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Koh-e-Suleman Division Launched: CM Bugti Unveils Major Development Package for Rakhni

Asif Kareem Khetran, Abdul Rehman Muskhail

Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Thursday announced the establishment of the Koh-e-Suleman Division, declaring it a historic step toward ending long-standing deprivation and strengthening good governance in the region. Addressing a large public gathering in Rakhni after granting it the status of Divisional Headquarters, the Chief Minister said the creation of the Division reflects the government's firm commitment to inclusive development. The Chief Minister described the Koh-e-Suleman mountain range as a symbol of the honour, history, and identity

of the region's proud tribes, stating that the new administrative setup would bring services closer to the people. "The establishment of a division is not just a name or notification. If we have created a division, we will also fulfil its responsibility by providing all essential facilities," he said. Expressing satisfaction over Rakhni's elevation from a Union Council to a Divisional Headquarters, the Chief Minister announced a comprehensive development package, including:

- Establishment of a 50-bed hospital
- Completion of a Residential College
- Completion of the Nahar Kor Dam
- Granting Municipal Committee status to Rakhni
- Immediate commencement of work on the Rakhni Model

Bazaar. "Establishment of a Rakhni Press Club" Launch of a housing scheme "Renaming Municipal Committee Dera Khetran as Municipal Committee Rakhni" He said the purpose of making Rakhni the divisional headquarters is to ensure sustainable development and improved governance across the division. Highlighting social harmony, the Chief Minister said the districts of the division are bound by brotherhood, adding that "just as Koh-e-Suleman stands tall, so do the people of this region with dignity and pride."

Addressing youth issues, CM Bugti stated that Baloch youth have been deliberately pushed into a futile conflict through propaganda aimed at distancing

them from the state. "The youth will not become part of this war or propaganda. Baloch and Pakistan are inseparable. Our survival and prosperity lie in this unity," he said. He acknowledged that governments can make mistakes and governance can be questioned, but emphasized that alienation from the state is never an option. "When I make a promise, I fulfil it. Every commitment made today will be taken to completion," he assured. Concluding his speech with a powerful message to the youth, the Chief Minister said, "This is not the time to dream, but to turn dreams into reality. This land does not ask questions—it demands answers. Nations are not built on slogans, but on character. Make knowl-

edge your strength, the pen your weapon, and hard work your identity." The gathering was attended by members of the Khetran, Bugti, Zarkoon, Buzdar, Gharshin, and Leghari tribes, along with political leaders including MPAs Zarak Khan Mandokhail and Haji Ali Madad Jatak. PPP leader Mir Baz Muhammad Khetran, former provincial minister Naseebullah Marri, National Party leader Abdul Karim Khetran, District Chairman Dera Bugti Wadera Ghulam Nabi Shambani, District Chairman Kohli Mir Nisar Ahmed Marri, and Sammi Khan Zarkoon. Speakers praised the Chief Minister's decision, calling it a rare and historic move to grant divisional headquarters status to a Union Council.

3 arrested after woman, daughter die from falling into open sewer line in Lahore

NEWS DESK:

Police on Thursday arrested all three people nominated in the first information report (FIR) report registered after a woman and her minor daughter died after falling into an under-construction sewer line a day earlier.

The FIR was filed by the woman's father and named the construction project's manager and safety management. The FIR — available with Dawn — was filed at the Bhatti Gate police station under Section 322 (manslaughter) of the Pakistan Penal Code. In the complaint, the deceased woman's father stated that his son received a call from his son-in-law informing him about the incident. "Upon receiving this information, I, my son... my son-in-law... and my friend... reached Data Darbar at about 2.30am," the complainant stated in the FIR. "There, my son-in-law... informed us that his wife... and his daughter... had fallen into the said manhole." The FIR noted the woman's husband added that her body had been recovered, but at the time, the daughter's body was still missing. The complainant named three individuals in the FIR, accusing them of leaving "the manhole open due to negligence and carelessness." These were the construction project's project manager, the safety in-charge, and the site in-charge. "Due to their gross negligence and irresponsibility, my daughter... and my granddaughter... lost their lives," he said in the complaint. Subsequently, Lahore Operations SSP Mohammad Ishaq confirmed to Dawn that the suspects nominated in the FIR by the complainant had been arrested.

The arrests were made after Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz issued directions to expand the scope of action to punish those responsible for the death of the woman and her minor daughter. Child's body found Earlier on Thursday, police said that the body of the child, said to be a baby between nine to ten months old in the FIR, was recovered. The body of the mother was found during the wee hours of Thursday morning. In a statement, Rescue 1122 said that its "diving team had recovered the girl's body from Saggan", around five kilometres from Bhatti Chowk, where the incident took place a day earlier.

PM Shehbaz congratulates nation on completion of PIA's privatisation

NEWS DESK:

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated the nation on Monday on the completion of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) privatisation as he, alongside Chief of Defence Forces and Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, witnessed the signing of documents pertaining to the transaction. The documents were signed by the government and a consortium led by Arif Habib Corporation Limited at a ceremony in Islamabad, where several federal ministers were also present. The Arif Habib-led consortium had won the auction for 75 per cent shares of PIA in December last year, making a winning bid of Rs135 billion. After the documents were signed, PM Shehbaz said, "I want to congratulate the entire nation from the bottom of my heart on the completion of PIA's privatisation, the process for which began a month ago." He commended Arif Habib — chairman of the investment firm that headed the consortium that won the auction for PIA — for his team, terming them "committed business ambassadors of Pakistan".

Women, Children Hold Protest in Quetta Over Disparity Reduction Allowance, Demand Release of Arrested Employees

Syed Ali Shah:

Quetta, Women and children staged a protest demonstration in Quetta on Thursday in support of the demands put forward by the Balochistan Grand Alliance, calling on the federal government to grant a Disparity Reduction Allowance (DRA) to provincial government employees. Despite subzero temperatures, protesters gathered on the roads, chanting slogans and holding placards demanding the immediate release of their arrested family members, including lecturers, teachers, and other government employees. The demonstration followed the arrest of several protesters by police for allegedly violating Section 144, which restricts public gatherings.

The Balochistan Grand Alliance has been urging the British government — through international advocacy — to intervene and press for parity in allowances, arguing that provincial employees continue to face discrimination compared to their counterparts in other provinces. A female protester, whose husband is currently in police custody, said, "We are not criminals.



Our men were demanding their constitutional rights. Why are women and children being forced onto the streets in freezing weather?" Another protester added, "Our brothers and fathers are behind bars simply for asking for equality. If the govern-

ment cannot listen to voices, it should at least see our suffering." The provincial government, however, maintains that it is financially constrained, citing rising non-development expenditures. Officials argue that the province is not in a position to bear the

additional financial burden of the allowance, stating that salaries already consume a major portion of the budget. Authorities also defended the arrests, saying the protest violated Section 144. However, protesters rejected this justification, insisting their dem-

onstrations were peaceful and driven by economic hardship. "The protesters warned that if their demands are not accepted and detainees are not released, the demonstrations would continue and expand across the province."

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

SBKWU Teacher Recruitment Scandal Raises Alarms for Pakistan's Education System



Editorial:

Serious questions have emerged over the secondary teachers recruitment process conducted by Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU), triggering widespread concern about merit, transparency, and accountability in Balochistan's education system.

It is essential to clarify a point that has caused public confusion: the advertised posts were NOT for SBKWU itself.

The university was only assigned the responsibility of conducting tests and interviews for Secondary School Teacher recruitment across Balochistan.

According to initial findings, hundreds of candidates who had failed were allegedly declared successful during the teacher recruitment process.

