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Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE



Photo by Manan Mandokhail: A view of Hana Lake after heavy snowfall.

Record Snowfall in Quetta Turns City into White Carpet

Syed Ali Shah:

Record snowfall in Quetta transformed the provincial capital into a stunning white carpet, as thick snow covered roads, rooftops, parks, and open spaces, drawing visitors from other provinces, particularly Sindh, to witness and enjoy the rare winter scenery.

Residents and tourists flocked to popular hill destinations including Ziarat, Hanna, Urak, and nearby areas, where families and young people were seen taking photographs, playing in the snow, and enjoying the cold weather amid scenic surroundings.

Many visitors described the snowfall as a refreshing es-

cape from routine life.

“I have never seen Quetta this beautiful,”

The snow-covered mountains and roads look magical,” said Ayesha Khan, a visitor from Karachi, while enjoying snowfall at Hanna Urak.

Local residents also welcomed the lively atmosphere despite freezing temperatures. “Snowfall slows daily life, but it also brings happiness.

Seeing tourists from other provinces enjoying Quetta feels encouraging,” said Muhammad Aslam, a shopkeeper in the city.

The city increased significantly in Ziarat, where pine-covered hills and roads turned completely white, creating scenes similar to

Pakistan's northern tourist destinations.

Hotel owners, tea stalls, and roadside vendors reported a noticeable increase in visitors.

However, record snowfall across Balochistan disrupted normal life, blocking major highways and leaving travellers stranded in several districts.

The Quetta-Ziarat Road was closed due to heavy snowfall, while traffic on several key routes came to a standstill, causing serious difficulties for passengers traveling through the mountainous areas.

According to officials, hundreds of people, including women, children, and elderly passengers, were safely rescued. Close coordination between PDMA and allied departments helped prevent any loss of life despite prolonged snowfall and road closures.

Authorities confirmed that continuous clearance and rescue operations were carried out on the Quetta-Ziarat Road until all stranded vehicles and passengers were safely assisted.

Chief Minister Balochistan

Mir Sarfraz Bugti praised the

PDMA and field teams for

their dedication and professionalism despite extreme weather conditions, issuing certificates of appreciation for officers and personnel involved in the rescue efforts.

Meanwhile, the National Highway Authority, in coordination with PDMA, initiated measures to restore traffic flow at critical locations including Lakpass, Khojak, and other key mountain passes.

The snowfall caused a sharp drop in temperatures across the province, intensifying public hardship. The situation was further worsened by heavy snowfall, landslides, particularly in remote and snow-affected areas, where residents continue to endure harsh winter conditions.

CM Balochistan Praises CTD Operation in Pishin

News Desk:

Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has lauded the timely and effective operation conducted by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in Pishin district, stating that law enforcement agencies are carrying out their responsibilities with professionalism and firm resolve to ensure peace and stability across the province.

In a statement, the chief minister paid tribute to the bravery and dedication of CTD personnel who were injured during the exchange of fire, and extended his best wishes for their early recovery.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that CTD Balochistan and police personnel remain on the front lines of the fight against terrorism and are taking every possible step to safeguard the lives and property of citizens.

He noted that the recovery of a rocket launcher, submachine guns, and explosive material during the operation clearly indicated that the terrorists were involved in efforts to undermine peace and had links with banned outfits.

The chief minister reiterated that the provincial government considers peace its highest priority and has issued clear directives to law enforcement agencies to continue indiscriminate action under a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism.

He expressed satisfaction that the operation was carried out while maintaining the writ of the state and ensuring the protection of the civilian population.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti emphasized that there is no room in Balochistan for terrorists, their facilitators, or their networks, adding that counterterrorism operations will continue with full force until sustainable peace is achieved. He said all attempts to destabilize the province will be thwarted with the support of the public.

He further stressed that the protection of the lives and property of the people of Balochistan remains the government's foremost and non-negotiable responsibility.

Punjab CM gives 30 days for installing fire hydrants in commercial, high-rise buildings across province

NEWS DESK:

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Tuesday instructed deputy commissioners (DCs) to ensure the installation of fire hydrants in all commercial and high-rise buildings across the province within 30 days.

At a provincial cabinet meeting in Lahore — which was broadcast live on television — three days after a fire at a hotel in the provincial capital's Gulberg area claimed three lives. Seven people sustained burn injuries in the incident, and all 11 guests were safely evacuated from the hotel. Following the incident, Maryam also directed the DCs — who attended the cabinet meeting — to ensure that all under-construction buildings had fire safety systems installed before work was completed.

“Make sure that these systems are installed as well,” she emphasised.

The chief minister further instructed that the prices of fire

Heavy Snowfall: Army Rescues Stranded People, Restores Roads in Balochistan and KP

News Desk:

Quetta/Peshawar: In view of severe snowfall across various areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pakistan Army has launched timely and effective rescue and relief operations despite extremely harsh weather conditions. Pakistan Army personnel remain actively engaged in providing relief to affected populations.

Command centers have been established in Hoor, Ziarat, Bolan, Zhob, Oila Saifullah, Khojak Top, Lak Pass, Dukki, Kolpur, and Muslim Bagh to coordinate rescue efforts during the ongoing snow emergency.

Pakistan Army troops and rescue teams are continuing



preceded snowfall prompted large-scale relief and rescue operations by security forces. An immediate rescue operation was initiated to assist the local population and restore ground connectivity.

Using heavy machinery and manpower effectively, all affected roads were fully cleared and re-

opened. The restoration of key land routes ensured the resumption of essential supply chain, including access to food markets and healthcare facilities for local residents. Pakistan Army personnel cleared snow from highways and safely relocated stranded passengers and vehicles to secure locations. As a result of these

professional and coordinated efforts, critical road networks were restored, significantly easing the movement of emergency services and challenging terrain. Pakistan Army officers and soldiers are personally supervising relief operations on the ground. In Tirah Valley, troops continue rescue activities despite intense

snowfall, prioritizing civilian safety. Local residents have reportedly responded positively to the efforts of the security forces. The Pakistan Army remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding lives and property and providing immediate assistance during natural disasters and emergencies.

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QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Climate Fund – A Lifeline Against Growing Disasters

**Editorial:**

Balochistan has taken a historic and timely step by establishing its first-ever Climate Fund, a move that signals the province's recognition of the existential threat posed by global warming and climate change. In his recent meeting with British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti rightly underlined the importance of mobilizing resources to safeguard communities from natural calamities that are growing in frequency and intensity.

Floods In Bunerai
The tragic flash floods in the Bunerai area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa this month, which claimed precious lives and lives are a stark reminder of Pakistan's extreme vulnerability. The province sits on the fragile ecological and seismic zone — prone not only to floods but also to severe droughts, earthquakes, and the looming threat of desertification. Each disaster further strains an already fragile infrastructure, displaces

communities, and deepens poverty.

Stop Deforestation

The Climate Fund, if implemented transparently and effectively, has the potential to become a lifeline for millions. It can provide the financial base for disaster preparedness, early warning systems, reforestation, water management, and community resilience projects. Equally important, it can build trust between the government and people by showing that saved resources — like the Rs. 1 billion curtailed on non-development expenditures — are being invested in protecting lives and livelihoods.

The Battle Cannot Be Fought Alone
Indeed, climate change is not a battle that Balochistan can fight alone. Partnerships with international agencies, such as the United Kingdom, are critical to ensure that technical expertise, innovative solutions, and funding support. Training local institutions, particularly in areas like disaster management

and environmental governance, should be a top priority.

The provincial government's commitment to reforms in governance, education, and health is commendable, but the climate emergency must remain at the center of its development agenda. Without climate resilience, all other reforms risk being undermined by the next flood or crippled by the next drought.

