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Email address: dquettavoice@gmail.com
Website: www.quettavoice.com

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Balochistan to Shift Iran Border Travel to Passport System, Tightens Anti-Smuggling Measures

SYED ALI SHAH:

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Balochistan, Muhammad Hamza Shafqat, has reiterated that facilitating lawful trade is the provincial government's top priority. Speaking to the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry, he warned that illegal border trade, smuggling, and poppy cultivation will no longer be tolerated in the province.

Passport-Only Entry at Iran Border

Hamza Shafqat announced that within one to two months, cross-border movement with Iran will switch to the One Document Regime

(ODR), requiring passport-based entry. Local permits will no longer be valid, ensuring stricter monitoring and control of border traffic.

The additional chief secretary dismissed claims that unemployment is responsible for law and order problems in Balochistan.

"Data shows that areas facing higher terrorism incidents actually have lower unemployment rates compared to other divisions," he said, highlighting the need to focus on security and governance rather than assumptions.

Security Update on January 31 Attacks

Hamza Shafqat shared that nearly 400 individuals

were involved in attacks across the province on January 31, of whom 221 have been killed and about

100 arrested. Investigations revealed that the Noshki attack was financially supported through poppy cultivation, emphasizing the link between illegal trade and terrorism.

The government will strictly prevent smuggling of essential commodities facing shortages in the province and across Pakistan. Issues related to Pakistani sugar trade in Balochistan are under review, and authorities will ensure that legal trade is fully protected.

Business Community Voices Challenges

Representatives of the Quetta Chamber of Commerce highlighted obstacles including unfair tax valuation, delays in import-export movement, and bureaucratic hurdles. They requested:

Extension of EIF period by six months

Permission for up to 10% mutilation of rollable scrap

Extended Taftan border operating hours

Free movement of goods through Bazaarche Business Terminal

Hamza Shafqat assured the business community that proposals would be reviewed seriously. The government plans to extend border operating hours and improve trade facilitation in coordination with

relevant departments.

Residents of border districts will receive free passport facilities, while financial assistance will be provided through the

Benazir Income Support Programme. Children of workers registered with the Workers Welfare Board will gain access to free education at top institutions, and individuals seeking overseas employment may receive up to Rs700,000 in support.

The additional chief secretary urged the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry to form a committee for regular coordination with the government to address trade and business challenges effectively.

SBP fined Rs500,000 for denying paternity leave to employee

NEWS DESK:

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has been fined Rs500,000 for unlawfully denying paternity leave to an employee after a decision by the Federal Ombudsman for Protection Against Harassment Fouzia Waqar. The case was filed by Syed Basit Ali, an officer serving as OG-1 at the SBP Banking Services Corporation (BSC).

Following the birth of his son on April 4, 2025, he applied for 30 days' paternity leave on April 10. His request was refused because "no such leave existed under the prevailing policy of SBP," although maternity leave is granted to female employees under the Maternity and Paternity Leave Act, 2023.

Ali argued that SBP BSC falls under the administrative control of the federal government, and therefore, the act applies. He added that SBP and SBP BSC "cannot selectively adopt provisions of the Act, granting maternity leave while denying paternity leave under the same statute."

SBP's counsel countered that the bank, as an autonomous entity, is not bound by the act and that paternity leave had not been incorporated into its service rules. The arguments focused heavily on matters of jurisdiction. The complainant's counsel presented evidence, including job advertisements and bidding documents, to show that SBP BSC adheres to federal regulations.

In her ruling, Waqar stated: "The denial of paternity leave to the Complainant, to which he is legally entitled as a father, while allowing maternity leave to female employees, constitutes clear gender-based discrimination."

The judgment imposed a fine of Rs500,000 on SBP, directing that Rs400,000 be paid to the complainant within 30 days, while the remaining Rs100,000 is to be deposited into the national treasury. SBP has also been ordered to grant Basit Ali 30 days' paid paternity leave and to update its leave policies to align fully with the Maternity and Paternity Leave Act, 2023.

Waqar further said, "Refusal to grant paternity leave is equivalent to harassment on the basis of gender."