Given the scale of

the exercise, involving thousands of applicants for secondary teaching positions across the province, such irregularities cannot reasonably be described as clerical mistakes. The magnitude strongly suggests organised manipulation, carried out with the involvement or protection of influential individuals rather than the actions of a single official.

This issue strikes at the heart of education governance in Balochistan.

Secondary school teachers shape the academic foundation of students, and any compromise on merit directly damages learning outcomes.

In Balochistan, where literacy rates remain among the lowest in the country, flawed teacher recruitment further deepens an already critical education crisis.

Reports that deserving candidates were sidelined only intensify public frustration and mistrust. Anti-corruption and accountability institutions must take immediate notice. A transparent, independent, and time-bound investigation is necessary to identify those responsible for manipulating the recruitment process conducted under SBKWU's authority. Accountability must reach every individual involved, regardless of status or influence.

This is not merely an administrative controversy; it is a matter of justice and the future of Balochistan's education system.

If credibility in teacher recruitment collapses, public trust in institutions will collapse with it. Balochistan cannot afford silence where integrity is at stake.

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

Muhammad Asghar Harfah

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

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

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



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

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

Historically, state control over food procurement and storage emerged in response to extraordinary circumstances. Organised storage of staple commodities in a governance culture that generally prioritises continuity over performance. The greatest weakness of Pakistan's bureaucratic system is

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

Until sugar de-ratification in 1984, even sugar distribution remained tightly controlled through rationing systems administered by these departments. Among the provinces, only Punjab is broadly wheat-sufficient, producing nearly 70 percent of the country's output and supplying deficits elsewhere. Pakistan's annual wheat requirement stands at approximately 28 MMT.

Balochistan, being sparsely populated, has the lowest requirement, with annual consumption estimated at around 1.8 MMT, while production ranges between 1.0 and 1.15 MMT. This deficit can be substantially reduced through yield-per-acre improvements and the solarisation of groundwater extraction, rather than through costly and inefficient procurement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Someone likely to argue that abolishing the Food Department will undermine food security, in particular during periods of price instability 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 deployed to ensure availability, affordability, and access. In practice, the Food Department's limited procurement—amounting to less than six percent of provincial consumption—has neither stabilised prices nor protected vulnerable consumers. Modern food security is better ensured through diversified supply chains, private-sector participation, strategic reserves managed by agile regulatory authorities, and targeted social protection programmes.

Quetta City, Proposed Master Plan

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

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

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

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

Geography and Soil

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

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



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

with pebbles and rock fragments and is suitable for vegetation. In the Hanna valley,

the greater part of the valley floor is covered by barren rock about crops of low re-

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

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

is silty clay which is not suitable for cultivation. Similarly, the

Chiltan surface has soils that are predominantly gravelly loams. The vegetation on these soils is mainly Haloxylon which provides poor grazing for livestock.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tear gas fired at protestors demanding release of 5-year-old detainee in Texas

NEWS DESK: Texas state police officers on Wednesday used tear gas to disperse a demonstration outside a US immigration detention facility where protesters demanded the release of a 5-year-old Ecuadorian boy, among others swept up in the Trump administration's immigration clampdown.

About 100 protesters gathered at the South Texas Family Residential Centre in Dilley on Wednesday, carrying signs accusing the federal agents of terrorising communities.

"We want Kristi Noem impeached. We want the US Senate to defend ICE, to not give it any more money. And we need people to pay attention to the midterm elections this year," local elected official Christina Morales told AFP.

Texas state law enforcement responded to the protest in riot gear, deploying tear gas canisters, including one that



landed near two AFP journalists, striking and temporarily incapacitating one of them. Earlier, Democratic congressional members

Joaquin Castro and Jasmine Crockett conducted an inspection to visit the child, Liam Conejo Ramos, and 1,100 others detained there.

"His dad said that he hasn't been himself, and he's been sleeping a lot because he's been depressed and sad," Castro said in a video message posted to X,

in which the congressman insists Ramos and his family were "legally in the United States".

National outcry followed images of the apparently terrified preschooler, dressed in a fluffy blue bunny hat and wearing his school backpack, being held by immigration officers who were

seeking to arrest the boy's father in Minneapolis.

The child and his Ecuadorian father, Adrian Conejo Arias — both asylum seekers — were taken from their driveway as they arrived home on January 20, after the child was used as "bait" by officers to draw out those inside his home, according to the superintendent of the boy's school, Zena Stenvik.

A federal judge temporarily blocked their deportation on Tuesday. Castro also demanded the release of everyone else being held at the privately-run facility, saying, "There are no criminals in Dilley. Donald Trump said this was about arresting illegal criminal 'aliens' — that's his language. There isn't a single criminal over there."

UK universities becoming more reliant on Chinese students: FT

NEWS DESK: Leading British universities are becoming more reliant on students from China for overseas enrolments, triggering concerns about financial risk and academic independence as global competition for international students intensifies.

A report in the Financial Times cites new data which shows that Chinese nationals made up more than two-fifths of international students at the UK's elite Russell Group universities in the 2024/25 academic year. Around 105,000 Chinese students were enrolled at these institutions, accounting for 42.5 per cent of their total overseas intake, which is the highest proportion on record.

By contrast, Chinese students represented less than 9pc of international enrolments across the rest of the UK's higher education sector, highlighting how heavily top-ranked universities depend on a single source country.

The figures come at a time when British universities are under mounting financial strain, driven by falling domestic funding and tighter immigration rules that have slowed recruitment from several key markets.

Sector leaders have warned that over-reliance on China exposes universities to geopolitical, economic and diplomatic shocks.

105,000 students from China enrolled in elite Russell Group universities in 2024-25 academic year, says report. Concerns about Beijing's influence on UK campuses have also resurfaced.

In recent months, British academics have cited instances of pressure and intimidation linked to research on sensitive issues such as alleged human rights violations in China's Xinjiang region.

Critics argue that universities' dependence on Chinese tuition fees may encourage self-censorship.

The UK Department for Education said any form of foreign in-

terference or intimidation would not be tolerated and stressed the steps were being taken to strengthen the sector's financial resilience.

Efforts to diversify recruitment have been complicated by recent policy changes. Universities have reduced intake from countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh following stricter visa rules while favouring markets with higher visa compliance rates, including China.

Data also shows that overall international student numbers in the UK have declined for the second consecutive year, falling by more than 5pc in 2024-25. En-

rolments dropped in three of the four largest source countries — India, China and Nigeria — with Nigeria seeing particularly sharp falls following its currency crisis.

Pakistan was the only major source country to record growth, with new student numbers rising by about 5pc. Nepal also saw a sharp increase, nearly doubling its student population in the UK.

Despite this, Russell Group universities reported a fall in total international enrolments, meaning their dependence on Chinese students has grown even as absolute numbers decline.



Driver arrested after car crashes into New York Synagogue

NEWS DESK: A car slammed into the entrance of a Jewish religious order in New York City on Wednesday in an incident that police said they were investigating as a hate crime.

No injuries were reported from the incident at the Chabad Lubavitch World Headquarters in Brooklyn, and police said the driver was arrested. Chabad followers, also known as Lubavichers, belong to the ultra-Orthodox Hasidic school of Judaism.

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said the man who was arrested "intentionally, and repeatedly, crashed his car into the building." Mamdani, who said he visited the location after the incident, described the act as "horrifying" and "deeply alarming" in a social media post.