Balochistan has shown leadership by creating this Climate Fund. The next step is to ensure that it does not become another underutilized policy initiative. Effective monitoring, independent oversight, and community involvement will be key to making it a success.

In the face of global warming, every delay

carries a cost and economic stability is at stake. The Climate Fund must now take all possible steps to translate the promise of the Climate Fund into tangible protections for the people of Balochistan.

Balochistan's Education Crisis: Beyond Numbers and Empty Promises

Syed Ali

Shah Analysis:
The Balochistan government's claim that around 45,000 children have returned to schools is being pre-

mised management, and hollow commitments by successive provincial governments.

For years, education in Balochistan has been treated more as

open skies or abandon education altogether. Shelterless schools are not an exception but a norm across vast parts of the province.

Equally alarming

important, but without strict monitoring and enforcement, such reviews risk becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise.

The return of

government is serious about change, it must move beyond statements and statistics. Massive investment in school infrastructure, transparent teacher



sented as a major breakthrough in addressing the province's deep-rooted education crisis.

While any increase in enrollment deserves acknowledgment, this figure pales in comparison to the magnitude of the challenge.

More than 3.1 million children in Balochistan remain out of school, a reality that exposes decades of neglect,

a slogan than a serious policy priority. Governments have consistently paid lip service to the issue, announcing plans, committees, and reforms that rarely translate into meaningful change on the ground.

The result is a broken system where thousands of schools remain without proper buildings, forcing children to study under

45,000 children to be used to mask the harsh truth: millions are still deprived of their fundamental right to education.

Poverty, insecurity, political interference, and lack of accountability continue to cripple public education.

Reviewing recruitment processes is

management, community-based enrollment drives, and sustained political will are essential.

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

Artificial Intelligence Just Taking Baby Steps

Syed Muhammad

Qaseem:
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence in computer systems. In simple words, AI enables machines to perform tasks that require human intelligence. Those tasks can be learning from past experiences, solving problems, and making predictions based on provided data. Until now, AI has just started taking baby steps but is growing at a much rapid rate.

Every invention has various positive and negative impacts on human civilization. According to Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai, "AI will have a more profound impact on human beings than fire, electricity, and the internet". This innovation also has both positive and negative impacts on human beings. If it is left unchecked, it will have adverse impacts on human creativity, the flow of information. However, the positive use of AI will bring major advancements in medical science, education, agriculture, etc. In the following paragraphs, the impacts of AI on humans are described.

Negative Impacts of AI:

AI is a technological tool and its use can be both positive and negative, although, it is in the hands of human beings on how to use it. Following are some negative impacts of AI on humans.

Deep Fakes Through Generative AI:

In the age of information

misinformation is a major issue. The introduction of generative AI into public space has further worsened the predicament of information flow.

AI is a Major Threat to Human Creativity

Creativity is a unique characteristic of human beings due to which they bring development, prosperity, and easiness in their lives.

Another example of the deep flaws that created uncertainty was pictures of the former US president, Donald Trump's arrest, which provoked his supporter's sentiments in the society.

Therefore, if the use of generative AI is left unchecked, bad actors in society will use it for their own purposes and spread wrong information.

AI's use in War

Using AI for the purpose will have ferocious results. Because AI unlike humans, does not fear, doesn't commit mistakes, doesn't get tired, and has no mercy. So, it can fight much better than a soldier. Thus, it can be used to develop AI fighters, robots, and drones for the maximization of power. This will attract the attention of their rival countries to build AI war machines

for the balance of power. Hence, like nuclear weapons, AI will further worsen security dilemmas if used for the purpose of war.

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Federal Constitutional Court upholds super tax

NEWS DESK: Accepting the authority of Parliament to legislate on imposing taxes, the Federal Constitution Court (FCC) on Tuesday upheld the vires of the super tax, which means that Section B of the Income Tax Ordinance (ITO) will remain in force.

A three-member bench, headed by FCC Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan and also including Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, announced the much-anticipated short order.

The short order was announced in the afternoon after a brief hearing in the morning, when the FCC received its ruling with an observation that the verdict would be issued today. The detailed judgment will follow later.

The FCC had taken up 225 connected matters, including 71 intra-court appeals (ICAs) that were transferred to it after the passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment.

The tax was initially imposed by the

PML-N government in 2015 as a one-time measure under a money bill, with the stated purpose of rehabilitating areas affected during Operation Zarb-i-Azb against terrorists.

It applies to wealthy individuals, associations of persons and companies earning above Rs500 million.

It levies a tax rate of 4 per cent on the income of banking companies and 3pc on other sectors, aimed at funding the rehabilitation of "temporarily displaced persons" under Section 4-B of ITO.

Subsequently, different appeals were instituted against the judgments of the Sindh, Lahore and Islamabad high courts regarding the levy of super tax through Section 4-B.

On Tuesday, the FCC rejected earlier court rulings that had declared the super tax "discriminatory" and declared that the levy was validly imposed.

It also observed that Sections 4-B (super tax for rehabilita-

tion of temporarily displaced persons) and 4-C (super tax on high-earning persons) of the ITO were in accordance with the law.

However, the FCC allowed oil and gas exploration companies to approach the court individually for tax exemptions, also explaining that it will not apply to mudarabah, mutual funds, or unit trust funds.

Senior counsel Hafiz Ahsaan Ahmed Khokhar, who represented the Revenue Division secretary before the FCC, told Dawn that the judgment would affect the recovery of around Rs31 billion.

Previously, an additional 5pc super tax was levied on annual profits exceeding Rs300m. But in 2022, the super tax was applied to individuals earning over Rs150m annually, with a maximum rate of 10pc.

Prior to the FCC's judgment in November 2025, a five-judge constitutional bench of the Supreme Court was hearing the case.

Sindh cabinet approves compensation package for families of Gul Plaza victims

NEWS DESK: The Sindh Cabinet on Tuesday approved the relief and rehabilitation package — announced last week — for the families of the victims of the Gul Plaza inferno in Karachi, which includes Rs10 million as financial compensation.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah had earlier announced the compensation on January 19.

The deadly inferno, which erupted on the night of January 17 at the mall and took nearly two days to be fully extinguished, has claimed at least 73 lives and left over 1,100 shopkeepers in ruins. After four days of searching through the rubble to locate remains of the dead and missing, the search operation concluded on Sunday.

According to a press release issued by the Chief Minister's House today, during the meeting, the cabinet did not express grief over the loss of lives in the Gul Plaza tragedy and approved Rs10m for the families of the deceased, along with the

Rs10m "interest-free loans" for shopkeepers affected by the devastating blaze.

The chief minister held that "there can be no compromise on human life. Relief, justice, and punishment must go hand in hand."

In addition, Rs500,000 per shopkeeper will be provided as immediate subsistence support to cover household and utility expenses," the statement said.

During the cabinet meeting, Sindh CM also directed that "alternative commercial spaces be provided within two months to enable shopkeepers to resume their business."

"These include the Star Gate flyover, Mahr Halt underpass, Sobhah Goth flyover, and Ziaul Hassan Lanjari — whose responsibility is to be given to the inquiry committee's report on the incident."

"No negligence will be overlooked. Those found responsible will be held ac-

countable," the CM was quoted as saying.

On Jan 19, CM Murad had announced that an inquiry committee was being set up to probe the incident, headed by Karachi Commissioner Hassan Naqvi.

He asserted that the inquiry's aim was not to point blame but to acknowledge and correct one's mistakes.

Rs19.1bn

approved for road infrastructure in Karachi.

Separately, the provincial cabinet also approved Rs19.16 billion for the "immediate execution" of six major road infrastructure projects in the megacity, the press statement said.

