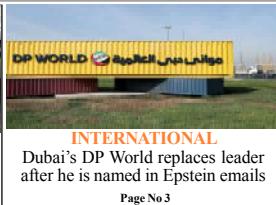


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Rs.10.00 Vol.VII:No:135
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Saturday 14, February, 2026

First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE



Flour Prices Rise Across Balochistan, Families Struggle to Make Ends Meet

Syed Ali Shah:

For many families in Quetta and other parts of Balochistan, buying flour has become an everyday worry.

A fresh increase in prices has pushed this basic kitchen staple beyond the reach of countless households, hitting daily wage earners and low-income families the hardest.

In crowded markets, shopkeepers can be seen comparing prices in frustration, while many return home with smaller quantities than usual.

"Our income hasn't increased, but food prices keep going up," says a seller at a local market, echoing the concerns of many others.

Shopkeepers and flour sellers blame the hike on supply issues linked to Punjab. According

to traders, court-related matters and administrative hurdles in Punjab have disrupted the smooth movement of wheat and flour, creating shortages in Balochistan.

Sellers say they are now receiving limited stock, forcing them to sell at higher prices and restrict sales to just two or three bags per customer—an especially tough blow for poorer buyers.

Balochistan's Food Minister, Noor Muhammad Dunar has acknowledged the public's concerns.

He stated that the provincial government is closely watching the situation and will take the necessary steps that could interfere with the inter-provincial supply of wheat and flour.

"Ensuring smooth movement of food supplies is critical," he said, stressing that shortages only worsen public suffering.

Meanwhile, citizens are urging the Balochistan Food Department to step in decisively—by stabilizing supplies, monitoring markets, and enforcing price controls.

For now, families across the province wait anxiously, hoping for swift action before an essential food item slips even further out of reach.

TTAP stages sit-in outside Parliament, seeks Imran Khan's admission to Shifa International Hospital

NEWS DESK:

A Tehreek-e-Tahaffuz-e-Ain Pakistan (TTAP) sit-in outside Parliament House was underway on Friday, vowing to continue the protest until Imran Khan is admitted to Shifa International Hospital for his eye condition.

In a post on its alliance, it said there would be no compromise on the health of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, adding that all PTI parliamentarians would participate in the protest.

The protest follows submissions made to the Supreme Court of Pakistan, where Advocate Salman Safdar informed the court—citing a report commissioned by the bench that only 15% of the country's health system is fit for use and Imran's right eye. The lawyer quoted the former prime minister as saying the loss followed medical complications in custody, sparking sharp criticism from opposition parties who accused the government of allowing Imran's health to deteriorate. "The government has cordoned off all roads leading to the Parliament. Gates of parliamentary lodges have been shut trapping MNAs and Senators inside," said Asst. Mawaz Khokhar said in his post on X.

Punjab Assembly Opposition Leader Moeen Riaz Qureshi also said police closed the main



doors of the Parliament lobbies as the group walked towards Parliament House.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazlur Rehman said Imran's eye condition, saying the matter should not be politicized and that appropriate medical care was being provided in line with medical advice. Speaking to the media outside Parliament on Friday, he said Imran had complained of an eye problem earlier and that any negligence, if proven, would carry responsibility.

He added that during a meeting with Imran's sister in October, Imran's eye condition was complained of, and after a medical check-up, jail authorities transferred him to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in accordance with medical requirements so his eye could be treated at a hospital.

He added that an experienced eye surgeon had prepared a medical report and that the medical assessment would be completed again.

Chaudhry said Imran would undergo medical examinations when he was released by doctors. "If there is a need to send him to any doctor at Al-Shifa Eye Trust Hospital, he will be sent," he said. Recalling events in January, he said that on January 16, it was recommended by a doctor that Imran be sent to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences for an eye checkup. He added that it is also on record that he was not shifted at the request of PTI, but by the jail authorities and the government. Chaudhry noted that following a medical report on January 24, a medical report was issued by the doctors, "and then there is a 'report' by the lawyer," referring to PTI counsel Advocate Salman Safdar's submission to the Supreme Court.

Balochistan's Tree Plantation Drive Must Go Beyond Ceremonies

Quetta Voice Report:

Every spring, usually between February and March, Balochistan witnesses the launch of tree plantation campaigns. Saplings are planted at official ceremonies, photographs are circulated, and media and hospital statements are issued about a greener future. While these efforts matter, they fall short of what the province truly needs.

Balochistan is one of the most arid, climate regions in Pakistan and ranks among the hardest-hit areas globally by climate change. Rising temperatures, recurring droughts, shrinking water resources, and disappearing biodiversity are constant threats—they are daily realities for communities across the province. In such circumstances, tree plantation cannot remain a symbolic activity limited to headlines and hashtags.

What is needed is a serious shift toward sustainable plantation. Planting a sapling is only the first step. Ensuring its survival—through protection, irrigation, monitoring, and community ownership—is what makes a difference. The success of tree planting drives should be measured by how many trees survive after one, three, or five years, not by the number of photo sessions held. The Forest and Wildlife Department must move beyond pub-



licy-driven campaigns and focus on long-term environmental impact. Native and drought-resistant species should be prioritized, while schools, universities, and local communities must be made partners in protecting and nurturing plantations.

Balochistan does not need unnecessary construction projects or decorative infrastructure. It needs a large-scale, province-wide plantation initiative—similar to a plantation tsunami—with clear targets aimed at reducing the effects of global warming, improving air quality, and restoring ecological balance.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Koh-e-Suleman and Pishin Divisions: A Necessary Shift Toward People-First Governance


Editorial: The announcement of the Koh-e-Suleman Division by Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti marks a long-overdue administrative correction for an area that has remained stagnant from effective governance for decades.