New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said the driver of the vehicle was arrested, and a bomb squad found no explo-



sive devices in the car. "Earlier tonight, a car crashed into a side entrance at Chabad HQ at 770 Eastern Parkway, the building encompasses one of the most important synagogues in the world," Chabad Lubavitch spokesperson Monti Seligson said on social media, adding the driver was arrested "almost immediately". Tisch told reporters the incident was being investigated as a hate

crime by the New York City Police Department's hate crimes task force. An ABC News affiliate identified the vehicle as a grey Honda with New Jersey plates.

Mamdani, Tisch and Seligson separately confirmed there were no injuries. "Antisemitism has no place in our city, and violence or intimidation against Jewish New Yorkers is unacceptable," Mamdani said.

Tisch said police have increased security "out of an abundance of caution" around houses of worship. Hate crimes against Jewish communities have risen in recent years in the United States. Rights advocates have particularly noted a rise in hate against US Jews and Muslims since the start of Israel's war in Gaza after an October 2023 Hamas attack.

Fresh Russian strikes kill three in Ukraine



NEWS DESK: Russian strikes across Ukraine killed three people and wounded several more, authorities said on Wednesday.

The fresh strikes came hours after Russian attacks on Tuesday night had killed at least 12 people across Ukraine, including five passengers in a train targeted by a drone attack, according to Ukrainian authorities.

Ukrainian Presi-

dent Volodymyr Zelenskyy had said the bombardment undermined peace efforts and urged allies to step up pressure on Moscow to end the war.

"In Bilogorodka community, two of our compatriots — a man and a woman — died as a result of the attack," said Mykola Kalashnyk, the head of Kyiv region's military administration, in a post on Telegram.

Ukraine's national police said in a later statement that the dead couple's four-year-old child had been wounded in the attack and three others were also injured.

In central Dnipropetrovsk region, a drone strike killed a 46-year-old man and wounded five people, one of them seriously, according to Oleksandr Ganzham, the head of the regional

military administration. Deadly strikes that have also left many Ukrainians without power in freezing winter temperatures have continued since Russian and Ukrainian negotiators met in the United Arab Emirates last week for US-brokered talks aimed at ending the conflict.

The next round is expected to take place on February 1, according to Zelenskyy.

Britain's Starmer seeks fresh economic start with China

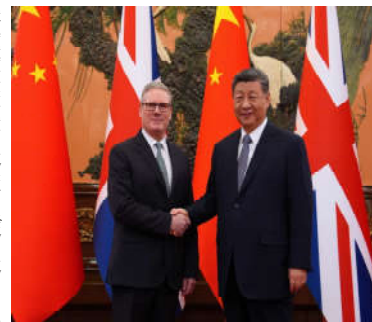
NEWS DESK: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday that he wanted to build a "sophisticated relationship" aiming to boost growth and security, signalling a breakthrough in ties after years of acrimony.

On the most important day of his four-day visit to China, the first by a British prime minister in eight years, Starmer held talks with Xi at the Great Hall of the People before they lunched together.

Starmer, whose centre-left Labour Party government has struggled to deliver the growth it promised, has made improving relations with the world's second-largest economy a priority, despite lingering misgivings about espionage and human rights.

"China is a vital player on the global stage, and it's vital that we build a more sophisticated relationship where we can identify opportunities to collaborate, but of course, also allow a meaningful dialogue on areas where we disagree," Starmer told Xi at the start of their meeting.

Xi said ties with Britain had gone through "twists and turns" that did not serve the interests of either country and that China stood ready to develop a long-term strategic partner-



ship. Starmer is the latest Western leader to engage in a flurry of diplomacy with China, as nations hedge against unpredictability from their relationship has improved.

"This must look like it's been a success," he said. "For both sides, they don't want a meeting which is going to be an arguing about things they disagree on."

Starmer has adopted a new policy of engagement with China after ties deteriorated for years under previous Conservative governments, when London curbed some Chinese investment over national security worries and expressed concern over a

crackdown on political freedoms in Hong Kong. "I made the promise 18 months ago, when we were elected into government, that I would make Britain face outwards again," Starmer told Xi.

"Because, as we all know, events abroad affect everything that happens back in our home countries, to prices on the supermarket shelves to how secure we feel."

Kemi Badenoch, the leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party, said on Wednesday she would not have gone to China because of the security risks the country poses. British security services have said China routinely spies on the government.

signed to committee members. The committee directed PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja and party Chairman Barrister Gohar to ensure early fixation of media platform X, he apologized for being part of the committee and cited legal cases and other engagements as reasons for his inability to remain active.

24th Board Meeting of Balochistan Awami Endowment Fund Approves Over Rs 2.72 Billion for Free Medical Treatment

QUETTA: The 24th meeting of the Board of Balochistan Awami Endowment Fund (BAEF) was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Parliamentary Secretary for Social Welfare, Haji Wali Muhammad Noorzai.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Social Welfare Ismatullah Qureshi, Additional Secretary Health Shehbaz Baloch, Additional Secretary Chief Minister Secretariat Rohana Kakar, Director Headquarters Social Welfare Ashraf Gichki, Program Director BAEF Samina Ehsan Baloch, Assistant Director Social Welfare Inayatullah Kasi, Finance Department representative Bashir Ahmed, Dr. Zahid Mahmood, Dr. Ferroz Achakzai, Sami Durrani, Zia Khan, along with representatives from various departments and civil society.

During the meeting, Program Director Samina Ehsan Baloch briefed the participants on previously approved cases under the Balochistan Awami Endowment Fund, including treatments for cancer, cardiac diseases, implants and limb-saving sur-

930 million. Of these, Rs 269 million has already been spent on the treatment of 321 patients, while treatment of 83 cases is currently in progress.

The board was informed that 1,054 new cases have been received, requiring an estimated cost of Rs

has already been adjusted against various cases, while approval was granted to adjust the remaining amount accordingly.

The meeting was also informed that the procurement of medicines worth Rs 200 million has been completed, increasing the

necessary working for the inclusion of ARIA Hospital in the approved panel of hospitals.

Speaking on the occasion, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Welfare Haji Wali Muhammad Noorzai stated that all possible measures would be

He also informed the meeting that discussions have been held with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who has assured his cooperation for the fund.

Haji Wali Muhammad Noorzai stressed that human health is of utmost im-



geries, end-stage renal disease and dialysis, hepatitis, liver transplantation, thalassemia, cochlear implants, and other serious illnesses.

She informed the board that 404 cases had been approved in the previous meeting, with a total cost of Rs

2.72 billion (Rs 2,720,476,386), which was approved by the board.

It was further shared that BAEF has Rs 520 million available under the Awami Endowment Fund, which has been recovered.

Out of this amount, Rs 242 million

total number of beneficiaries to 492 patients.

However, due to ongoing treatment needs, an additional Rs 200 million worth of medicines is required, which was also approved by the board. Furthermore, the Program Director was directed to carry out

taken to further enhance transparency in the functioning of the Balochistan Awami Endowment Fund.

He emphasized that this is the only provincial initiative providing expensive medical treatment completely free of cost to poor and deserving patients.

portance and that service to humanity must rise above personal relations and affiliations.

He concluded by stating that the funds available under BAEF are a public trust, and their transparent and rightful utilization remains the top priority of the government.

BUMHS Announces NCAT for BS Nursing Admissions Across Balochistan

QUETTA: Bolan University of Medical and Health Sciences (BUMHS), Quetta, has announced the conduct of the Nursing Colleges Admission Test (NCAT) for admissions to the four-year BS Nursing program in various nursing colleges across Balochistan.

According to an official university notification, admissions will be offered strictly on a merit basis and are reserved exclusively for eligible candidates domiciled in Balochistan.