"These include the

Star Gate flyover, Mahr Halt underpass, Sobhah Goth flyover, and Ziaul Hassan Lanjari — whose responsibility is to be given to the inquiry committee's report on the incident."

"No negligence will be overlooked. Those found responsible will be held ac-

countable," the CM was quoted as saying.

According to a press release issued by the Chief Minister's House today, during the meeting, the cabinet did not express grief over the loss of lives in the Gul Plaza tragedy and approved Rs10m for the families of the deceased, along with the

No question of military operation in Tirah, govt says

NEWS DESK: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said on Tuesday that there was no question of a military operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tirah Valley whose residents have been vacating their houses in recent days amid concerns about a military action against them.

Asif made these remarks during a press conference in Islamabad, where he was flanked by Information Minister Aslam Khan and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Information and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Affairs Iftikhar Wali Khan.

The press conference

was held two days after the federal and provincial governments traded barbs over who authorised the evacuation process.

An official, who

requested anonymity

and spoke on the condition of temporary displaced persons) and 4-C (super tax on high-earning persons) of the ITO were in accordance with the law.

However, the FCC allowed oil and gas exploration companies to approach the court individually for tax exemptions, also explaining that it will not apply to mudarabah, mutual funds, or unit trust funds.

Senior counsel

Hafiz Ahsaan Ahmed

Khokhar, who repre-

sented the Revenue

Division secretary before the FCC, told Dawn that the judgment would affect the recovery of around Rs31 billion.

Previously, an addi-

tional 5pc super tax was levied on annual profits exceeding Rs300m. But in 2022, the super tax was applied to individuals

earning over Rs150m annually, with a maximum rate of 10pc.

Prior to the FCC's

judgment in November 2025, a five-judge

constitutional bench of the Supreme Court was hearing the case.

President okays seven bills, heads to United Arab Emirates (UAE)

NEWS DESK: Pre-sident Asif Ali Zardari on Monday gave assent to the seven bills passed by the parliament, including some controversial bills, turning them into laws, before leaving for the United Arab Emirates on an official tour.

On Monday, the

President, the ap-

pointed to the Na-

ional Commission for

Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2026;

Export Devlopment Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2026;

the Transfer of Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2026;

the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2026;

the Daanish Schools Aut-Horty Bill, 2026;

the Income Tax (Amend-

ment) Bill, 2026; and the

National Commission for

Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

A joint sitting of

parliament, which was

attended by the

Speaker, was held on

Wednesday, Decem-

ber 20, 2023, and the bills were re-

turned unsigned.

After signing the

seven bills, President

Zardari, accompanied by a high-level delegation,



mishandlement by the authorities only adding to their troubles.

At the end of the press conference, he said members of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan had been residing in Tirah with their families. "They are about 500 in number," he said.

The defence minister also asserted that the provincial government had approached the KP government for the release of Rs1.4 billion for the rehabilitation of the area. "The armed forces deployed in that area have nothing to do with it. This is an arrangement between the jirga and the provincial government, and as a result of that, the notification was issued," he added, holding up a notification that he said was issued by the KP government.

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Punjab CM approves setting up of Stroke Management Centres in all districts

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has approved the establishment of Stroke Management Centres in every district of the province to ensure timely and effective treatment for

stroke patients. The chief minister has given in-principle approval for the deployment of neurologists and paediatric neurologists in every hospital. In addition, one doctor and one nurse from each district

will be provided three months of specialised stroke management training on an urgent basis. Maryam Nawaz has directed the health department to immediate launch of a telemedicine project for stroke patients, enabling

doctors at district hospitals to seek instant guidance from specialists and consultants via telephone for emergency cases. The chief minister ordered the initiation of a nurses' training programme for

stroke management centres and the launch of a public awareness campaign on stroke prevention and timely treatment. She underlined the critical importance of "golden hours" in stroke care and said she would

force to travel to major cities for treatment. During a special meeting, PIMS neurologist Dr. Qasim Bhatti briefed the chief minister on the stroke management programme, highlighting that one in four people

over the age of 25 is at risk of stroke. He emphasised that awareness and training for pre-hospital, hospital, and post-hospital stroke care are essential to reduce mortality and long-term disability.



Islamabad: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Chinese Brands lead Pakistan's Mobile Manufacturing to 30.2M Units

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan's local mobile phone manufacturing and assembling sector continued its rapid expansion in 2025, while commercially imported handsets dropped sharply, Gwadar Pro reported quoting new data released by the Pakistani Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

The regulator's latest Mobile Device Manufacturers show that local assembly and manufacturing reached 30.21 million units in 2025, compared with just 2.37 million commercially imported phones, underscoring a decisive shift toward domestic production.

The PTA's data suggests that Pakistan's handset ecosystem has undergone a structural transformation over the past decade.

Local manufacturing rose from just 0.29 million units in 2016 to 1.72 million in 2017, 5.2 million in 2018, and 11.74 million in 2019,

before accelerating to 13.04 million in 2020 and 24.66 million in 2021. Output remained above 21 million units in both 2022 and 2023, surged to a record 31.38 million in 2024, and eased slightly to 30.21 million in 2025, while foreign imports collapsed from more than 21 million units in 2016 to near historic lows in recent years.

The figures mark another milestone for Pakistan's impressive substitution drive. As recently as 2020, commercial imports stood at more than 24 million units, while local manufacturing was limited to about 13 million.

In 2021, domestic output had overtaken imports, and the gap has widened steadily since then. The trend reflects the combined impact of PTA's Mobile Device Manufacturing (MDM) regulations, tighter controls under the Device Identification and Registration and

Blocking System (DIRBS), and incentives aimed at encouraging global brands to assemble devices locally.

Chinese brands dominate Pakistan's locally manufactured handset market.

PTA's latest "Top 10 Brands" chart shows Transsion Holdings' Infinix leading local production in 2025 with about 3.65 million units, followed closely by Vivo at roughly 3.8 million units. Other Chinese-backed brands such as Itel, Tecno and Xiaomi's Redmi line also feature prominently among the top assembled devices.

Collectively, Chinese manufacturers account for a substantial share of Pakistan's locally produced smartphones, highlighting their central role in the country's handset value chain, PTA's statement said.

The growing presence of Chinese brands has helped expand affordable smartphone

access while strengthening Pakistan's industrial base.

The momentum is also reflected in PTA's Annual Report, which is based on data available up to June, notes that by 2025 more than 95% of mobile devices used on Pakistani networks were locally manufactured, including 68% of all smartphones, a dramatic shift from a few years ago.

The report adds that dozens of manufacturing authorizations have been issued to domestic and international players, positioning Pakistan as an emerging regional hub for handset assembly.

Beyond reducing pressure on foreign exchange reserves, the transition has supported job creation and technology transfer, while helping formulate a more stringent compliance and registration frameworks, according to Gwadar Pro.

Chinese tech delegation explores investment in Pakistan's AI industry

ISLAMABAD (INP): A two-member Chinese technology delegation from the Leviathan Group, specializing in big data centers, smart technology and emerging II platforms called on Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

In the meeting, the delegation explored investment and cooperation opportunities in Pakistan's growing information technology sector, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence (AI).

The delegation comprised Sun MingQian, Chief Executive Officer of Leviathan Technologies, and Mei

Dinglin, Senior Representative of the Group.

According to Gwadar Pro, Khalid Taimur Akram, Adviser to the Chairman of HRL Group, told Gwadar Pro that the delegation has expressed strong interest in investing in Pakistan's AI industry.

He said the company views Pakistan as a strategic destination due to its highly skilled IT workforce, expanding startup ecosystem and the government's emphasis on digital transformation.

During the meeting, the Chinese delegation discussed prospects for long-term partnerships, joint ventures and technology transfer, high-

lighting Pakistan's evolving digital ecosystem as a key driver of interest.