Declaring Rakhi as the divisional headquarters reflects a growing recognition that governance cannot succeed when decision-making centers remain far removed from the people.

For residents of Koh-e-Suleman, this step promises easier access to administration, faster service delivery, and greater state presence in everyday affairs.

Administering such a vast population through distant divisions has long strained public services, from

healthcare and education to revenue and law enforcement. In this context, the establishment of a new division is not symbolic—it is an administrative necessity grounded in population realities and governance efficiency.

Alongside this development, the provincial cabinet's approval of the Pishin Division deserves equal attention.

What now remains is the issuance of a formal notification by the Board of Revenue and its public inauguration by the Chief Minister.

Comprising Chaman, Pishin, Karezat and Killa Abdullah districts, the proposed Pishin Division also serves more than two million people.

Delaying its noti-

cation risks prolonging administrative contention and public hardship in an already overburdened system.

However, administrative restructuring must follow clear principles.

Divisions and districts should be created on the basis of population size, service demand, and administrative feasibility—not political ambition, tribal influence, or electoral engineering.

When designed for political gain, such reforms fail the common citizen.

If implemented with sincerity, the Koh-e-Suleman and Pishin Divisions can become models of people-centric governance—where administrative boundaries exist to serve citizens, not power corridors.

National Nutrition Survey (2011) 2011 covered all provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Balochistan (KPK), Sindh, Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It included 1,584 enumeration blocks and 30,000 households with a 49% urban and 51% rural distribution.

National Nutrition Survey (2018): The 2018 Pakistan National Nutrition Survey (NNS 2018) is the largest national nutrition survey carried out in Pakistan. It is designed to provide policymakers, program managers, and researchers with a unique set of data including environmental, anthropometric, and biochemical indicators.

National Nutrition Survey (2018-19) is to undertake a field survey and generate district-specific nutrition information related to malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition.

Malnutrition status in Balochistan is the most under-developed of Pakistan's provinces, with a high proportion of children under five years of age who are stunted (52%) and underweight (51%).

Moreover, the prevalence of anemia among children in this age group is 57% and nearly 49% among women of childbearing age. Numerous factors are thought to contribute to the underdevelopment in Balochistan, including sub-optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices; frequent child infections (especially diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections, and measles); maternal nutritional deficiencies and/or illness and death; absence/inadequacy of micronutrient supplementation; and household income and gender inequality.

A survey conducted by the National Nutrition Cell revealed that 49% of women in Balochistan were suffering from malnutrition. Moreover, the ratio of maternal anemia was 49%, anemia among children below five years was 57% and iodine deficiency among women was 29%.

Balochistan Nutrition Program for Mother and Children (BNPMC) is the largest national nutrition survey carried out in Pakistan. It is designed to provide policymakers, program managers, and researchers with a unique set of data including environmental, anthropometric, and biochemical indicators.

In response to the challenging nutrition situation in the province, the Department of Health (DoH) launched the National Nutrition Program for Mothers and Children (BNPMC) in 2016. They implemented nutrition activities among the rural and urban populations of 22 districts. The total population of these districts is 1,654,613, of which estimated target populations include 132,369 pregnant and lactating women, 1,000,000 children under five years of age, and 1,521,244 households.

The total cost of the above project was 1,492.62 million PKR (US\$14.21 million) of which 80% were provided by the World Bank and 20% by the Government of Balochistan. A major part of the funding

(41%) was allocated to strengthen institutional arrangements which include staffing, technical assistance for capacity building, strengthening coordination mechanisms, addressing malnutrition among children and PLW (37%), and addressing micronutrient malnutrition (13%).

Future Plans
The aforesaid program ended in December 2019 and was limited to seven districts; whereas the malnutrition situation continues to exist in 22 districts of Balochistan.

The Government of Balochistan has assigned DoH and PPFI to extend nutrition intervention in 22 districts for which project proposals are ready; implementation is expected from July 2021.

The author is a program officer in PPFI

nuclear. The Perils and Prospects of Artificial Intelligence

Harnessing the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in warfare brought a paradigm shift in

the modus operandi of warfare. It eliminated the requirement of direct human involvement in

selecting and engaging targets. Even the smartest of the weapons were hitherto launched and guided by humans.

This development has given rise to the debate of ethics and morality all over again. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General joined the skeptics on Twitter where he

wrote in March 2019, "Autonomous machines with the power and discretion to select targets and

take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be prohibited by international law."

Word count (592)
Group captain Masroor ul Hassan served in the PAF.

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QAU and another M.Sc. Strategic Studies from KU. He can be reached masroorulhassan@gmail.com

Malnutrition in Balochistan



THE DILEMMA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) WEAPONS

Masoor ul Hassan

The danger associated with military and semi-autonomous weapons systems is unacceptable.

There exists a near consensus that such weapons must not be completely AI-controlled.

The design must include appropriate levels of human judgment while resorting to them. This line of thought gains more credence when the present degree of global polarization is taken into view.

The international order is tilting towards autocracy and the likelihood of employment of these weapons is becoming a reality. The norms and values of world politics were subjected to heavy Trumpian Strain in the recent past when the competition of naked power showed its ugliness in international relations.

The Genesis of warfare

The history of warfare is as old as the human race. The Book of Genesis states that Cain killed Abel to satiate his vengeance. Ever since, vengeance, contention and bellicosity have remained more pervasive than cooperation and amiability in human relations.

The perception of life as a zero-sum game breeds selfishness and consequent animosity between in-

dividuals, groups, or states. Instincts of survival and procreation are reflexive thus natural for all living organisms—including us humans.

