, chosen as a neutral venue.

As per the competition, Pakistan were set to play their matches at the upcoming T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka, though PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi said on Saturday their participation was still not con-

firmed. 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 and upon whether India stayed relaxed in any situation [...] it will be challenging, and we are both ready and excited for it."

When asked "why

Mohammad Raizwan 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 coaches expect 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 bat-

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

"You have to look at who is 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 both 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.

Speaking about the line-up, Hesson said 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 T20 World Cup, 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: Sialkot Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) won their respective matches while the third best team, Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) ended in a draw as the fifth and sixth 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, while the next two rounds vital in terms of qualification for the final. PTV (77) are fourth. All four teams have won three games each. SNGPL romped to a thumping 10-wicket victory over Ghan Glass as they chased a slim 39-run target at the National Bank Stadium.

Earlier, Ghan Glass resumed their second innings with a 10-wicket target score of 125-1 following on and with 126 more runs left to surmount before setting a target.

Ghan Glass opener Khawaja Asif stuck 141 – his maiden first-class century — in the follow-on effort. Ghan Glass' batting crumbled

after the first-wicket stand of 186 between Arham and Hammad Butt (77) ended.

In a spectacular col-

lapse, Ghan were from

202-4 to 289 all out. They ended with 100 runs in 51-run first-innings deficit, replying to SNGPL's 452.

Sajid Khan and Mohammad Ali picked up three wickets each. Shahnawaz Dahani and Shehzad Gul claimed two each. Shehzad was named player-of-the-match for his nine wickets in the game.

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

Mohammad Hurain (25 not out) and

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

Sahir Associates began the day from overnight second-innings score of 44-2 and overcame lead of seven after their first-innings total of 100 runs matched with SNGPL's 434.

Wapda and OGDCL

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 combination of heavy rain and landslides," said a resident of Pasirlangi village who, like many Indonesians, only has one name, told AFP. "It had been raining non-stop since the morning, and then if the (landslide) happened immediately, it scared us."

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, a spokesman for the national disaster agency, confirmed that eight

people were killed and 82 were unaccounted for.

West Bandung's mayor Jeje Ritchie Ismail 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 disaster comes after several weeks of intense monsoon rains.

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 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. 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 the news said 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 Parwan province 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 capi-

tal. 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 to reach the area because of the blockage 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 stock 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.

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 as 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 snow.

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 storm "historic," President Joe Biden approved federal emergency disaster declarations in South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee and Mississippi, 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 winter 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 power, mostly in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee and New Mexico, according to PowerOutage.com.

On Sunday the Department of Emergency Management issued an emergency order to authorise grid operators to "specify resources" in the mid-Atlantic region, regardless of limits due to state laws or environmental statutes.

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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 Lahiya, while another drone strike killed another Palestinian in Jabalia, Gaza, Israel'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 Lahiya, 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 hospital 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 casu-



for a "New Gaza" rebuilt from scratch, to include residential towers, a medical centre and upscale resorts.

Meanwhile, US envoy Steve Wittenhoff 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 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 has 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 Minneapolis. Let's end this operation. Pull the public to remain calm and avoid the immediate area," a post by the City of Minneapolis read.

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.

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.

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