Welcoming the delegation, Shaza Fatima Khawaja reaffirmed the government's commitment to attracting foreign investment in the technology sector.

She highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks and create a business-friendly environment for international technology companies.

The minister also underlined Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's "Digital Nation Pakistan" vision to position the country as a regional hub for IT services and

research facilities in collaboration with Pakistani public and private sector partners.

"The group is keen on long-term engagement and is evaluating investment models that support technology development, local capacity building and skills development in advanced technologies," he said, adding that potential areas of investment include artificial intelligence applications in smart cities, e-governance, fintech, healthcare, agriculture and industrial automation.

According to Akram, Leviathan Group is exploring opportunities to establish AI-driven data centres and research and development facilities in collabora-

tion with Pakistani public and private sector partners.

"The group is keen on long-term engagement and is evaluating investment models that support technology development, local capacity building and skills development in advanced technologies," he said, adding that potential areas of investment include artificial intelligence applications in smart cities, e-governance, fintech, healthcare, agriculture and industrial automation.

During the meeting, the Chinese delegation discussed prospects for long-term partnerships, joint ventures and technology transfer, high-

Civil servants not bound to obey illegal orders: SC

I S L A M A B A D (INP): Supreme Court Justice Hashim Kakar remarked on Tuesday in the OGDCI recruitment case that if the prime minister issues illegal orders, civil servants are not bound to comply with them.

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Justice Hashim Kakar, heard the case regarding illegal recruitment in OGDCI (Oil and Gas Development Corporation Limited).

The court directed the lawyers to come prepared for the case.

The counsel for

the NAB (National Accountability Bureau) stated that former minister Anwar Saifullah had asked the Chairman of OGDCI to issue appointment letters. According to him, the recruitment process should have been carried out through advertisements.

Justice Kakar remarked that this is not a monarchy where orders are simply issued, adding that there is no such thing as every government institution.

Justice Salahuddin Panhwar said that the public asks ministers

for jobs.

The NAB counsel

suggested that the

minister's principal

staff officer had written that there was parliamentary pressure regarding the jobs.

The counsel

stated that if civil

servants refuse to

follow such orders, they may face serious consequences when Justice Kakar remarked that they were not bound to obey illegal orders by prime minister.

The NAB's rep-

resentative added that PIA had to be priva-

tized due to overstaff-

ing. Justice Ishaq

requested the court to

dismiss the review

petition and uphold the original verdict.

PMD forecasts more rain, snowfall in upper regions

I S L A M A B A D (INP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast cloudy weather with intermittent rain, wind and thunderstorms, along with snowfall in hilly areas, across several parts of the country during next 24 hours.

According to the PMD, rain-wind and thunderstorms with lightning over hills are expected in hilly areas of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir. The section 144 has been issued to prevent and the law enforcement agencies have been directed to take action under the law.

The government of Punjab has given conditional permission to celebrate the Basant Festival from February 06 to 27. Deputy Commissioner Lahore has issued the Basant 2026 notification under the Punjab Kite-Flying Act 2025, recently passed by the Punjab Assembly.

The authorities have also planned various safety measures including installing safety nets and wire-protectors on power lines to prevent accidents. Officials earlier said that the Basant festival will be allowed only during the day for 30 days under section 144.

During Basant using single or multicolour kites without any picture will be permissible under the law. Preparation of illegal kites, their storage, sale or distribution will be a punishable offence. According to sources, there were apprehensions that the

heavy snowfall is likely at isolated places in Kashmir and upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Heavy snowfall is likely at isolated places in

Kashmir and upper

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Tourists have been advised to remain cautious and avoid unnecessary travel during the forecast period.

In Islamabad,

cloudy weather with

intermittent rain and

thunderstorms is ex-

pected.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, widespread rain with snowfall over hills is likely, with heavy rain and moderate to heavy snow expected.

In Chitral, Dir, Swat,

Kalam, Shangla,

Kohistan, Battagram,

Manehara, and

Abbottabad.

In Punjab, rain-wind

and thunderstorms

are forecast in Rawalpindi,

Lahore, Gujranwala,

Sialkot, Narowal, Iehlum,

Chakwal, Attock, and

surrounding areas, while

Muree and Galiyat may

experience heavy rain and

moderate to heavy snow-

fall. Most parts of Sindh

are expected to remain

cold and dry.



ISLAMABAD: Acting President Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani meeting Pir of Lauri Sharif, Pir Muhammed Sadiq Qureshi.

Fresh spell of rain in upper regions of Mansehra district continues

M A N S E H R A (INP): A fresh spell of rain in the plain areas and intermittent snowfall in the upper regions of Mansehra district has continued since late last night, severely affecting normal life across the mountainous areas. According to officials, heavy snowfall in Kaghan Valley, Siran Valley and Konsh Valley have been covered with a thick white blanket. Heavy snowfall is ongoing at major tourist destinations including Shogran, Kaghan and Naran, where accumulation has increased significantly during the current spell. In Shogran, more than one additional foot of snow has fallen during the latest snowfall, raising the total snow depth to over three feet. Kaghan Bazaar has also received nearly one and a half feet of snow. Heavy snow is disrupting routine activities and restricting the movement of residents, who have largely remained confined to their homes due to severe cold and slippery conditions.

Snowfall has also caused the closure of several link roads in Siran Valley and has increased significantly during the current spell. In Shogran, more than one additional foot of snow has fallen during the latest snowfall, raising the total snow depth to over three feet. Kaghan Bazaar has also received nearly one and a half feet of snow. Heavy snow is disrupting routine activities and restricting the movement of residents, who have largely remained confined to their homes due to severe cold and slippery conditions.



ISLAMABAD: A four member delegation of Transparency International headed by its Chair Mr. Francois Valerian held a meeting with Chairman NAB Lt Gen (R) Nazir Ahmed at NAB (HQ).

chinery have been stationed at sensitive points along the

Kaghan Highway to

provide guidance and assistance to both local residents and tourists.

Meanwhile, the

district administration

has issued an advisory

against tourists and

visitors to Kaghan Valley to avoid unnecessary travel in view of the prevailing weather conditions and the risk of further snowfall.

Authorities have as-

sured that the situation is being closely monitored and snow clearance and relief operations will continue as weather permits.

DIG Sibi Range Barkat Hussain Khoso Visits Kohlu on Two-Day Tour, Reviews Law and Order Situation

KOHLU: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Sibi Range Barkat Hussain Khoso arrived in Kohlu on a two-day official visit, where he was given a warm welcome by Superintendent of Police (SP) Kohlu Muhammad Tayyab Iqbal.

A smartly turned-out police contingent presented a guard of honor on his arrival.

DIG Barkat Hussain Khoso chaired an important law and order meeting at the SP Office Kohlu.

During the meeting, SP Muhammad Tayyab Iqbal gave a detailed briefing on the overall security situation of the district. Senior officials from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Counter Terror-



ism Department (CTD) and other relevant departments were also present, where a comprehensive review of the district's security and policing arrangements was conducted.

Later, the DIG visited Police Lines Shahed Muhammad Aalam, where he laid floral wreaths at the Martyrs' Memorial to pay tribute to police martyrs.

SP Kohlu Muhammad Tayyab Iqbal Muhammad Marri gave the DIG a detailed tour of the police lines, including vehicles, weapons, residential barracks and offices, and provided a comprehensive briefing.

Addressing police personnel who were recently merged into the police force, DIG Barkat Hussain Khoso said that Kohlu Police will be further organized and strengthened on professional lines to ensure the protection of life and property of the citizens.