War, being one of the forms of human relations, received due attention
However, what distinguishes Homo

sapiens from other living entities is the quest for controlling the forces of nature like wind, water, fire, and Sunlight for enhancing the level of physical comfort and peace of mind. This pursuit did improve amenities of life over time but alongside increased societal complexities. War, being

one of the forms of human relations, received due attention for defining political scientists for defining political and moral issues. Caine, who may have used a sharp stone, a strong branch of a tree, or simple brute force to

strangle Abel, would be flabbergasted if he were to visit our times. The civilization we live in

today took centuries over centuries to materialize.

The use of electromagnetic spectrum was considered a game-changer
The use of electromagnetic spectrum was considered a game-changer before Counter Measures (ECM) were developed

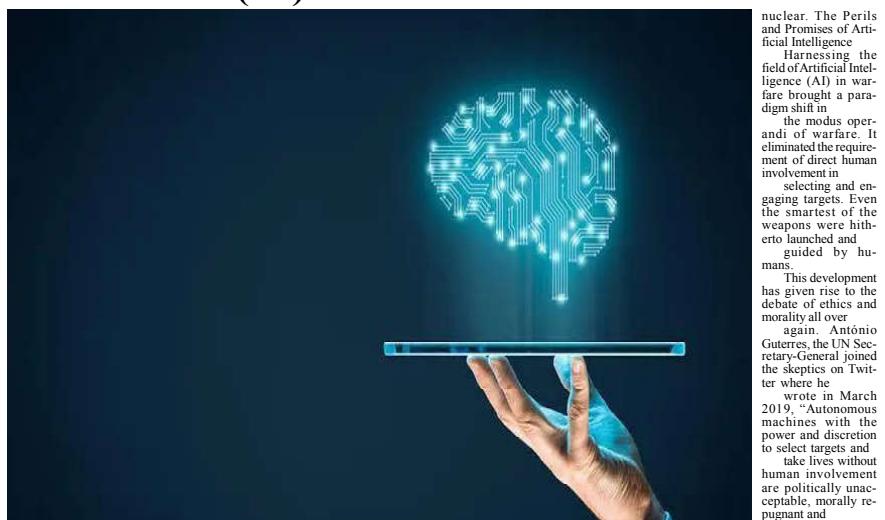
which was then countered by Electronic Counter Measures (ECM). When the lethality of weapons created a situation of mutually assured destruction (MAD) the situation became unacceptable. Various treaties like Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

(START), and many more were signed to avert the unacceptable destruction of the human race.

Exercising restraint was never so important
Exercising restraint was never so important before the development of autonomous weapons; chemical, biological, and

radiological, and

QAU and another M.Sc. Strategic Studies from KU. He can be reached masroorulhassan@gmail.com



UK terrorism ban on Palestine Action group unlawful, court rules after appeal

NEWS DESK: Britain's ban on pro-Palestinian campaign group Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation was ruled unlawful by London's High Court on Friday, though the ban will temporarily remain in place and the government said it would appeal against the decision.

Palestine Action was proscribed in July, having increasingly taken "direct action" against Israeli-owned defence companies in Britain, often blocking entrances or spraying red paint.

Britain argued the group's actions amounted to terrorism, citing a 2024 raid on a factory of Israel's largest defence firm Elbit Systems, in which prosecutors said activists caused £1 million (\$1.4 m) of damage and a police officer was hit with a sledgehammer. Ban followed

at in July. Palestine Action was banned shortly after a June break-in at the Royal Air Force's Brize Norton air base, in which activists damaged two



planes, an action described by Prime Minister Keir Starmer as "disgraceful".

Lawyers representing Huda Ammori, who co-founded Palestine

Action in 2020, argued at the court last year that the move was an authoritarian restriction on the right to protest.

Judge Victoria Sharp said Palestine Action nonetheless ruled that a ban was a dispropor-

tionate interference with political freedoms of expression, though the ban was not lifted ahead of a further hearing to decide whether it should remain.

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tionate interference with political freedoms of expression, though the ban was not lifted ahead of a further hearing to decide whether it should remain.

Civil liberties groups, including Amnesty International, had called for the ban to be lifted and Irish novelist Sally Rooney said it could even lead her books being withdrawn from sale due to her public support for Palestine Action.

The British government argued proscription only prevented people from protesting in favour of the Palestinian cause.

The High Court, however, said it could cause pro-Palestinian protesters to "exercise self-restraint in terms of what they say and what they do".

UN extends mandate of Taliban sanctions monitoring team amid regional security concerns

NEWS DESK: The UN Security Council Thursday unanimously adopted a resolution extending by one year the mandate of the Monitoring Team that supports the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, which oversees sanctions imposed on the Taliban.

All 15 council members voted in favor of the US-drafted resolution, renewing its Monitoring Team's mandate for another year, until February 17, 2027. The extension comes amid mounting international concern over Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation, the growing influence of multiple terrorist groups, and the potential for regional destabilization.

Pakistan, which supported the resolution, stressed the threat posed by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), ISIL-Khorasan (ISIL-K), Majeed Brigade, and Al-Qaeda.

Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, said these groups "have been responsible for some of the most heinous terrorist attacks against Pakistan," citing

recent attacks that killed 80 people this month alone.

"Once again, Afghanistan is used by these groups to plan and orchestrate attacks against neighbouring countries," he said, urging the council to prevent the use of Afghan territory for terrorist operations.

"It is for the Taliban to decide what path they want to choose for Afghanistan, whether the path to isolation or the path to peace and prosperity as a responsible member of the international community," he said.

The ambassador also highlighted the council's concerns over the wider humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

"The resolution only addresses the Taliban's human rights conditions, particularly for women and girls, economic collapse, political exclusion, and the challenges posed by drug trafficking," he said.

"Through this resolution, the council has sent a clear message that Afghan territory should not serve as a safe haven for terrorists and that all member states must prevent ransom payments or political

concessions benefiting hostage-takers or terrorist groups.