The minimum educational requirement for applicants is 50% marks in FSc, while the maximum age limit is 30 years.

Seats are available in the following nursing colleges of Balochistan: College of Nursing BUMHS, Quetta, Nursing College Civil Hospital Quetta, Nursing College Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Hospital Quetta,

and Nursing Colleges in Loralai, Zhoib, Nasserabad, Gwadar, Mastung, Turbat, Kharan, Khuzdar, Hub, and Panjgur. The university stated that candidates can apply online through the official BUMHS website at www.bumhs.edu.pk. The admission test fee has been set at Rs 3,000. It was further announced that the Government of Balochistan will provide a monthly stipend to selected candidates, encouraging nursing education and healthcare development in the province. The last date for submission of applications is February 13, 2020. For further information, candidates may contact the Admission Branch, BUMHS, Quetta, or call 081-9213066.

Quetta Master Plan Reviewed in Urban Planning Committee Meeting Chaired by Commissioner Quetta Division

QUETTA: A meeting of the Urban Planning and Designing Committee was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Quetta Division, Shahzaib Khan Kakar.

The meeting was attended by Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Quetta, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Qambrani, SSP Traffic Quetta, Mirza Bilal Hassan, Deputy Project Director QDP, Abid Mahmood, Director QDA, Asif Ali, DSP Traffic, Saifullah Durrani, SP City Quetta, Nauman Zafar, Chief Architect Abdul Aziz Zahri, along with officers from QDA, BPA, and other relevant departments.

During the meeting, a detailed review of the Quetta Master Plan was conducted of various facilities to citizens.

He stressed that strict enforcement of building codes is essential to citizens. The Commissioner further directed that special arrangements for drainage be incorporated into the Master Plan to provide a permanent solution to long-standing issues related to rainwater channels and drainage systems, and to ensure protection against urban flooding.

It was also decided in the meeting that the Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Quetta would be a mandatory member of the ACS Standing Committee, while the SP Traffic and Chief Architect Metropolitan Corporation Quetta would be included in the Technical Committee. This step aims to ensure that all development projects are planned in line with traffic management, urban needs, and technical requirements, thereby promoting sustainable urban development.

Additionally, the Commissioner instructed all concerned departments to further strengthen inter-departmental coordination and ensure transparency throughout the planning and implementation process.

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Provincial Health Minister Visits Mir Abdul Ghafoor Teaching Hospital Gwadar, Orders Immediate Shift of Emergency Unit

GWADAR: Provincial Minister for Health, Bakht Muhammad Kakar, during the visit, the Provincial Health Minister reviewed the hospital's Casualty

ing to assess the available facilities. On the occasion, the Provincial Health Minister issued clear directives to the hospital administration, instructing that the Emergency (Casualty) Unit be shifted immediately to the new building in order to provide better and improved medical facilities to patients. Assuming compliance, the Medical Superintendent of Mir Abdul Ghafoor Teaching Hospital informed that the Emergency Unit will be shifted to the new building within one day.

He also inspected the dialysis center, gynecology department, and the hospital pharmacy store. In addition, he visited the newly constructed hospital building.

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Balochistan Government Takes Comprehensive Measures to Eliminate Polio: Chief Secretary

QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan stated that the provin-

polio campaign across Balochistan will begin on Monday, February 2.

He stated that the campaign has set a target of vaccinating more than 2.6 million children. He further informed that no polio

case has been reported in Balochistan for the past 15 months.

He highlighted that no polio case was reported in Balochistan in 2019, which reflects the success of these efforts.

The Chief Secretary expressed these views while presiding over a meeting of the Provincial Polio Eradication Task Force. He directed all Deputy Commissioners to ensure that the Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS) coverage exceeds 90 percent in their respective districts to guarantee the success of vaccination campaigns.

He said that the provincial government has taken comprehensive and effective measures to prevent and eradicate polio across the province. He emphasized that it is critically important to completely eliminate this dangerous disease.

He said that the provincial government has declared polio eradication as a top priority, with continuous focus on vaccination campaigns, monitoring, and community engagement.

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Tribal Elders from Tehsil Kangri Meet Deputy Commissioner Musa Khel Over Border Issues

MUSAKHEL: A delegation of tribal elders from Tehsil Kangri met Deputy Commissioner Musa Khel, Abdul Razzaq Khajjak, at his office. During the meeting, a detailed discussion was held on the overall situation of the area, maintenance of law and order, and particularly issues related to the border areas adjoining Barkhan district.

The delegation informed the Deputy Commissioner about their concerns regarding alleged encroachments into Musa Khel's territorial limits from the Rakhni side of Barkhan district.

He stated that the issue of encroachments will be immediately taken up with the relevant authorities and the Barkhan district administration to determine boundaries in accordance with ground realities.

He emphasized that while fulfilling the requirements of law and justice, the public interest will be protected at all costs.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the representatives of the tribal elders stated that interference in border areas is creating local unrest, making an immediate resolution essential.

On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq Khajjak listened carefully to the concerns of the delegation and assured them that the district administration is fully committed to safeguarding its territorial boundaries.

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Loralai Administration Visits Injured Police Constable, Commends Bravery

LORALAI: On the special directives of Deputy Commissioner Loralai, Miran Baloch, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Muhammad Ismail Mengal and Assistant Commissioner Loralai, Nadeem Akram, visited the home of Constable Dilawar Khan, who was injured last night in a shooting incident by unidentified armed persons at Pathankot.

During the visit, the officers checked on the well-being of the injured constable and extended their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

The district administration officials praised Constable Dilawar Khan for his courage, bravery, and sense of duty, emphasizing that police personnel risk their lives daily to protect citizens' lives and property.

They said the sacrifices of the police force are commendable and recognized by the state. Both ADC (Revenue) Muhammad Ismail Mengal and AC Nadeem Akram affirmed that the district administration and police are taking joint and robust measures to maintain law and order in Loralai. They made it clear that no leniency will be shown to criminal elements or anti-police forces, and the rule of law will be enforced at all costs. The

officers also assured full support to the family of the injured constable, stating that the district administration stands alongside the police force and that no police officer will be left unsupported in times of crisis. They reiterated their commitment to public safety, law and order, and upholding the rule of law, ensuring that all available resources will be deployed to achieve these goals.

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Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) okays offloading 0.8m tonnes of wheat

NEWS DESK: Amid the alleged waste of public funds on managing imported wheat stocks since 2021-22, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Wednesday decided to offload 800,000 tonnes of wheat — less than half of the total stock — and approved more than Rs66 billion in supplementary grants.

The meeting of the ECC, presided over by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, was informed that around 1.8 million tonnes of wheat stocks were still lying with the Pakistan Agricultural Services and Storage Corporation (PASSCO), which is currently under winding up.

Around 550,000 tonnes of these stocks belonged to imports made from Ukraine in 2021-22, most of which are now reportedly beyond the category of human consumption.

During the meeting, the ECC decided to offload 800,000 tonnes at an estimated cost of about Rs70bn, which would still leave about one million tonnes in storage, largely in bad shape.

The ECC “ap-



proved the disposal of 800,000 metric tonnes of PASSCO wheat stock through competitive bidding, with the objective of managing surplus stocks, reducing carrying and storage costs, and ensuring price stability in the domestic

wheat market while safeguarding food security considerations,” an official statement said. Committee also approves Rs66bn in supplementary grants PASSCO employees. This is expected to generate more than

Rs45bn, part of which would be used to pay severance and voluntary separation packages to around 200 PASSCO employees. The cost of the package has been estimated at Rs4bn, based on a pattern similar to

that offered to Utility Stores Corporation employees, or about Rs2.8bn as determined by market-based actuarial practices. However, a decision on the severance package could not be taken.