He acknowledged that officers and personnel of the former

Historic Decision: Women Police Officers Appointed to Key Positions in Naseerabad Range

QUETTA: Dr. Rabab Khan Baloch, the Advisor to the Chief Minister of Balochistan on Women's Development, expressed great pleasure and satisfaction over the decision to appoint women police officers to key positions in all districts of the Naseerabad Range. In a statement, Dr. Rabab Khan Baloch welcomed this decision as a major milestone in the empowerment of women in Balochistan's police force.

The decision to appoint women officers to crucial roles such as Complaint Officers, Assistant Clerks, and Computer Operators in various police stations is seen as a testament to the provincial government's complete trust in women's abilities. Dr. Rabab emphasized that these appointments will create a safer, more dignified, and trust-filled environment for both female officers and citizens seeking assistance.

Highlighting the significance of this development,

Dr. Rabab stated that women police officers will now be able to address issues such as domestic violence and general public concerns more effectively.

This, she added, would make it easier for female citizens to seek justice and support.

Dr. Rabab also noted that this clearly demonstrates that the potential of Balochistan's daughters is not confined to the four walls of their homes. She expressed confidence that these women officers, in their uniforms, will work alongside their male counterparts to maintain law and order.

Deputy Commissioner Musa Khel Meets District Chairman to Discuss Ongoing Development Projects

MUSA KHEL: A key meeting was held today between Deputy Commissioner (DC) Musa Khel, Abdul Razzaq Khajak, and District Chairman Alam Khan Musa Khel, with Assistant Commissioner Najibullah Kakar also in attendance.

The discussion primarily focused on the ongoing development projects in the district and strategies for improving the quality of work. District Chairman Alam Khan emphasized the need for

a structured approach to ensure better quality and oversight of all ongoing development schemes.

He stressed the importance of regular supervision to maintain high standards and suggested taking immediate actions for improving public health, sanitation, and the provision of clean drinking water.

The Chairman also highlighted the necessity for all district department heads to maintain consistent attendance.

The discussion pri-

marily focused on the ongoing development projects in the district and strategies for improving the quality of work. District Chairman Alam Khan emphasized the need for

to align with the provincial government's vision of providing justice and essential services directly to the people's doorstep.

Responding to the concerns, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq Khajak assured the District Chairman that the vision of the Government of Balochistan would be followed and implemented accordingly.

He informed the Chairman that there would be no compromise on the quality of development work or the well-

fare of the public. The District Chairman expressed his gratitude to the Deputy Commissioner and extended his best wishes for continued collaboration towards the district's progress.

Musa Khel, Deputy Commissioner, District Chairman, development projects, Balochistan government, various districts, district administration, Abdul Razzaq Khajak, Alam Khan Musa Khel.

He further emphasized that the operation of health centers is the top priority of the district administration. Speaking to hospital staff, Deputy Commissioner Akhazai appreciated the hard work and medical staff is non-negotiable. He stressed that absenteeism would not be tolerated under any circumstances and informed that strict action would be taken against any personnel found negligent in their duties.

He concluded by reiterating the district administration's commitment to resolving health center issues.

Furthermore, the Deputy Commissioner informed that the operation of health centers is the top priority of the district administration. Speaking to hospital staff, Deputy Commissioner Akhazai appreciated the hard work and medical staff is non-negotiable. He stressed that absenteeism would not be tolerated under any circumstances and informed that strict action would be taken against any personnel found negligent in their duties.

He reassured the public that all available resources are being mobilized to restore essential services and maintain road safety during the adverse weather condi-

tions. In addition, DC Chaman appealed to the citizens to stay home and avoid unnecessary travel.

He warned that the icy conditions on roads and mountains increase the risk of vehicles slipping, making travel hazardous. The DC urged ev-

eryone to prioritize safety and refrain from non-essential travel until conditions improve. The Chaman highway, PDMA, NHA, Kordik Top, road safety, district administration, DC Chaman, heavy machinery, traffic flow, winter weather, public safety.

Deputy Commissioner Ziarat Visits DHQ Hospital, Emphasizes on Ensuring Health Centers' Full Functionality

ZIARAT: In a surprise late-night visit to the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital Ziarat, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Qudus Akhazai conducted a thorough inspection of the health care facility on creation. He was accompanied by Assistant Commissioner Sajad ur Rehman Koro during the

visit, which aimed to ensure that health services in the region are fully operational.

The Deputy Commissioner meticulously checked the attendance of doctors and paramedical staff, inspected the wards, and evaluated the availability of essential facilities.

He emphasized that the operation of health centers is the top priority of the district administration. Speaking to hospital staff, Deputy Commissioner Akhazai appreciated the hard work and medical staff is non-negotiable. He stressed that absenteeism would not be tolerated under any circumstances and informed that strict action would be taken against any personnel found negligent in their duties.

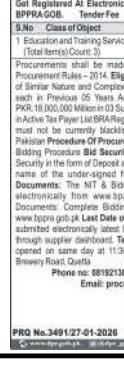
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PRQ No.3496/27-01-2026
www.pib.gov.pk

PAKISTAN AIRPORTS AUTHORITY (PAA)

پاکستان ائیر پورٹس ایئر پارک

TENDER NOTICE

1. Bids are invited in accordance with PPRA Rule No. 36(a) from eligible contractors/firms having expertise/resources and valid registration with FEC (I-C-5) category, and FIR in per eligible criteria mentioned in bidding documents for the following work.

S. No.	Name of Work	Earliest Money	Date and time of submission	Date and time of opening
01	INSTALLATION OF PARKING SHEDS AT DIFFERENT LOCATIONS OF NEW GUJARAT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT GUJARAT	Rs.1,350,000/-	17th February, 2020 11:00 am	17th February, 2020 11:30 am

2. Bids must be submitted electronically as per conditions set out in bidding documents and guidelines provided by PAA available on PAA E-Tender System (<http://etender.paa.gov.pk>).

3. Tender documents without required earnest money or where earnest money is not received prior to closing time of bid will not be entertained. Earnest money should be in the shape of PIAI's bank draft or any schedule bank draft in favor of PAA Works Unit Nokan Coastal Area.

4. For Eligibility, firm must also have experience of having successfully executed 03 similar nature works (fabrication/erection sheds, etc) or civil works amounting to Rs. 25 million or more during last 05 years.

5. PAA reserves all the rights to accept or reject any or all the tenders for sufficient and cogent reasons which will be communicated to bidder on request.

6. The bids of contractors having unsatisfactory performance history in ongoing works will be liable to be rejected.

WARNING: Pay Order / Bank Drafts or any other financial instruments to be submitted by Bidders and Contractors as "Tender Cost", Earnest Money / Bid Security and Bank Guarantee, if issued fake or deducted by issuing bank / financial institution at any / per contract stage of the case, would call for blacklisting and legal action as per law of the land.

DIVISIONAL ENGINEER ES (CIVIL) MAKRAN

NGAP, Gwadar
Address: Divisional Engr ES (Civil), Makran Division, NGAP Gwadar | Telephone: 086-3000105 PWDK 2564/26

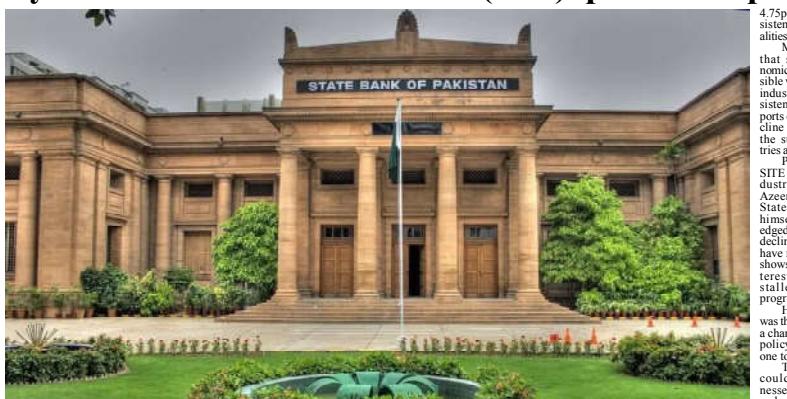
Industry slams State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) 'penal' rate policy

NEWS DESK: While some local and foreign business leaders have rejected the State Bank's decision to maintain interest rates at 10.5pc, calling it disappointing and counterproductive at a time when industrial revival and a boost in exports are the need of the hour.