The UN Monitoring Team's 37th report, released this week, paints a grim picture of Afghanistan as a base for multiple terrorist groups, noting that the de facto Afghan authorities continue to provide a "permissive environment" for groups, particularly TTP.

The report cited rising regional anxiety over cross-border attacks, the radicalisation of vulnerable communities, and the exploitation of communications and artificial intelligence by militant groups.

While Afghan authorities insist no terrorist groups are present in the country, the Monitoring Team stated that "no UN member state supported that assessment." Although the authorities have taken action against ISIL-K and other groups, they face difficulties for activities of other groups.

TTP, one of the largest terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan, has intensified attacks on Pakistani security institutions. A November 11 attack on an Islamabad courthouse killed 12 people, marking the first such strike in the capital in several years. After a series of regional setbacks, including the killing of deputy emir Mufti Muzahim in October, the group remains a serious threat.

The Monitoring Team warned that TTP could deepen regional divisions with Al-Qaeda-aligned groups, potentially expanding the threat beyond the region.

On Al-Qaeda, the report said the group's

intent and capability for external operations remain unchanged, and the group continues to be a recruiting and advisory hub, particularly for TTP, and "favors spectacular attacks aimed at attracting global media attention, highlighting the continued threat beyond the immediate region.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), not listed under the group, remains active in Afghanistan, especially in areas influenced by the Haqqani Network.

The report indicates AQIS leaders Osama bin Laden and Mullah Akhbar Rahim Ghami are believed to be in Kabul, with the group's media cell operating from Herat.

Member states within the AQIS are increasingly focused on deniable external operations, possibly under cover groups such as Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen, Pakistan, likely to avoid causing difficulties for the Taliban.

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Dubai's DP World replaces leader after he is named in Epstein emails

NEWS DESK: Dubai's DP World named a new chairman and chief executive officer on Friday, replacing its former leader Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, after the Epstein files revealed frequent correspondence between him and the convicted sex offender.

DP World announced the appointment of His Excellency Essa Kazim as chairman of its Board of Directors and the appointment of Yuvraj Narayan as Group Chief Executive Officer. The group said in a statement published by the Dubai media office.

The statement did not mention Sulayem. Described by Jeff

Epstein as one of his "most trusted friends", Sulayem was group chairman and chief executive officer of DP World, one of the largest port operators on the globe. He is cited more than 9,400 times

in the documents recently released by the US Department of Justice, which revealed close ties between the two men. They maintained regular correspondence from 2009 to 2018, exchanging

messages on intimate matters, meetings, introductions and business opportunities.

The correspondence suggests he visited the US sex offender in his home several times, including on his island. They maintained regular correspondence from 2009 to 2018, exchanging

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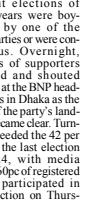
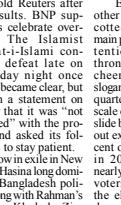
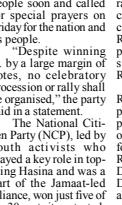
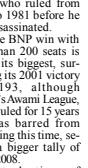
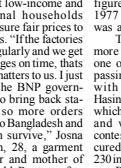
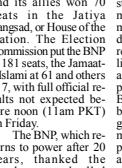
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Inter-Divisional Talent Hunt Boxing starts

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Boxing Federation (PBF) has commenced the Inter-Divisional phase of the National Talent Hunt Boxing Championship from Saturday under its ongoing nationwide

talent hunt program. President Assoziate Lieutenant Colonel (R) Nasir Ijaz

Tung, the initiative is being organized in collaboration with the Pakistan Army with the primary objective of iden-

tifying and promoting emerging boxing talent across the country.

In Punjab, the competitions are being held at the Sports Complex of the Government of Punjab, Faisalabad, where around 300 male

and female boxers are competing in three categories: Under-17,

Under-19, and Under-22.

Nasir Tung stated that two teams will be selected from Punjab following the four-day competition, while sim-

ilar selection trials will be conducted in other provinces to identify top-performing boxers for the next stage.

He expressed grati-

tude to the Pakistan Army for its full support, noting that their coop-

eration is playing a vital role in identifying and nurturing talent and strengthening boxing at the grassroots level.

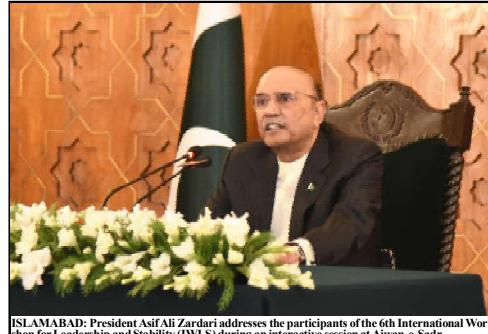
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ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari addresses the participants of the 6th International Workshop for Leadership and Stability (IWLS) during an interactive session at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Profiteering will not be tolerated during Ramadan: Commissioner Hazara

A BOTTABAD (INP): Commissioner Hazara, on Friday directed all district administrations to ensure strict price control, uninterrupted public services and foolproof security during Ramadan 2026, declaring that providing maximum relief to the public is the government's top priority and that no negligence will be tolerated.

Chairing a high-level meeting at the Commissioner's Office, Abbottabad, he said Ramadan teaches patience, tolerance and brotherhood, urging traders to respect the sanctity of the holy

month and refrain from profiteering, while instructing officials to remain fully vigilant to safeguard public interests across the divisions.

Deputy Commissioners of all eight districts of the region briefed the Commissioner on preparations for Ramadan, including meetings of Price Review Committees, market management plans and security arrangements.