Providing maternity leave while denying paternity leave constitutes gender discrimination. Childcare is not solely the responsibility of women, and refusal

of paternity leave undermines the shared responsibility of parents and the best interests of the child."

The ruling further emphasized that statutory rights cannot be overridden by internal policies, and that federal institutions,

including autonomous bodies, are bound by constitutional guarantees and welfare legislation.

"The order categorically rejected the long-standing claim of institutional autonomy used to deny statutory rights. State Bank of Pakistan is owned, controlled, and supervised by the Federal Government, and SBP Banking Services Corporation, as its wholly owned subsidiary, cannot escape the application of federal welfare legislation," the Ombudsman added.

Balochistan Rolls Out Ramazan Relief Package for 328,000 Families

Staff Reporter:

Quetta: As Ramazan begins, the Balochistan government has launched a province-wide relief package to support families struggling with rising living costs. Speaking at a press conference in Quetta, Director General PDMA Jehanzaib Khan said the initiative is aimed at ensuring that no deserving household is left without basic food support during the holy month.

He explained that, on the instructions of the Chief Minister, the Ramazan Relief Package will reach 328,000 low-income families in all districts of the province.

Supplies have already been delivered to over 20 districts, allowing distribution to begin without delay.

To improve transparency and restore public trust, the government has revised the distribution process this year.

Relief items will be handed out through an eight-member District Coordination Committee, formed to ensure fair distribution and prevent misuse.

The PDMA chief assured that the quality of ration would meet set standards and that the assistance would strictly be limited to deserving families.

"This support is meant for those who truly need it," he



said, adding that monitoring mechanisms are in place at every level. Each relief package has been prepared to cover a

family's food requirements for around 15 days, providing timely relief during the most demanding part of Ramazan.

Jehanzaib Khan said the government remains committed to delivering aid with dignity, transparency, and care, calling

the relief package a step toward easing the daily hardships faced by vulnerable communities during the holy month.

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 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 of Balochistan's education system.

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.

All 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.

Balochistan's education sector, implementation of article 25-A



Improving the education sector has always been the hallmark of all successive governments in Balochistan. Every government has allocated substantial funds to improve the education sector and quality of education to enable students to compete on national and international level. Health and education, all successive governments declared their priorities.

Former Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch led nationalist government allocated around 24 percent budget to bring the province at par with other parts of the country. Dr. Baloch's government also declared emergency and announced implementation of article 25-A of the constitution to enroll all out of school children in Balochistan. The number of out of school children in Balochistan is currently over 1 mil-

lion. However, independent sources put the number high as compared to the official data. There are conflicting figures about the exact number of out of school children in Balochistan.

To be precise, positive strides were made during Dr. Malik Baloch led government to improve the education sector.

For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools.

Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transpar-

ency in the recruitment process. This has ruined the entire education sector. Dr. Malik Baloch, the then adviser on education Sardar Raza Muhammad Bareech led rallies against cheating to create awareness among the people regarding the curse of cheating in educational institutions.

After the removal of Sardar Raza Bareech as an adviser on education and transfers of senior bureaucrats Ghulam Ali Baloch and Saboor Kakar, no effective step was taken to improve the quality of education in Balochistan.

Now again the portfolio of education has been awarded to Sardar Muhammad Rind who belongs to Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI). Mr. Rind has made announcements to bring what he claimed

revolutionary changes. However, improvement in education sector, enrolling out of school children in schools and improving quality of education needs a multi-pronged strategy. Senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ali Baloch who had already served as secretary education has again been posted.

Mr. Baloch is taking a number of initiatives to improve schooling and trace out ghost schools and teachers across the province.

However, political speed breakers appear to be major obstacles in his way. Despite being the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan spends over 70 billion rupees on primary, middle, secondary and higher education in the province.

The province spends thousands of rupees per month on a student. Unfortu-

nately, neither the quality nor the education standard meet national standards what to speak about international standards. Poor quality of education is the result of poor capacity of teachers that needs to be improved to compete on national and international level.

The Balochistan government has announced to enroll 70000 kids in government run schools in the province. However, ground realities negate claims of the provincial government. So far, the government has not been able to mobilize the civil society, media, political parties and tribesmen to make sure maximum enrollment of kids in educational institutions of the province. Coordinated efforts and combined strategy by all segments of society can ensure implementation of article 25-A of the Constitution.