The SBP's cautious approach is baffling given the ground realities – with core inflation stabilised around 5 per cent over the past many months and major economic indicators pointing to the need for growth. However, the state bank's decision to keep rates at 10.5pc will continue to hamper the industry's access to finance, local businessmen said.

In contrast, Overseas Investors Chambers of Commerce and Industry Secretary General M. Alvi told Dawn that the State Bank's decision to retain the interest rate without a prudent reduction may have surprised many who were looking for a minor cut.

However, these are decisions made on economic fundamentals, not on the wishes of some key stakeholders, he said, adding that the economy is doing reasonably well. Still, some challenges and difficulties may have led to no change in the decision. "We support the State



Bank's decision," Aleem concluded. Business leaders criticise central bank for ignoring calls for a single-digit rate to revive economy

Federation of Paki-

stan Chamber of Com-

merce and Industry Atif

Ibrahim Sheikh stated that

the business commu-

nity has had to

resigned to a substan-

tive reduction of 35 basis

points to bring the

policy rate down to 7pc to kickstart the economy. He added that as the industry is currently battling an existential crisis due to exorbitant energy tariffs and high borrowing costs.

Holding the interest rate would not help move the needle on the cost of doing business, he said, resulting in a loss of capital of almost 10pc.

IPCC President Saeed

Yazay Magoon said the

industry of Pakistan export-

ers to compete glo-

bally. If the monetary

policy is not aggres-

sively corrected in the

following review to

target for export growth

and industrial expand-

tion for the fiscal year

will remain elusive," Atif

warned.

IPCC Senior Vice

President Saeed

Yazay Magoon said the

real interest rate in Paki-

stan remains

unsustainably high

compared to our

competitors.

Keeping the policy

rate at double-digit lev-

els is unjustified given

that inflation has rec-

eded.

This State Bank's

decision would continue

to penalise our busi-

nesses by restricting access

to finance for SMEs and

hampering export com-

petitiveness. The SBP has made a commitment to align monetary policy with the government's vision for industrial growth and export facilitation, he added.

President of the Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI), Muhammad

Yousaf, said that the

view of the inflation rate

and declining exports, there was sufficient

room for at least a one-percentage-point reduction in the policy rate.

Still, the central bank opted for an overly cautious approach.

The decision, he said, was not aligned with expectations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that domestic economic realities be reflected.

President of State Bank's

projected economic growth forecast of 3.75

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Railways sets up one-window facility for investors

NEWS DESK: Federal Minister for Railways Mian Riaz Haider Abbasi on Monday inaugurated a Business Facilitation Centre at Pakistan Railways Headquarters in Lahore, aiming to facilitate freight, logistics and commercial operations through a one-window facilitation mechanism.

According to an official statement, the centre has been established to ensure faster decision-making, greater convenience and enhanced transparency for investors and business entities engaging with Paki-

stan Railways. He said the initiative was designed to facilitate prompt guidance and swift handling of commercial matters related to freight, logistics and partnerships.

Abbasi said individuals and organisations conducting business with Pakistan Railways would improve transparency in commercial decision-making.

Despite an unprecedented fall in overall cotton production, cotton consumption – which production was expected to contribute to increased revenue generation and strengthen private sector confidence in Pakistan Railways' commercial operations.

The minister said

the centre would function as a central point of reference for investors, engagement, freight operations and logistics and partnerships.

Abbasi said the establishment of the centre was expected to contribute to increased revenue generation and strengthen private sector confidence in Pakistan Railways' commercial operations.

Mr Jahangir said the rebate would help exporters maintain market share and compete in the international market, adding that the support was intended to ease cost pressures faced by the industry. He rejected concerns that the scheme would result in a downward pressure on domestic rice prices, maintaining that the rebate was designed to support exports rather than influence the local market.

According to a notice issued by the commerce ministry, exports of basmati and

brown rice are eligible for a rebate of 9 per cent of the free-on-board (FOB) value, provided the export value is equal to or above \$750 per metric tonne. Other coarse rice qualifies for a lower rebate of 3pc of FOB value, but only where the export price remains below \$750 per tonne.

A Karachi-based rice exporter told Dawn that Pakistan's bureaucracy has a long history of repeated neglect of the rice industry, relying on short-term measures such as

rebates and subsidies to keep export sectors afloat. He said these stop-gap measures have failed to deliver sustained growth, leaving exports largely stagnant despite repeated fiscal support. By contrast, he said regional competitors in India, Bangladesh and Indonesia have focused on structural reforms to improve productivity, logistics and cost efficiency, enabling their exporters to compete more effectively in global markets.

Exporters remain divided over the government's decision, which has been presented as a support measure for the sector. Several industry players, however, are of the view that the move fails to address the structural problems confronting rice exports and instead risks shifting the burden onto domestic consumers.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) Chairman Faisal Jahangir told Dawn that the Drawback on Local Taxes and Levies (DLT) scheme could help lower export prices and improve Pakistan's ability to compete with global suppliers. He said India rice was currently being offered at significantly lower prices, making it difficult for Pakistani exporters to maintain their foothold in international markets.

Critics warn more

could push up domestic

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White Winter Olympics beckons as snow falls in Italian Alps

NEWS DESK: Snow has fallen in the Italian Alps just in time for the start of the Winter Olympics, dispelling fears of artificially-covered tracks winding through lush green mountainsides.

From Bormio, home to some of the tamer racing, to the Antholz valley where biathletes will fire their rifles, venues have seen intense snowfall less than two weeks before the opening ceremony on February 4.

"The snow has arrived," Italian meteorologist Mattia Gussoni told AFP, while pictures of the areas showed white mountain peaks, low-hanging snow clouds, and blanketed fields.

The Milan-Cortina Games, which run from February 6 to 22, will be scattered across the mountains of northern Italy, from alpine skiing in Cortina to freestyle skiing in Livigno.

These resorts —



most of which are within the soaring Dolomites — have seen between 1,200 and 1,800 metres (3,940 feet and 5,900 feet) above sea level, a height

which would traditionally be considered snow cover in the Italian Alps down by half in the past 100 years as the climate

warms, organisers feared spring-like conditions.

But snow is still falling. "In the coming days, especially tomorrow evening, there will be new and heavy snowfall across

the Alps," said Gussoni. "This is expected to coincide with the opening of the Olympics. At least there will be no shortage of snow at the start

of February!" he said. This does not mean there will be no artificial snow for the Games, which is made using cannons and guns which spray

water into the cold air, turning it into fine snow. "It is the federations that govern skiing and biathlon both require organisers to have snow production

equipment on hand, which should be needed."

And the 2026 organising committee has said it plans to make 2.4 million cubic metres of artificial snow, which will require 948,000 cubic metres of water.

The artificial snow planned will certainly use far less water than that required during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, when 890,000 cubic metres was used for alpine skiing at Yanqing alone. A further 1.9 million cubic metres was needed for all other snow sports, according to Olympic statistics.

Gussoni said it was "a bit early to say" though whether there would be further snowfall to ensure a white wonderland throughout the Games to the finish line.

"There are still too many days to go. The weather conditions are also forecast to be quite changeable during these weeks," he said.

Luke Ronchi appointed head coach of Islamabad United

NEWS DESK: Islamabad United are delighted to announce the appointment of Luke Ronchi as the team's new Head Coach, marking the return of one of the most influential and loved figures in PSL history.