The meeting reviewed measures to ensure price control of essential commodities, establishment of Sasta Bazaars, transparent auction processes in fruit and vegetable markets, unin-

terrupted electricity and water supply, improved sanitation, and foolproof security during the holy month.

Commissioner Hazara Ali Shah directed that district-level monitoring teams be issued clear SOPs to ensure effective price control.

He instructed Price Control Magistrates to conduct daily market inspections and take immediate action against overcharging and profiteering.

To promote transparency, it was decided that auction processes in fruit and vegetable markets would be video recorded and commodity rates shared with the public

through social media. The Commissioner also ordered preparation of special relief packets for the disadvantaged families, particularly privileged families, directing district administrations to identify beneficiaries and offer assistance to their homes in a dignified manner.

The meeting further emphasized keeping Rescue 1122 and hospital emergency services fully functional, managing traffic congestion in markets, the use of signage and parking areas, taking action against illegal parking, and ensuring uninterrupted electricity during Sehri, Iftar and Taraweeh.

Commissioner Hazara said such actions are forecast in northern areas, where light rain or snowfall may occur in Chitral, Swat and surrounding mountain parts of the country during next 24 hours.

The PMD said the prevailing cold and dry spell is likely to persist in most regions during the coming days.

However, the hilly regions are expected to remain partially cloudy with very cold conditions during morning and night. Light rain and light snowfall may occur at isolated places in Gilgit-Baltistan.

In the federal capital and surrounding areas, weather is expected to remain dry, with cold temperatures during early morning and night hours. Gusty winds are likely to blow during the daytime.

Most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will experience cold and dry weather, while upper districts are expected to remain partly cloudy along with light rain and light snowfall at isolated locations.

PMD predicts cold, dry weather across country

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast mainly cold and dry weather across the country.

In Punjab, dry weather is expected to remain cold and dry, while gusty winds may affect central and southern parts of the province during the daytime.

Sindh will continue to experience mainly dry weather, while Balochistan is likely to remain partly cloudy and dry with gusty winds, with cold conditions in northern regions during morning and night.

In Kashmir, cold and partly cloudy weather is expected, with very cold conditions during early morning and night hours. Gusty winds are likely to blow during the daytime.

In the federal capital and surrounding areas, weather is expected to remain dry, with cold temperatures during early morning and night hours. Gusty winds are likely to blow during the daytime.

Most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

will experience cold and dry weather, while upper districts are expected to remain partly cloudy along with light rain and light snowfall at isolated locations.

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Pakistan calls for multilateral cooperation against terrorism

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has called for resolution of Kashmir Dispute, stronger multilateral cooperation, and action against terrorism.

This was emphasized by Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani during a meeting with President of the UN General Assembly Annalena Baerbock on the sidelines of the Annual IPU Parliamentary Hearing 2026 at the UN headquarters.

The Chairman Senate underlined that while the UNSC resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir remained unimplemented, India has taken further destabilizing action in unilaterally holding the Indo-Western Treaty in abeyance, arguing that this unlawful action constituted a blatant violation of the Treaty's provisions and established principles of customary international law.

He said such actions threaten the lives and livelihoods of over 240 million Pakistanis and set dangerous precedents, particularly at a time when climate stress and water scarcity demand cooperation and strict respect for international law.

Chairman Senate underscored that the people of Pakistan strongly support the United Nations' mission of promoting international peace and security, sustainable development, and the protection of human rights.

Speaking on the occasion, the President of the UN General Assembly conveyed the commitment and people of Pakistan on the loss of lives in the recent terrorist incidents in Pakistan. She said it is in the interest of all countries to fight terrorism together.

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast mainly cold and dry weather across the country.

In Punjab, dry weather is expected to remain cold and dry, while gusty winds may affect central and southern parts of the province during the daytime.

Sindh will continue to experience mainly dry weather, while Balochistan is likely to remain partly cloudy and dry with gusty winds, with cold conditions in northern regions during morning and night.

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ISLAMABAD (INP): Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) on Friday announced that the new moon of Ramazan 1447 AH is expected to be born on February 17 at 5:01 pm Pakistan Standard Time (PST), setting the stage for a high probability of moon sighting the following evening (Wednesday – 18 February).

According to the space agency's astronomical assessment, by the time of sunset on February 18, the moon's age will reach approximately 25 hours and 48 minutes,

a duration considered

highly favourable for visibility.

The SUPARCO further noted that the interval between sunset and moonset along Pakistan's coastal belt is expected to be around 59 minutes, providing ample opportunity for observation.

"Based on many astronomical parameters, the chances of sighting the new moon with the naked eye on the evening of February 18 are very bright," the statement said.

"Consequently, the first day of Ramazan is likely to dawn on February 19, 2026." However,

SUPARCO emphasized that the official

commencement of the holy month will be determined by Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Pakistan, the country's sole authorized body for moon sighting, which will make its final announcement after receiving and verifying testimony from across the nation.

The beginning of Ramazan marks a spiritually significant period for Muslims, characterized by fasting from dawn to sunset, increased prayers, and acts of charity.

In this regard an important meeting of the Ruet-e-Hilal Committee

has been convened in Peshawar on February 18. The meeting will be chaired by Chairman Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Pakistan Maulana Syed Abdul Khadir Azad. In which the sighting of moon of the month of Ramazan will be declared and announced. Members of Central and Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Peshawar will participate in the meeting.

Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khadir Azad said that the committee made special arrangements for sighting the moon of Ramazan.



JAMSHORO: Federal minister for planning development and special initiatives Ahsan Iqbal giving shield to students during IMCS tech Expo 2026 final years projects exhibition & job fair at sindhu university jamshoro.

PM vows to integrate Radio Pakistan with modern technologies

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed his government's commitment to integrate Radio Pakistan with modern technologies, particularly with Artificial Intelligence, in order to transform the national broadcaster into a more effective instrument for public service, education, health and national development.