In a related decision, the ECC also approved the provision of 300,000 tonnes of PASSCO wheat to the Food and Consumer Protection Department of the Punjab government, aimed at maintaining adequate wheat supplies for flour mills,

stabilising prices and ensuring uninterrupted availability of wheat flour to consumers. Supplementary grants The ECC also approved funds required for clearing outstanding liabilities of utility com-

panies, mostly power distribution companies, against the Pakistan Post Office Department (PPOD).

which had collected electricity bills but could not transfer the amounts to utilities due to financial constraints. The ECC authorised the release of a Rs10.98bn supplementary grant to address long-pending payables accumulated over several years.

In the health sector, the ECC approved a Rs29.66bn supplementary grant for the Federal Directorate of Immunisation under the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination to ensure uninterrupted procurement of vaccines and syringes under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation.

The ECC also approved the sharing of subsidy on imported urea on a 50:50 basis between the federal and provincial governments through a supplementary grant of Rs23.42bn sought by the Ministry of Commerce.

Of this amount, Rs1.5bn will be released by the Finance Division, while the remaining amount will be arranged subject to fiscal space.

Pakistan offers Turkiye rice exports at competitive rates

NEWS DESK: Pakistan is fully prepared to supply both Basmati and non-Basmati rice to Turkiye at internationally competitive rates and Turkiye can consider increasing imports as Pakistan's primary objective is to enhance welfare rather than maximise prices in order to safeguard farmer incomes and sustain the agricultural value chain.

Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan stated this during a meeting with Turkish Ambassador Dr. Irfan Neziroglu. The meeting was held on the directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who has called for strengthening agricultural exports, particularly rice, amid intensifying global competition.

During discussions, the federal minister highlighted that Pakistan had reaped an excellent paddy harvest in the current season, ensuring both quality and ample exportable surplus.

However, he noted that aggressive pricing by competing exporters, especially India and Vietnam, created challenges

in global markets and exerted downward pressure on prices despite Pakistan maintaining strong export volumes.

He informed the Turkiye side that the government, in close consultation with rice exporters and industry stakeholders, had developed a price support mechanism to ensure competitiveness in international markets.

Under the mechanism, Pakistan is prepared to match prevailing global prices so that buyers do not face cost disadvantages when sourcing rice from Pakistan.

Both sides discussed activating gov-

ernment-to-government (G2G) trade channels alongside existing private-sector mechanisms.

Under the proposed framework, Pakistan's state trading entities would coordinate with relevant Turkish public and private-sector institutions, including state-owned grain procurement bodies, to enable bulk purchases where price competitiveness is ensured.

The federal minister also raised market access issues, including tariff-rate quotas (TRQ), import licensing procedures and the possibility of zero or reduced tariffs on Basmati rice.



Oil prices gain 1.5pc on increasing concerns of Iran attack

NEWS DESK: Oil prices rose 1.5 per cent on Thursday, extending gains for a third day, on increasing concerns the US may carry out a military attack on key Middle Eastern producer Iran that could disrupt supply from the region.

Brent crude futures rose 94 cents, or 1.4pc, to \$69.34 a barrel by 07:30 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude climbed 92 cents, or 1.5pc, to \$64.13 a barrel.

Both contracts have climbed about 5pc since Monday and are at their highest since September 29.

Prices are rising as US President Donald Trump has increased pressure on Iran to end its nuclear programme with threats of military strikes and as a US naval group has arrived in the region. Iran is the fourth-largest producer among the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with output of 3.2m barrels per day.

Trump is considering options to attack Iranian security forces and leaders to inspire pro-

tests to potentially topple the current regime, Reuters reported on Thursday, citing US sources familiar with the discussions.

“The main driver of oil prices remains geopolitical risk premium surrounding Iran and the Middle East, though unplanned outages in Kazakhstan and US (Winter Storm Fern) have had temporary impact as well,” DBS Bank's energy sector team lead Suvro Sarkar

said in an email. The huge Tengiz oilfield in Kazakhstan is being restarted in stages after electrical fires cut output last week, with the aim of reaching full production in a week.

In the US, the world's biggest oil producer and largest liquefied natural gas exporter, crude and gas producers were bringing wells back online following disruptions from severe cold from Winter Storm Fern that hit over the

weekend. A surprise draw in US crude inventories, which temporarily eased concerns of excess supply, also supported prices, said Phillip Nova's senior market analyst Priyanka Sachdeva.

US crude inventories fell by 2.3m barrels to 423.8m barrels in the week ended January 23, the Energy Information Administration said on Wednesday, compared with analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll for a 1.8m barrel rise.

Some analysts are forecasting higher prices because of the Iranian concerns.

“The potential for Iran getting hit has escalated the geopolitical premium of oil prices by potentially \$3 to \$4 (per barrel),” analysts at Citi said in a note on Wednesday.

They added that further geopolitical escalation could push prices to as high as \$72 a barrel for Brent over the next three months.



Every Pakistani owes Rs333,000

NEWS DESK: The debt burden of every Pakistani increased by 13pc to Rs333,000 in the last fiscal year, while public debt remained a “challenge” due to a budget deficit that exceeded the statutory limit by Rs3 trillion, according to a Fiscal Policy Statement presented to Parliament.

Debt per capita increased from Rs294,098 in fiscal year 2023-24 to Rs333,041 in fiscal year 2024-25, the annual Fiscal Policy Statement of the Ministry of Finance stated. Under the Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act (FRDL), the ministry is legally bound to submit this statement to Parliament by the end of January for information.

Within a year, the debt burden, which is calculated by dividing total public debt by the country's 241.5 million population, increased by Rs39,000, or 13pc, the report showed.

It added that from June 2024 to June 2025, total public debt increased from Rs71.2 trillion to Rs80.5 trillion, mainly due to higher interest payments. These interest costs, the report noted, were the outcome of additional borrowing undertaken to finance

spending beyond the limits set in law.

Unlike the United States, where the government can come to a standstill for breaching the debt ceiling until it is revised by Congress, in Pakistan parliamentarians are only informed of such breaches, without any consequences for the federal government.

Fiscal year 2024-25 was the first full financial year of the government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif,

which assumed office in April 2024.

The finance ministry said total public debt as a percentage of GDP increased from 67.6pc in June 2024 to 70.7pc in June 2025.

The rise in public debt, both in absolute terms and relative to the size of the economy, undermines the federal government's claim of fiscal discipline. During the year, the government added new departments, expanded the federal cabinet and purchased new furniture and cars despite claiming austerity.

The law requires the federal government to lay a fiscal policy statement before the National Assembly by the end of January each year. The statement must comprehensively assess key fiscal indicators, including total expenditure, net revenue receipts, fiscal deficit, federal fiscal deficit excluding foreign grants, public debt and per capita debt.

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Textile exporters demand relief package

NEWS DESK: Amid the government's narrative of returning to macro-economic stability, the country's textile exporters upped the ante against uncompetitive energy costs, high tax rates and challenging financial costs and demanded broad-based fiscal space to compete globally.

A large delegation of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) on Wednesday had an urgent meeting with a government team comprising Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik to reduce energy costs, taxes, and interest rates to single digits.

The finance minister assured the industry of the government's continued engagement to address key challenges facing the textile sector, as it remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's economy due to its significant contribution to exports, employment, and industrial activity.

Given the IMF compulsions, the minister reiterated the “resolve to support its sustainability within the broader economic re-



form framework”.