A fan favourite in Islamabad United colours, Ronchi's contribution to the HBL Pakistan Super League goes far beyond numbers. Widely recognised as one of the most impactful overseas player in HBLPSL history, his fearless batting, big-match temperament, and leadership presence helped define modern T20 cricket.

Ronchi played a central role in Islamabad United's most memorable campaigns, producing performances that have become part of HBLPSL folklore and created a deep connection with the Islamabad United fanbase that has remained strong long after his playing days.

Ali Naqib, Owner of Islamabad United, said: "Luke Ronchi is Islamabad United through and through, a true shero. He's one of the most iconic and impactful overseas players in the league. He's ever been to a team and his bond with Islamabad United is unique. As we say, once a shero always a shero."

"We are delighted that Luke has become available this season. He understands our culture, our standards, and what it truly means to represent Islamabad

United. We're excited to welcome him back this time as Head Coach."

Luke Ronchi said: "Islamabad United has always felt like home to me. The bond I share with this team, the owners, the fans, and the entire ISLU family is something genuinely special. I've always carried that connection with pride."

To return now as Head Coach is a huge honour. Islamabad United is a team with less cricket, character, and a winning mindset. I'm excited to carry that legacy forward and help develop the next group of leaders and match-

winners for this great team."

Islamabad United

has always been run by building more than just a PSL pedigree. Ronchi brings valuable international coaching experience, having been part of New Zealand's coaching setup, where he worked within a high-performance environment to contribute to the development and success of New Zealand's national team.

His global exposure and deep understanding of the HBLPSL ecosystem, makes him ideally positioned to guide Islamabad United in the upcoming season.



Sinner powers on, Keys exits as heatwave hits Melbourne

NEWS DESK: One champion bowed and another succumbed at the Australian Open on Saturday as James Sinner reached the quarterfinals after women's holder Madison Keys crashed out at the hands of friend Jessica Pegula as Melbourne braved for 45°C heat.

Sinner became the second Italian into the last eight after Lorenzo Musetti battled stifling conditions and beat an American, Taylor Fritz to set up a first-round showdown with Novak Djokovic, while Iga Swiatek sent the last

Australian out of the

women's draw with a 6-0, 6-3 win over qualifier Madison Inglis.

Two days after suffering dramatic cramps in a third-round scare against Elina Svitolina, Sinner continued his run over fellow Italian and close friend Luciano Darder as the heat returned to Melbourne Park.

With the sun having reigned in the late afternoon, double-defending champion

was relieved to play in the shade at Margaret Court Arena on a day when temperatures reached 45°C.

"It's definitely a bit different when there is no sun, even if it's quite warm outside," said Sinner, who booked his ninth successive Grand Slam quarter-final.

"It was difficult to put the match away, happy I closed it in three sets. So I felt quite good

out there physically. Everything was very good."

Sinner sent down a bumper 19 aces in the match, and said his hard work had paid off.

"Still room to improve but happy to have won the new season," he added.

Sinner will next meet American eighth seed Ben Shelton, who stepped in for the absent Djokovic and overcame Radulovic 6-4, 6-4 in the late match at Rod Laver Arena.

Shelton lost to Sinner in last year's semi-finals, one of a run of eight consecutive defeats to the Italian.

A year after hoisting the women's trophy with a brilliant win over Aryna Sabalenka, Keys' title defence ended with a 3-6, 4-6 loss to sixth seed Pegula.

Good friends with Pegula, with whom she does a podcast "The

Player's Box", Keys promised to honour her pre-match wager by eating a cheese-smothered apple pie.

"A bet is a bet, so I'll do it. I hope it's less gross than I think it's going to be, but we will find out," Keys, who described defeat as "a proud despite defeat".

Pegula is chasing

an elusive Grand Slam title aged 31, her best performance to date reaching the US Open final.

An erratic Keys made 27 unforced errors to Pegula's 17 and fired down six double faults as her title defence folded.

Pegula reached her

fourth quarter-final at

Melbourne Park and will

meet Amanda

Anisimova, who made it

four US players in the

women's final eight after

defeating China's Wang Xinyi.

Fourth seed

Anisimova, beaten final

ist at last year's US

Open and Wimbledon,

cooled herself off with

bags of ice and running

Wang 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Second seed

Swiatek will face former

Wimbledon champion

Elina Svitolina in the

bottom half of the draw,

the resurgent Kazakh

having blitzed Elise

Mertens 6-1, 6-3.

Swiatek demolished

home qualifier Inglis as

she cruised on a first

Australian crown, having

won all three of the

other majors.

Inglis, ranked 168,

was in the biggest match

of her life after two-time

Grand Slam champion

Naomi Osaka pulled out

injured from their third-round meeting.

Just being in the

fourth round earned

Inglis a life-changing

prize of \$100,000 — she

plans to buy a toaster

and a kettle with the

windfall.

Don Bradman's 'Baggy Green' cap worn against India sells for record amount at auction



NEWS DESK: A "Baggy Green" cap worn by Don Bradman during a series against India in 1930 was sold for Australian \$460,000 (\$319,000) at a Gold Coast auction on Monday, fetching the highest price for a cap sported by the great Australian.

On Monday, the president of the northern Lambton region, said their involvement would be limited to monitoring Vance and Rubio.

"Can't we just say

no to (US President

Donald) Trump for

once?"

Alessandro Zan, a

member of the European

Parliament for the centre-left Democratic Party, condemned it as "inacceptable".

"In Italy, we don't

want people who talk

about human rights and act

outside of any democratic control," he wrote on X.

Monitoring Vance

and Rubio are the

head of the US de-

legation.

The leftist mayor of Milan, which is hosting

several Olympic events

said ICE was "no

welcome". "This is a mi-

crocosm in which there's no

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Sudanese army claims breaking long-running RSF siege

NEWS DESK: The Sudanese army said on Monday it had broken a long-running siege of Dilling in South Kordofan, where paramilitary forces had choked off access for more than a year and a half.

Since April 2021, Sudan has been engulfed in a conflict between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has killed tens of thousands of people.

The war has also uprooted some 11 million people and triggered what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis.

In its statement, the army said its forces "succeeded in opening the Dilling road after carrying out a military operation," claiming they had inflicted "heavy losses" on the RSF. The army's advance has seized its hold over both the northern and southern approaches to Dilling.

The push around Dilling comes as the army attempts to stem a sweeping paramilitary advance across the wider Kordofan region.

Based in the

Sudan People's Liberation Movement and led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, the RSF shifted its focus



eastward after seizing the army's last stronghold in western Darfur last October.

Based in the

Sudan People's Liberation Movement and led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, the RSF shifted its focus

largest oil field and intensified its siege of famine-hit Kadugli, the capital of West Kordofan, with reports of mass killings.

Abductions and widespread looting. The UN has warned that similar abuses could spread into Dilling.

More than 65,000 people have fled the Kordofan region since October, according to the latest UN figures.

A UN-backed assessment last year already found Kadugli, which has been under RSF siege for more than a year and a half. The assessment said conditions in Dilling were likely similar, but security issues and a lack of access have prevented a formal declaration.

Three million return home. More than three million Sudanese people displaced by nearly

three years of war have returned home, the United Nations migration agency said on Monday, even as heavy fighting continues to tear through parts of the country.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been locked in a devastating war pitting the regular army against the RSF.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people and created what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis. At its peak, the war had displaced around 14 million people both internally and across borders.

In a report released on Monday, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said an estimated 3.3 million displaced Sudanese had made their way back home by November of last year.

The rise in returns follows a sweeping offensive by the Sudanese army in late 2024 to retake central regions seized earlier in the conflict by the RSF.