In his message on the occasion of World Radio Day, he said our government, under the Digital Pakistan Vi-

sion, is promoting innovation in media and IT sectors so that Pakistan can achieve a prominent position in the field of knowledge and technology.

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Farm credit surges to Rs1.41tr in six months

NEWS DESK: Agricultural credit disbursement increased to record Rs1.412 trillion in the first half of FY26, while the number of borrowers edged up to 2.97 million.

Chairing a meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) on Thursday, State Bank Governor Jameel Ahmad said that in FY25, the agricultural credit disbursement had hit a record Rs2.577tr, marking a 16 per cent year-on-year increase.

The meeting reviewed agricultural credit disbursement and discussed measures to strengthen inclusive and resilient farm finance.

To accelerate borrower expansion, particularly among small farmers in underserved and unserved areas, Mr Ahmad urged banks to fully utilise SBP initiatives, including the Risk Coverage Scheme for Small Farmers of Underserved Areas and Zarkehee, the central bank's flagship digital platform for agricultural lending.

SBP also urges banks to fully utilise initiatives for small farmers.

Mr Ahmad said Pakistan's economy had regained macroeconomic stability and was moving towards a durable growth path. Real GDP growth reached 3.7pc in the first



quarter of FY26, while year-over-year growth is projected at 3.75pc to 4.75pc. The committee's progress in Zarkehee is described as a major step towards the digital transformation of

agricultural credit delivery. The platform enables digital onboarding for farmers, standardised credit application creation with land and crop information, and end-to-end loan trace-

ability. It also ensures financing is used for quality agricultural inputs through an integrated system.

The governor said Zarkehee must be scaled up as a core delivery channel, particularly to make small-ticket lending commercially viable and expand outreach beyond the central and northern regions. He urged banks to ensure the timely processing of

applications, strengthen internal ownership of the scheme, and further develop the vendor ecosystem to enhance farmers' access to certified inputs and advisory services. Mr Ahmad also

called on banks to fully implement their Agricultural Credit Expansion Plans for FY26 and encourage collaboration with provincial governments for digitisation of land records, as well

as partnerships with NGOs, agri-tech firms and microfinance institutions to enhance outreach.

The meeting discussed the development of an Upgraded Crop Loss Insurance Scheme (CLIS) framework under the Asian Development Bank-funded Pakistan Insurance Transformation Programme to strengthen the sector's resilience against calamities.

The proposed scheme aims to expand crop coverage, establish a centralised claims system for improved risk-sharing and farmer payouts, and introduce technology-based calamity assessment alongside loss-of-income support. The Crop Loss Insurance Fund will also support extending coverage to non-borrowing farmers and the development of a National Insurance Policy for agriculture.

In addition, the ACAC deliberated on scaling up Electronic Warehouse Receipt Financing to improve post-harvest liquidity, reduce distress sales, and strengthen market linkages.

The committee underscored the need to expand accredited warehousing facilities and enhance bank participation in warehouse receipt-based financing.

Risk-averse capital drives hybrid deals

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's startup ecosystem, once a headline-grabbing post-Covid-19 success story that attracted aggressive investment, is facing growth and buzzworthy "disruption" is now entering a more cautious and structurally different phase.

Investment is increasingly prioritising risk-adjusted returns and shifting capital towards safer assets such as gold, the funding landscape is undergoing a transformation, and investors have moved away from speculative equity rounds towards hybrid financing structures that now dominate capital flows. The shift was highlighted during InvestInnovate (I2i)'s "Ecosystem Signals 2026" event, where industry leaders discussed the findings of Pakistan's annual landscape Brief 2024-2025 and outlined emerging investment trends shaping the ecosystem. Aleena Khan, Deputy Director Growth & Strategy at I2i, highlighted that total startup funding doubled to \$74 million



in 2025 from \$34 million in 2024, while deal activity also increased from eight deals to 16 deals.

However, the nature of capital changed significantly as hybrid financing, combining equity with debt, surged to 89% of all capital raised in 2025, underscoring a structural shift in investment behaviour rather than a broad-based reversal of capital flows.

During the period under review, hybrid financing surged from just \$1 million in 2024 to \$6 million in 2025, representing 89% of total capital raised.

Naqvi highlighted that Pakistan already has venture debt criteria and investors are increasingly turning to hybrid financing structures that founders can utilise, providing alternative financing channels beyond traditional equity rounds. However, she cautioned that the ecosystem remains incomplete without successful exits.

Debt risks hurt economy vulnerable

NEWS DESK: The fragile external financing system of Pakistan is one of the main reasons for the weak economic situation of the country as heavy reliance on foreign loans continues to expose the economy to sudden shocks, business leaders and economists said.

They added that the external debt profile remains tilted towards short-term borrowing, leaving little room for policy makers.

"The government must

strategically begin serious negotiations with friendly nations to secure longer repayment periods and to ensure a "debt-free exchange reserve," said Raja Waseem Hassan, Vice Chairman of the Pakistan Industrial and Trade Association (PITA).

According to Hassan, without extending the maturity of loans, the risk of recurring balance-of-payments stress will continue to haunt the economy.

Official data shows that Pakistan's total external debt and liabilities stood at around \$43.5 billion as of September 2025, with a significant

portion either short-term or maturing within a few years. Foreign exchange reserves have improved and crossed the \$21 billion mark in FY25, but inflows from multilateral institutions and friendly countries are providing temporary support, while repaying obligations remain heavy throughout 2026 and beyond.

Hassan said recent diplomatic meetings, including closer ties with Gulf states, reported potential Saudi

and UAE investment, and improving relations with the United States, are positive signals. However, he cautioned that geopolitical alignment can be a risk.