The industry demanded the removal of Rs4-7 per unit cross-subsidy component from the industrial tariff, withdrawal of Rs3.23 per unit debt servicing surcharge and abolition of peak energy rates at night to a flat rate.

They also demanded abolition of advance tax on exports, fully automated and fast-tracked payment of refunds, removal of surper-tax and allocation of Rs30bn funds from the export development fund for exporters.

fiscal space to compete globally.

On top, they also want an immediate reduction in policy rate to 5pc and gradually to 6pc, and restoration of the concessionary export refinance scheme. All these demands are, in one way or another, tied to IMF programme conditions. The prime minister had recently sought relaxations from the IMF to trigger economic growth — a subject that would only be discussed at the third programme review next month and within the programme's under-

lying objectives — fiscal and monetary surpluses. An official statement said the two ministers reaffirmed the government's commitment to maintaining a fair and predictable policy environment for businesses, with equity, transparency and broad-based participation across the economy.

It was emphasised that efforts were underway to address the genuine concerns of compliant sectors while advancing structural reforms through consultation and institutional processes.



Has India's dominance in ICC revenue model factored in Bangladesh's dismissal from World Cup?

NEWS DESK: Bangladesh's request to play the T20 World Cup 2026 matches outside India was not entertained by the International Cricket Council (ICC), leading to their ejection from the marquee event.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had refused to play their matches in India in response to the termination of Mustafizur Rahman's contract by Kolkata Knight Riders, on the instructions of the BCCI.

There were no reasons given by the BCCI for its verdict.

The board that did not let a single Bangladesh player compete in its biggest league wanted the entire team to assemble and play their matches in India.

The ICC dismissed the security concerns raised by the BCB, stating that "no credible or verifiable security threat to the Bangladesh national team, officials or supporters in India" was



found in their elaborate assessment of the situation. While mainstream analysis has treated this as a singular conflict between the ICC and BCB, the lack of mention of

the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) signals that the world's most influential cricketing board's presence did not factor in.

This has also been the official stance of the

BCCI. When Devajit Saikia, the BCCI secretary, was asked about the conflict earlier this month, he stated that the matter falls beyond the purview of the Indian

cricketing board. "It's not our domain to talk about that," Saikia had said.

The ICC functions not on a specific frame-

work, but on the caprices of the BCCI, as suggested by The Wire journalist, Ravi Raj. For instance, last year, India also adopted a similar stance by not sending the team to Pakistan, which was hosting the Champions' Trophy

2025. Their request was promptly heard, and their matches were shifted to Dubai. But the same request from Bangladesh has not been given the

same consideration.

The ICC is now more wary of setting a "precedent that would jeopardise the sanctity of future ICC events", and "undermine its neutrality as a global governing body".

The precedent was set a year ago by the BCCI and the BCB was simply following the same script.

Jason Gillespie, the former Australian cricketer, pointed out this inconsistency when he posted on X.

"Has there been an explanation from the ICC why Bangladesh could not play their games outside of India?"

The tweet is deleted as of now following abuse from netizens.

"In the past, India refused to play Champions Trophy matches in Pakistan and were allowed to play those games outside the country.

Can someone make this make sense?" Gillespie wrote in the post.

Djokovic gets out of jail to set up Sinner semi-final showdown

NEWS DESK: Novak Djokovic continued his quest for a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and standalone 25th Grand Slam crown, but only after a cruel twist of fate for Lorenzo Musetti, who quit their quarter-final due to injury on Wednesday holding a comfortable lead.

While the stars may seem to be aligning for Djokovic in his bid for more major glory, the road will only be more rocky after Janik Sinner beat Ben Shelton to book a blockbuster semi-final against him, and Carlos Alcaraz potentially in the final.

Like Alcaraz, Iga Swiatek arrived in Melbourne chasing a career Grand Slam—the feat of winning all four of the sport's biggest trophies—but her bid went up in smoke after a

defeat by Elena Rybakina earlier in the day.

Jessica Pegula had little trouble as she reached the Melbourne Park semi-finals for the first time after dashing fellow American Amanda Anisimova's hopes of reaching three straight major finals.

The drama in the day session was re-matched and Djokovic arrived fresh for the battle with fifth seed Musetti after getting a walkover on Sunday from injured Czech Jakub Mensik.

The Serb made a fast start but it was then one-way traffic as the artistic Musetti showed his full range of strokes and bagged the opening two sets, before the Italian pulled up holding the upper part of his right leg at the start of the third.

Musetti looked to

soldier on after receiving treatment, but lasted only one more game and he threw in the towel leading 6-4, 6-3, 1-3 as stunned fans at the Rod Laver Arena let out a gasp and Djokovic quietly heaved a sigh of relief.

"I don't know what to say, except that I feel really sorry for him and he was a far better player," said Djokovic, who had been uncharacteristically error strewn and staring down the barrel.

"I was on my way home. These things happen in sport and it's happened to me a few times, but being in the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam, two sets to love up and being in full control, I mean it's so unfortunate. He should have been the winner today no doubt.

I am extremely

lucky to get through this one today."

Djokovic has been trying to move past Margaret Court and clinch the landmark 25 since his last major title at the US Open in 2023. It has proved increasingly difficult with the emergence of Sinner and Alcaraz.

Djokovic, who needed treatment during the match for a gruesome blister, added: "I am going to double my prayers and gratitude tonight to God for giving me this opportunity again."

A heartbroken Musetti said he was pained by having to retire after taking a big lead against the experienced Djokovic, adding the trouble in his leg first began in the second set.

"I felt there was something strange," he said. "I continued to play, because I was playing really well, but I was feeling that the pain was increasing, and the problem was not going away. In the end, when I took the medical timeout... and started to play again, I felt it even more and it was getting higher and higher, the level of the pain."

Although he eclipsed Roger Federer with his 103rd match win at Melbourne Park, the task will get only tougher for Djokovic when he meets Sinner, who won a 22nd consecutive set against big-serving Shelton in a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 victory in the evening session.



PSG and Real Madrid miss automatic qualification

NEWS DESK: Holders Paris St Germain and Real Madrid both failed to seal automatic spots in the Champions League knockout round as they slipped out of the top eight on a frenetic final night of group-stage action across Europe on Wednesday.

PSG could only draw 1-1 at home to Newcastle United – a result that left both sides facing a playoff despite starting the final night in the automatic places.

Fifteen-time winners Real Madrid were beaten 4-2 at Jose Mourinho's Benfica, meaning they fell from third to ninth.

Liverpool thrashed Qarabag 6-0 to end their group campaign in style and finish in third place. Barcelona, who began the evening in ninth spot, spared themselves a playoff tie as they came from a goal down to beat Copenhagen 4-1 and finish fifth, one place



behind Tottenham Hotspur who won 2-0 at Eintracht Frankfurt. Chelsea came from behind to win 3-2 at Napoli with Joao Pedro's double helping them clinch sixth spot. Defeat left Napoli down

and out in 30th place. Portugal's Sporting grabbed a last-gasp 3-2 win at Athletic Bilbao thanks to a goal by Allison Santos to beat Bayern Munich and effectively relegate Real Madrid to the play-

offs. Manchester City beat Galatasaray 2-0 to jump from 11th to eighth. Arsenal, who like Bayern Munich were a top-ready spot of a top-eight finish, became the first club in

the new 36-team group format to finish with a 100% record, beating bottom club Kairat Almaty 3-2. Bayern finished second after a 2-1 victory at PSV Eindhoven that left the Dutch club eliminated.