Taftan border and Balochistan Govt's response

Quetta Voice Analysis

The sudden arrival of thousands of Zaireen at Pak-Iran border Taftan posed a serious challenge for government of Balochistan to make sure their screening and conduct medical tests in the aftermath of outbreak of COVID-19 in neighboring Iran. The federal government closed the border with Iran at Taftan on February 23rd to halt the spread of deadly corona virus.

All of a sudden over 4,000 Zaireen, students, tourists and traders gathered at Taftan, Pakistan's bordering town with Iran. The poorly equipped health officials that too less in number tried to conduct screening and tests of those entered from Iran. However, many managed to flee from the administration and used their own means of communication to reach Quetta on way to their home provinces. The drivers were paid heavy fares by those fleeing the quarantine centers at Taftan.

Perhaps, in the beginning, the Balochistan government and Islamabad did not realize the gravity of situation. A wind-blowing tent quarantine center was established to keep the



Zaireen and others to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, the laboratory to diagnose the deadly disease and conduct tests of novel corona virus could not be arranged at the border soon after the closure of border. The National Institute of Health (NIH) dispatched machinery

and laboratory to conduct the diagnosis 10 days after the closure of the border. Before installation of the laboratory, the health officials used to send tests of suspected patients to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi for diagnosis.

Though, it was imperative to install laboratory soon after

the closure of the border to make sure proper screening and diagnosis of the people.

Apart from corona virus, the Balochistan government appeared to be concerned about the security of Zaireen as well.

In the past, Zaireen were frequently targeted by terrorists on Quetta-Taftan highway. Since then, the Balochistan government has been providing security and law enforcers escort long convoys of buses from Quetta to Taftan all the time.

The Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has been closely monitoring the

unfolding situation and all the time directing the concerned quarters to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, loopholes in the system caused the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

Although, the Chief Minister issued statements, precautionary measures through print, elec-

tronic and shares videos on social media to sensitize the people about the deadly virus.

Nevertheless, the virus penetrated and made its way from Taftan to Sukkur prompting the Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah to say that Zaireen were not properly screened at Pak-Iran border

Taftan.

Opposition political parties in Balochistan in general and the Balochistan National Party ideological, Sanaulah Baloch have strongly criticized the Jam Kamal led government for what they call its failure and incompetency to contain the corona virus.

Political parties, members of civil society and legal fraternity had also objected over the establishment of quarantine center at Mian Ghundi area of Quetta. They feared spread of deadly virus after establishment of center near the city rather they demanded of the government to shift the Zaireen to their home provinces directly from Taftan.

To be precise, the virus has already penetrated and now it is time for all political parties from left to right and religious to nationalists to join their hands to contain its spread.

The government needs to take all stakeholders including political parties, media, civil society and lawyers to evolve a combined strategy in the province to tackle the situation. It is not alone the job of government rather every individual to play his/her role to contain the virus before it is too late.

Bangladesh's JI-led coalition submits poll complaints

NEWS DESK: Bangladesh's Islamist-led coalition, which lost its chance to form the country's next government in this week's polls, submitted complaints to the Election Commission on Sunday, challenging results in 32 constituencies.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman — the scion of one of the country's most influential political dynasties — celebrated a sweeping victory in the South Asian nation of 170 million after general elections on Thursday.

They were the first polls since a 2024 uprising ousted the autocratic government of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The BNP alliance won 212 seats, compared with 77 for the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, according to the Election Commission.

The alliance identifies 32 constituencies where their candidates were "unfairly defeated," Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman con-



ceded on Saturday, saying his party would "serve as a vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition." Newly elected lawmakers are expected to be sworn in on Tuesday, after which

Rahman is set to become the country's next prime minister. But on Sunday, Jamaat officials submitted their complaints. "We have identified 32 constituencies where our candidates

were unfairly defeated," said senior Jamaat official Hamidur Rahman Azad. "The election day began smoothly, but the ending was not what we had expected."