"Economic strength must be the real shield. Without strong buffers and self-reliance, external pressures along with debt guarantee stability," he added.

He pointed out that a neighbouring regional economy managed to negotiate better trade terms during Trump-era tariff pressures because

it had stronger reserves

and export diversification. In contrast, limited export growth and a narrow industrial base have reduced Pakistan's bargaining power.

Pakistan's exports remained around \$32 billion in FY25, far below potential, while imports, especially to output compression measures, have increased.

The trade deficit, though reduced from previous highs, still poses structural challenges.

Dr Saleem Ahmed, a

senior economist, said the economy cannot depend on rollovers and short-term deposits forever. "Debt maturity extension should be treated as a strategic priority, not a temporary fix. At the same time, structural reforms in taxation, energy pricing and inflation control are essential to reduce external dependence," he said.

According to Ahmed, sustainable growth of at least 5-6% is required to stabilise the debt-to-GDP ratio, which has remained close to 70% in recent years.

Overall growth

has remained modest. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected GDP growth of around 3.6% for FY26 under a stabilisation scenario. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), is projecting growth in the range of 3.75-4.75%. While inflation has eased from its peak of 17.61pc in 2023, high borrowing costs and tighter monetary policy have slowed industrial expansion. Private sector credit growth has remained weak, reflecting cautious business sentiment.

PAVE Scheme rolls out EV subsidies, easy financing

NEWS DESK: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Engineering Development Board (EDB), Hamid Ali Mansoor, said under the Home Minister's PAVE (Pakistan Accelerated Vehicle Electrification) Scheme, the process of providing electric bikes, rickshaws and loaders on easy instalments, along with subsidy payments, has commenced.

The initiative aims to provide the public with affordable and environmentally friendly transport, while reducing the country's dependence on fuel.

Under the scheme, electric bikes are being offered a subsidy of up to Rs80,000, which is being directly transferred to the bank accounts of applicants through the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

In addition, electric bikes and rickshaws are being provided on easy instalments through bank leasing.

Mansoor added that the government plans to provide approximately Rs9 billion in subsidies during the

current fiscal year under the PAVE Scheme, with the total amount exceeding Rs100 billion in subsidies by 2030.

In the first phase of the scheme, subsidies are being provided to 41,000 recipients of electric vehicles, including 40,000 electric bikes and 1,000 electric rickshaws and loaders.

He said the transfer of subsidy amounts to

approved applicants in the first phase is progressing.

He further stated that the second phase of the scheme is about to begin and plans to provide subsidies on easy instalments to students, young people, and others.

He added that the government initiative is expected to help reduce fuel import bills, combat environmental pollution and promote alternative energy sources.

PAVE Scheme will be eligible for the government subsidy.

The EDB CEO said that under the scheme, electric bikes are being made available on easy instalments to students, young people, and others.

He clarified that only individuals who obtain electric bikes, rickshaws or loaders through an approved procedure under the

PAVE Scheme will be eligible for the government subsidy.

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Short-term inflation decreases 0.59 per cent

NEWS DESK: Short-term inflation in Pakistan, measured by the Sensitive Price Index (SPI) for the week ending on February 12, decreased 0.59 per cent, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

The SPI-based inflation has been on an upward trend for the past few weeks, mainly driven by a surge in prices of perishable products, pulses, and meat.

Major decreases noted during this period were in the prices of eggs (17.61pc), followed by tomatoes (12.02pc), chicken (6.34pc), onions (2.73pc), potatoes (2.49pc), salt, powder (1.69pc), LPG (1.67pc), wheat flour (1.31pc), and sugar (1.12pc).

Major increases were in the prices of bananas (7.62pc), garlic (4.35pc), pulse (2.69pc), chillies powder (1.68pc), muton (0.80pc),

onions (0.37pc), mustard oil (0.34pc), shirting (0.31pc), cigarettes (0.24pc), vegetable ghee (1Kg 0.08pc), and ghee (1.167pc), firewood (1.167pc), LPG (1.073pc), powdered milk (9.89pc), shirring (8.81pc), and gur (8.81pc).

The year-on-year data showed a 4.26pc increase.

The major influences contributing to this annual trend were an increase in tomatoes (73.36pc), wheat flour (33.82pc), gas charges

for Q1 (29.85pc), chilli powder (15.20pc), beef (12.70pc), eggs (11.67pc), bananas (11.67pc), firewood (11.67pc), LPG (11.67pc), powdered milk (9.89pc), shirring (8.81pc), and gur (8.81pc).

Major decreases were seen in the prices of potatoes (44.68pc), garlic (30.78pc), pulse gram (23.81pc), onions (22.04pc), chicken (20.13pc), tea (13.95pc), salt powder (12.52pc), pulse (12.88pc), and petrol (1.31pc).

The weekly SPI base year 2015-16=100, covers 17 urban centres and tracks the prices of 51 essential items across all expenditure groups and quintiles.



Zimbabwe pull off shock win over Australia at T20 World Cup

NEWS DESK: Zimbabwe pulled off a shock victory over Australia by 23 runs on Friday in Colombo to pull off the biggest shock of the T20 World Cup so far.

After posting 169-2 in their 20 overs, thanks mainly to Brian Bennett's classy 64 not out, Zimbabwe had Australia 29-4 before dismissing them for 146 in 19.3 overs.

The Zimbabweans, ranked 11th were always in control against their second-ranked opponents in the Group B match at President's Stadium after opening bowlers Blessing Muzarabani and Brad Evans ripped out Australia's top order.

There were scenes of celebration in the venue as a group of Zimbabwe fans dressed in their team jerseys celebrated the win with a traditional dance.

"There are fans who have come all the way from Zimbabwe and they have enjoyed the game and it is a special feeling



today to get a win here."