Pakistan name squad for Pro Hockey League

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has announced the national squad for the Pro Hockey League and the World Cup Qualifying round.

The national contingent consists of 20 players and six officials, with the team scheduled to depart for Australia on February 2nd.

While announcing the team at the Naseer Bunda Hockey Stadium, PHF Secretary Rana Mujahid Ali Khan and Head Coach Tahir Zaman stated that the squad traveling to Australia will also represent Pakistan in the World Cup

Qualifiers. Mohammad Anwar Butt will lead the Green Shirts as captain.

Rana Mujahid mentioned that the issue of players' daily allowances has been taken up with the government, and all outstanding dues will be cleared by Friday.

Squad Updates & Composition

Two changes have been made to the Pro League squad: Ali Raza replaces goalkeeper Abdullah Ishtiaq.

Umair Sattar joins the team in place of Mannan Raza.

The Full Squad: Muneeb-ur-Rehman,

Ali Raza, Arshad Liaquat, Mohammad Abdullah, Sufyan Khan, Arbaz Ahmed, Hammad Anjum, Moin Shakeel, Ghazanfar Ali, Zakaria Liaquat, Umair Sattar, Hamman Shahid, Rana Waheed, Nadeem Ahmed, Abdul Rehman, Rana Waleed, Afraz, and Abu Bakar.

Team Officials:

Head Coach Tahir Zaman, Mohammad Usman, Zeeshan Ashraf, Nadeem Lodhi, Mohammad Aslam, and Adel.

Coaching & Captain's Outlook:

Head Coach Tahir Zaman remarked that facing powerhouse

teams like Australia and Germany will be a challenge.

However, the national team is set to play 16 matches before the World Cup, providing an excellent opportunity for preparation.

He noted that after a long hiatus, Pakistan finally has the chance to compete against top-tier teams.

Captain Mohammad Anwar Butt added that player morale is high and things are moving in the right direction.

He expressed hope that the Prime Minister would continue to further support the national sport.



New Zealand thrash India to end losing streak

NEWS DESK: New Zealand thumped India by 50 runs in the fourth Twenty20 International to earn their first win of the five-match series in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

Put in to bat, New Zealand struggled to build on the century opening stand between Tim Seifert (62) and Devon Conway (44) but still posted a commanding 215-7.

The tourists then returned to bowl out India for 165 in 18.4 overs despite Shivam Dube's belligerent 65 off 23 balls that included seven sixes. India lead the series 3-1 ahead of Saturday's final match in Thiruvananthapuram.

Earlier, New Zealand got off to a blazing start with Seifert and Conway combining in an opening stand of 100 to lay the foundation for a big total.

Spinner Kuldeep Yadav dismissed Conway in the ninth over to break the century



stand as India clawed their way back into the contest with a flurry of wickets.

Jasprit Bumrah took a return catch to send back Rachin Ravindra in the next over and Arshdeep Singh ended Seifert's 36-ball blitz, which contained three sixes.

Kuldeep also claimed the wicket of Glenn Phillips (24) but Daryl Mitchell smashed 39 not out from 18 balls as New Zealand managed to make hay in the death overs to power

past the 200-mark.

Having taken an unassailable 3-0 lead, India rested top-order batter Ishan Kishan, who sustained a niggle in their victory in Guwahati, and their rejuvinated batting order was immediately under pressure.

Their in-form opener Abhishek Sharma, currently the top-ranked T20 batter, fell for a first-ball duck to Matt Henry while skipper Suryakumar Yadav (eight) did not last long either.



Field Marshal Munir says Pakistan Army shifting to tech-led, multi-domain warfare

NEWS DESK: Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir on Thursday said the Pakistan Armed Forces are undergoing a major transformation across multiple domains, with technology reshaping the future character of warfare, according to the military's media wing.

"Character of war has evolved massively, with technological advancements driving the evolution, dictating huge mental transformation at all tiers," he said. In future, technological manoeuvres will replace physical manoeuvres and will fundamentally alter the way offensive and defensive operations are undertaken. Therefore, Pakistan Armed Forces are embracing and absorbing technology at a rapid pace.

In this process innovation, indigenisation and adaptation shall remain fundamental," he said.

The remarks were made during his visit to Bahawalpur Garrison, where he was briefed on

operational, training and administrative matters of the Corps, with special focus on preparations for multi-domain warfare, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

The army chief also witnessed a high-intensity field exercise, "Steadfast Resolve," at Khairpur Tamewali (KPT).

The exercise showcased the integration of niche technologies, including unmanned aerial systems (drones), advanced surveillance assets, electronic warfare capabilities and modern command-and-control mechanisms, reflecting the Armed Forces' emphasis on technology-enabled multi-domain operations.

Addressing the troops, the COAS and CDF praised their high morale, professional competence and operational preparedness.

He reaffirmed that the Pakistan Armed Forces remain fully prepared to defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity against all threats, stressing the need to

maintain optimum readiness to meet future battlefield and security challenges.

Earlier, Field Marshal Munir inaugurated the ROH eSkills Learning Hub (STP), aimed at promoting digital skills and learning opportunities for students, particularly from southern Punjab and across the country.

He also inaugurated the APS Abbasia Campus, reiterating the Pakistan Army's commitment to quality education and character building.

The army chief later visited the EME Regional Workshop, where he was briefed on maintenance regimes to sustain modern platforms through advanced technologies, indigenisation and other combat support measures.

Upon arrival at Bahawalpur Garrison, the COAS and CDF was received by the Commander Bahawalpur Corps. He also laid a floral wreath at Yadgar-e-Shuhada and offered Fateha, paying tribute to the supreme sacrifices of the martyrs.

Imran Khan taken to hospital for minor eye procedure, confirms Tarar

NEWS DESK: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Thursday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder and former prime minister Imran Khan, who is incarcerated at Adiala Jail, was briefly taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) for medical treatment.

His statement came amid growing concern expressed by senior opposition leaders over Khan's health.

On Wednesday, top leaders from PTI and allied parties held a joint press conference, raising alarm over what they described as the continued denial of access to the jailed former prime minister, a day after reports surfaced that he was suffering from an eye infection.

"The last meeting with Imran Khan took place on December 20,

after which party officials and family members have not been allowed to meet him," PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said at the press conference. He added that a petition had been filed in court seeking permission to meet Khan, but approval had not yet been granted.

Speaking to a private news channel on Thursday, Tarar said eye specialists had examined Khan at Adiala Jail and advised that he be shifted to PIMS for further assessment and treatment.

Acting on the doctors' recommendations, Tarar said, Khan was taken to the hospital on Saturday night.

According to the minister, doctors at PIMS conducted another examination of Khan's eyes and, after obtaining his written consent, carried out a minor medical procedure that lasted around 20 minutes.

Following the procedure, Khan was shifted back to Adiala Jail along with the necessary medical instructions, Tarar said, adding that his vital signs remained stable throughout and his overall health was satisfactory.

"He is absolutely healthy," Tarar said. He added that prisoners are provided access to medical facilities and specialist care whenever required, in line with jail rules.

Rejecting rumours circulating on social media about Khan's condition, Tarar said claims that the former prime minister's health was serious were false.

"Alhamdulillah, he is completely fine," he said, reiterating that the hospital visit was solely for a minor eye-related procedure carried out on medical advice.



Pakistan committed to working with EU on trade initiatives, especially through GSP+: PM Shehbaz

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said Pakistan was committed to working closely with the European Union (EU) on mutually beneficial trade enhancement initiatives, especially through the GSP+ status.

According to a handout by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), PM Shehbaz made these remarks while meeting the EU's Ambassador to Pakistan Raimundas Karoblis, who called on him in Islamabad.