World not ready for rise in extreme heat, scientists say

NEWS DESK: Nearly 3.8 billion people could face extreme heat by 2050 and while tropical countries will bear the brunt, cold regions will also need to adapt to the changing climate.

Demand for cooling will "drastically" increase in subtropical regions like the US, Indonesia and Nigeria, where hundreds of millions of people lack air conditioning or other means of beating the heat.

But even a moderate increase in hotter days could have a "severe impact" in nations not used to such conditions like Canada, Russia and Finland, said scientists from the University of Oxford.

In a new study, they looked at different global warming scenarios to project how often people in subtropical environments experience temperatures considered uncomfortable hot or cold.

They found "that the population experiencing extreme heat conditions is projected to nearly double by 2050 if global average temperatures rise 2°C above preindustrial times.

But most of the impact will come this decade as the world fast approaches the 1.5°C mark, the study's lead author Jesus Lizana said.

"The key takeaway from this is that there is now a clear need for adaptation to extreme heat is more urgent than previously known," said

Lizana, an environmental scientist.

"New infrastructure, such as sustainable air conditioning and passive cooling systems, will be built out within the next few years to ensure people can cope with dangerous heat."

It is called a silent killer because most heat deaths occur gradually as high temperatures and other environmental factors work together to undermine the body's internal thermostat.

Climate change is

making heatwaves longer and stronger and access to cooling especially air conditioning will be a challenge.

Dangerously unprepared

The study, published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, projected that 79 million people worldwide could be exposed to extreme heat by mid-century.

This would "drastically" increase energy demand for cooling and develop a strain on the grid where the greatest health consequences would be felt.

India, the Philippines and Bangladesh would be among biggest populations impacted.

The most significant change in "cooling degree days" tempera-

tures hot enough to require cooling such as air conditioning or fans were projected in tropical or equatorial countries, particularly in Africa.

Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan, Laos and Brazil saw the biggest rise in

dangerously hot temperatures.

"Put simply, the most disadvantaged people are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the heat," said Radhika Khosla said.

But wealthier countries in traditionally cooler climates also face a major problem even if many do not realise it yet," she added.

Climate scientist Radhika Khosla said.

But wealthier countries in traditionally cooler climates also face a major problem even if many do not realise it yet," she added.

The US-based rights group said on Monday that it had confirmed the deaths of nearly 6,000 people in the wave of protests suppressed by Iranian forces, but emphasised the actual toll could be several times higher.

The protests started in late December, driven by economic grievances, but turned into a mass movement against the Islamic republic, with huge street demonstrations for several days from January 8.

Human rights groups have accused authorities of quelling the movement with unprecedented violence.

Ariga, life-threatening Arctic air mass could delay recovery as municipalities from New Mexico to Maine tried to dig out following the storm, which dropped a vicious cocktail of heavy snow and wind, along with freezing rain and sleet.

Forecasters warned that much of the country will see temperatures that are "continuously below freezing through February 1," and "record low temperatures" to night across the South, particularly throughout the west of the weekend winter storm with many still without power," the National Weather Service said in an X-treme weather alert.

While skies began clearing in parts of the country, relentless snowfall in the northeast meant parts of Connecticut saw up to 22 inches, with more than 16 inches recorded in Boston, Massachusetts.

The storm was declared at least 23 days ago, and a compilation of state government and local media reports, with causes including hypothermia as well as acci-

from the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda and former Taliban fighters from Afghanistan. According to Hafiz Saeed Khan, a Pakistani militant with ties to the TTP. The name "Khorasan" refers to a historical region that spans parts of Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia, reflecting the group's ambition to carve out a caliphate in the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands.

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US President Donald Trump has previously threatened to step in, saying last week in Washington that he was sending a "massive fleet" to the region "just in case."

The deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group dramatically boosts American firepower in the region.

The United States backed and briefly joined Israel's 12-day

shooting into crowds of protesters under the cover of an internet shutdown that has now lasted 18 days -- the longest Iran has ever imposed.

The clerical leadership took power after the 1979 Islamic revolution remains in power despite the protests, with many opponents of the system looking to outside intervention as the most likely driver of change.

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Extreme cold grips millions as US digs out of deadly snowstorm

NEWS DESK: Perilously cold temperatures threatened millions of Americans as a powerful winter storm that left at least 23 people dead as it knocked out power and paralysed transportation.

A frigid, life-threatening Arctic air mass could delay recovery as municipalities from New Mexico to Maine tried to dig out following the storm, which dropped a vicious cocktail of heavy snow and wind, along with freezing rain and sleet.

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dents related to traffic, sledging, ATVs and snowplows.

One man was found in the snow, unresponsive, with a shovel in his hand.

In New York City, eight more people were found dead amid plummeting temperatures, and an investigation to determine the causes was underway. It was known if all of these fatalities were storm-related.

Electricity began blinking back on across the country, but as of Monday evening, still over \$50,000 customers remained without it, according to the tracking site Poweroutage.com.

Tennessee, Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana and other southern states unaccustomed to intense winter weather were especially impacted.

Approximately 190 million people in the United States were under some form of extreme cold alert, the National Weather Service (NWS) told AFP.

In the Great Lakes region, residents woke up to extreme temperatures that could cause frostbite on exposed skin in minutes. In parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin, the NWS reported early Monday morning temperatures as low as -23°F (-30°C), with windchills exacerbating the biting cold.

Over the weekend, nearly half of the states in the contiguous US received at least a foot of snow (30.5 cm), and in many cases, far more. The US Midwest and Mexico's Baja California Sur reported the highest US total over the weekend with 31 inches (78.7 cm).

Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell told journalists that trees were continuing to fall under the weight of encrusted ice across the Tennessee capital city, some even knocking over power lines already rendered.

Nashville and other municipalities across the country were establishing emergency warming facilities.

NWS meteorologist Allison Santorelli told AFP the storm was particularly arduous because so many states were impacted, leaving northern states with more winter supplies were unable to share their resources with less-prepared southern regions.

"A lot of these locations don't have the means or the resources to clean up after these events," she said.

Azerbaijan arrests three over planned attack on foreign embassy in Baku

NEWS DESK: Authorities in Azerbaijan said on Tuesday that they had arrested three individuals planning an attack on a foreign embassy in the capital, Baku, at the instructions of Islamic State Khorasan (ISK-K), the Afghan offshoot of Islamic State.

In a statement, the State Security Service said the three men, whom it named, had conspired with members of ISK-K, obtained weapons and planned to attack a foreign embassy before they were apprehended by security forces.

The statement did not name the foreign embassy. One of the men was born in 2000, and the other two in 2005.

Islamic State Khorasan (ISKP), or IS-K, claimed responsibility for the 2024 Circus City Hall attack in Moscow, which left at least 145 people dead. There have been several Islamic State-linked plots in the Muslim-majority regions of Russia, where the group is listed as a banned terrorist organisation, and in Central Asia.

Azerbaijan, a South Caucasus country of some 10 million people, is a secular country with a predominantly Muslim population, the majority of whom are Shites. In its statement, Azerbaijanian authorities said the suspects had been arrested on charges of "preparation for terrorism" on the basis of religious hostility. They said the investiga-

tion was ongoing. In a separate case, an Azerbaijani court sentenced a man affiliated with the TTP to 20 years in prison on terrorism charges last October after finding him guilty of plotting an attack on a synagogue in Baku with a Molotov cocktail in December 2024.

IS-K the ISKP/IS-K was officially formed in 2015 when breakaway militants from the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda and former Taliban fighters from Afghanistan. According to Hafiz Saeed Khan, a Pakistani militant with ties to the TTP. The name "Khorasan" refers to a historical region that spans parts of Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia, reflecting the group's ambition to carve out a caliphate in the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands.

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