Muzarabani was the pick of the bowlers finishing with 4-17.

"I was really happy

that today really came well. The next step?" It's really good to beat Australia, but it will also be nice to qualify for the Super Eight. So we'll be thinking about the next step."

who was named player of the match.

"I also believe that everyone really bowled well. We missed Rich (Ngarava), but Brad (Evans) really bowled

well. The next step?" It's really good to beat Australia, but it will also be nice to qualify for the Super Eight. So we'll be thinking about the next step."

Maxwell and Matt Renshaw put 77 for the fifth wicket.

Australia retained a record of a rear-guard victory when Glenn Maxwell and Matt Renshaw put 77 for the fifth wicket.

But once part-time

leg-spinner Ryan Burl induced one of the short game's great players, Maxwell, to drag on to his stumps for 31, they were never in the hunt.

Australia beat Ireland on Wednesday, but with matches to come

against Sri Lanka and against the Netherlands, they could see them on the plane home after the group stage.

Without their captain Mitchell Marsh for the second match, and previously ruled out pace spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, Australia's campaign in the 20-nation tournament is in danger of falling apart at the first hurdle.

Zimbabwe thrashed Oman in their opener and their last two group games will be against Ireland and Sri Lanka.

Co-host Sri Lanka have also won both their matches so far.

"We are in a good position to go to the next round having won two out of two," said Bennett.

Ryan Burl and Bennett put on 70 for the second wicket, a record stand for Zimbabwe in T20 World Cups after an opening partnership of 61 with Tadwinawase Marumani.

Australia beat Ireland on Wednesday, but with matches to come

against higher and him not being able to bat higher was a blow," said Renshaw, who top scored with 31.

"Medical staff will examine how bad is his injury. We weren't good enough today. There is time for flair in T20 cricket."

ICC invites major Asian stakeholders to Pak-India Feb 15 T20 clash for talks to 'melt ice': report



NEWS DESK: The International Cricket Council (ICC) has invited all five Asian stakeholders for talks to de-escalate matters on the sidelines of the high stakes Pakistan-India T20 World Cup match on February 15, reported Bangladeshi news outlet Prothom Alo.

The World Cup feature four test teams divided into four groups, began on Saturday. Originally, Bangladesh had been included in the slate but requested the International Cricket Council (ICC) to move the matches from India to Sri Lanka after its star player, Mustafizur

Rehman, was released from the Indian Premier League following objections from ruling party activists.

The ICC declined the request and replaced Bangladesh with Scotland.

ICC officials took a principled stand in support of Bangladesh and protested the ICC's decision, a move that further strained the relationship between the governing body. The federal government also ordered the team not to play the match against India in India.

In an interview with Prothom Alo, a Bangladeshi language daily, on Wednesday, BCB President Aminul Islam was questioned about any efforts to de-escalate tensions with India, to which he responded: "The ICC has taken a decision in this regard. The five major Asian stakeholders play a role in the ongoing political tension between India and Pakistan. He told the outlet that the agenda of his trip focused on protecting Bangladesh's interests while trying to find a way to persuade Pakistan to play against India.

Islam

revealed that

Pakistan had initially taken a firm stance, refusing to play the match against India in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

Italy dream of cricket 'in Rome, Milan and Bologna' after historic win at T20 World Cup



NEWS DESK: Italy have ambitions of hosting top-class cricket from Rome and Milan and Bologna after a historic and emotional T20 World Cup victory.

The lowest-ranked side in the 20-team tournament hammered Nepal by 10 wickets on Thursday at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

The win, in just their second match at their debut T20 World Cup, left some of the Italy players in tears of joy.

Both Justin and Anthony Mosca — who hail from Sydney — powered the team's chase of 124 to achieve

a famous triumph with more than seven overs to spare.

None of the Italy team was born in the country far better known for its football than its cricket.

But the victory meant everything to them and after hitting the winning wicket, 25-year-old Anthony raised his arms to the sky, roared and shed a tear.

"I don't think you'll see many players cry on the field after a win in a group stage," stand-in captain Harry Manenti said.

"I think you've got to appreciate what Italy's cricket is bringing to the

game, understand that the passion is slightly different with the Italians."

"We will bring that everywhere we go, no matter the level of the tournament or the level of the opposition." England loom next, at Kolkata's Eden Gardens on Monday.

Italy's cricket federation says it has about 1,800 players and around 100 clubs, but it is struggling for a natural cricket pitch.

Manenti hopes their World Cup exploits will help change the whole face of the sport in the country.

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"I think you've got to appreciate what Italy's cricket is bringing to the

Trent return can help Arbeloa's Real Madrid move forward

NEWS DESK: Trent Alexander-Arnold's return to Real Madrid could potentially start for the first time since December 3.

After a decent early showing for Madrid at the Club World Cup last month, the 21-year-old right-back, who has been instrumental in the team's recent success, has been limited to just 12 appearances across all competitions this season.

Former Liverpool full-back Alexander-Arnold, who came off the bench last weekend to help Madrid to a 2-1 win over Benfica in the Champions League play-off round on Tuesday.

Even if Arbeloa uses veteran Dani Carvajal or youngster David Jimenez to start against Real Sociedad, the expectation is for Alexander-Arnold to get another crucial minutes under his belt.

With superstar striker Kylian Mbappe a doubt for the game because of knee discomfort, the creative input could prove an important weapon for Los Blancos against a Real Sociedad side unbeaten in nine matches.

Real Madrid's star

defender last weekend

against Valencia

could potentially start

for the first time since

December 3.

After a decent early showing for Madrid at the Club World Cup last month, the 21-year-old right-back, who has been instrumental in the team's recent success, has been limited to just 12 appearances across all competitions this season.

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