The EU, GSP+ status is a special incentive awarded to developing countries to "pursue sustainable development and good governance" in exchange for cutting import duties to zero on two-thirds of the tariff lines of its exports. Governments with this status need to implement 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, good governance and the environment.

According to the handout issued on



Thursday, the premier welcomed the ambassador and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthen cooperation with the EU in all areas of mutual interest, particularly trade, investment, development, security, migration and climate change.

The prime minister emphasised upon the critical role of the GSP+ scheme in enhancing trade between Pakistan and the EU, and said the government of Pakistan is committed to working

closely with the EU on mutually beneficial trade enhancement initiatives, especially through the GSP+," it said.

He also expressed satisfaction at the seventh round of Pakistan-EU Strategic Dialogue held in Brussels in November last year, it added. Meanwhile, the EU ambassador expressed gratitude and deep appreciation to the prime minister for the warm welcome he had received since his arrival in the country and as-

sured him that he would continue to work steadfastly to strengthen Pakistan-EU relations across all spheres.

He also conveyed good wishes from the EU leadership to the prime minister, and said the EU would continue to engage closely with Pakistan on enhancing trade, under GSP+ as well as through trade promotion activities such as the first-ever EU-Pakistan Business Forum, which would be held in April.

The GSP+ status was granted to Pakistan by the EU in 2014, resulting in a 108 per cent increase in Pakistani textile exports to the EU due to concessional tariffs.

In October 2023, the European Parliament unanimously voted to extend the GSP+ status for another four years until 2027 for developing countries, including Pakistan.

According to the EU's GSP Convention Compliance Database, Pakistan has ratified 27 international conventions, most recently ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987) in 2010.

Regarding the EU's monitoring of Pakistan, the body prioritised 13 key areas, including enforced disappearances, torture prevention, and freedom of expression and belief and minority rights.

Three terrorists killed in DI Khan operation as violence persists in K-P

NEWS DESK: Three terrorists were killed and several others injured on Thursday in a joint operation by police and security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, officials said.

Bannu Deputy Inspector General Sajjad Khan said operations were carried out in Akbar Ali Khan Village, Asparaka and Dome.

He said the operation was supervised on the ground by senior officers, including DIG Khan, Bannu District Police Officer Yasir Afridi and Brigadier Umar Nizai of the 116 Brigade.

Dome lies along the North Waziristan Road, while the other areas are located above the Kohat and Bannu boundaries. All the locations are mountainous, officials said.

A search operation is continuing to arrest militants who fled the area.

"The terrorists will be brought to justice, and law and order will be maintained at all costs," DIG Sajjad Khan said.

Federal Interior Minister Mohan Naqvi praised police and security forces for what he described as a successful operation against militants belonging to "Fitna al-Khawarij" in



the Bannu region.

"I pay tribute to the police and security forces for sending three terrorists to hell," Naqvi said in a statement.

He said the police and security forces had thwarted the militants' "nefarious designs" through a timely and co-ordinated operation and lauded their professional capabilities.

"Joint actions by the police and security forces for the establishment of peace in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa are commendable," he said.

Naqvi added that, with the support of the nation, militants linked to Fitna al-Khawarij – a term the Pakistani authorities use for the Tehreek-e-Taliban Paki-

stan (TTP) militants – were being eliminated. "The terrorists will not be allowed to hide anywhere," he said.

In a separate incident on Thursday, labourers from Dera Ismail Khan were abducted in the Makki area of South Waziristan after unknown armed men attacked an under-construction government checkpoint near the local market.

The region has seen a series of violent incidents in recent months. On December 24, five people were killed and 10 injured in a suicide blast at the residence of Noor Alam Mehsud.

Head of a local animal committee, during a wedding ceremony near Qureshi Mor in Dera Ismail Khan.

Last month, three police officers were killed in a bomb attack targeting a police vehicle.

Security was tightened in and around Makki market following the incident, triggering fear and panic among residents.

Police said the abducted labourers were reportedly from Dera Ismail Khan.

The region has seen a series of violent incidents in recent months. On December 24, five people were killed and 10 injured in a suicide blast at the residence of Noor Alam Mehsud.

Head of a local animal committee, during a wedding ceremony near Qureshi Mor in Dera Ismail Khan.

Last month, three police officers were killed in a bomb attack targeting a police vehicle.

hicle in the district. In November last year, six policemen, including trainees, were martyred and 12 other policemen and one civilian injured in a militant attack on the Police Training School, one of the deadliest incidents in recent years.

Dera Ismail Khan, located at the junction of Balochistan, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, has long been a focal point of militant violence.

Since 2020, the district has recorded 111 attacks, resulting in the deaths of 71 police officers and injuries to 100 others.

Across Pakistan, overall violence rose by more than 25% last year, with at least 1,871 fatalities and 1,981 injuries among civilians, security personnel and criminals, according to the Centre for Research and Security Studies.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa was the worst-hit province, accounting for nearly 68% of violence-linked fatalities and more than 62% of all incidents.

In the province, fatalities during security operations stood at 1,370, exceeding deaths from militant attacks, which totalled 795, highlighting the scale of counterterrorism operations underway.

Foreign Office 'does not subscribe' to judge's opinion on 'terrorist states' in Imaan Mazari case

NEWS DESK: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday stated Pakistan did not "subscribe to the opinion" of the judge who convicted lawyer Imaan Mazari, Hari and her spouse, Hadi Ali Chattha regarding "terrorist states".

In his verdict, Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka had noted: "Currently, there are certain countries designated as terrorist states, which are Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Korea, Iran and Syria."

Asked about that judgment during his weekly press briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, FO spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said:

"This judgment [...] is the view of the learned judge. Pakistan, of course, does not subscribe to this opinion."

"And frankly, this kind of designation does not exist either under the United Nations (UN) or under international law," he said.

Judge Majoka had made the observation while noting that Pakistan was "not included in the list of terrorist states." It is worth mentioning that the UN does



not maintain a list of "terrorist states".

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has a "Consolidated List" of individuals, entities and other groups that it subjects to certain measures, such as sanctions, due to various reasons.

While it may include certain government-affiliated departments, it does not name any country in its entirety.

Imaan and Hadi were sentenced on January 24 under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act's (Peca) sections 9

(glorification of an offence), 10 (cyberterrorism), and 26-A (false and fake information).

They were handed a total of 17 years in jail, with the longest sentence being 10 years, and fined Rs36 million each collectively.

In his judgment, Judge Majoka had remarked about the four countries while noting that the couple had "intentionally in their tweets mentioned the [sic] Pakistan as a terrorist state." Convictions against freedom of ex-

pression: EU official

Earlier on Thursday, the European Union's (EU) Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Anouar El Anouar raised concerns over the conviction of Imaan and Hadi.

In a post on X, the EU official said their convictions "over social media activity goes against freedom of expression and independence of lawyers."

"These are not only key democratic principles but also part of [Pakistan's] international human rights com-

mitments," Anouar said. On Wednesday, the National Assembly's Special Committee on Gender Mainstreaming, under the chairmanship of MNA Dr Nafisa Shah, expressed the concern that vague provisions within Peca were often misused against civil society actors, journalists and political parties.

In December 2025, the EU had reviewed Pakistan's progress towards implementing 27 international conventions under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) framework.

Both sides had exchanged views on various topics, including freedom of expression and media, and the judiciary's independence.

"They stressed the importance of proportionality and appropriate safeguards and their need to continue dialogue on these concerns."

Governments with the GSP+ status need to implement 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, good governance and the environment.