Fake votes, the circulation of black money (bribes), threats, assaults, and attacks marred the atmosphere. Police records show that political clashes during the campaign period left five people dead

and more than 600 injured. But despite weeks of turbulence ahead of the polls, voting day passed without major unrest and the country has so far responded to

the results with relative calm. At least two people were killed in post-poll clashes, while scattered acts of vandalism and assaults were reported in several districts, police said.

Both Jamaat-e-Islami and ally the National Citizen Party (NCP) — formed by student leaders who spearheaded the uprising — reported attacks on their supporters. NCP loyalists marched through Dhaka University campus against the BNP on Friday.

Police spokesman AHM Shahadat Hossain said that police were deployed to keep the peace. "Over 150,000 police personnel were trained to tackle pre- and post-election violence," Hossain said.

The Election Commission said turnout was 59 per cent across 299 of the 300 constituencies where voting was held.

Only seven women were directly elected, although a further 50 seats reserved for women will be allocated to parties according to their share of the vote.

Four members of minority communities won seats, including two Hindus — a population that makes up roughly seven per cent in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

US flies nuclear microreactor in first airlift demo for rapid nuclear deployment

NEWS DESK: The US Departments of Energy and Defense on Sunday for the first time transported a small nuclear reactor on a cargo plane from California to Utah to demonstrate the potential to quickly deploy nuclear power for military and civilian use.

The agencies partnered with California-based Valar Atomic to fly one of the company's "Ward microreactors" on a C-17 aircraft — without nuclear fuel — to Hill Air Force Base in Utah. Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Michael Duffey were on the C-17 to monitor the flight with the reactor and its components, and hailed the event as a breakthrough for US nuclear energy and mili-

tary logistics. "This gets us closer to deploying nuclear power when and where it is needed to give our nation's warfighters the tools to win in battle," Duffey said.

President Donald Trump's administration sees small nuclear reactors as one of several ways to expand US energy production.

Trump last May issued four executive orders aimed at boosting domestic nuclear deployment to meet growing demand for energy for national security and competitive AI advancements.

The Energy Department in December issued two grants to help accelerate the development of small modular reactors.

Proponents of microreactors have also touted them as energy

sources that can be sent to far-flung and remote places, offering an alternative to diesel generators, which require frequent deliveries of fuel. But skeptics have argued that the industry has not proven that small nuclear reactors can generate power for a reasonable price.

"There is no business case for microreactors, which — even if they work as designed — will produce electricity at a far higher cost than large nuclear reactors, not to mention renewables like wind or solar," said Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists. The Energy Department plans to have three microreactors reach "criticality" — when a nuclear reaction can sustain itself — by

July 4, Wright said.

The microreactor in Sunday's event, a little larger than a minivan, can generate up to 5 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 5,000 homes, according to Valar CEO Isaiah Taylor.

It will start operating in July at 100 kilowatts and peak at 250 kilowatts this year before ramping up to full capacity, he said.

Valar hopes to start selling power on a test basis in 2027 and become fully commercial in 2028.

Although private industry funnels money into development of nuclear technology, it also needs the federal government "doing some enabling actions to allow fuel fabrication here," he said.

Fuel for Valar's reactor will be transported from the Nevada National Security site to the San Rafael facility, Wright told reporters.

However, even small generators result in a significant amount of radioactive waste, Lyman said.

Other experts have said designers are not compelled to consider waste at inception, beyond a plan for how it will be managed.

Although disposal of nuclear waste remains an unresolved issue, the Energy Department is in talks with a few states, including Utah, to host sites that could reprocess fuel or handle permanent disposal, Wright said.



Fury mounts over 'false' claims against UN rapporteur

NEWS DESK: Top European government officials who led a smear campaign against United Nations special rapporteur for the Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, have failed to apologize or withdraw their calls for her resignation, even after multiple reports confirmed the allegations were based on a fabricated quote.

France 24 and Reuters verified that Albanese did not describe Israel as the "common enemy of humanity" during a forum in Qatar earlier this month, an allegation levelled by Israeli officials and echoed by European ministers.

Transcripts of the event show she was referring to a global "enemy of finance and weapon." Yet diplomats from



France, Germany and other nations have so far declined to correct the record. Amnesty International has demanded that European states immediately withdraw their accusations. Its secretary general, Agnès Callamard, said ministers

in Austria, Czechia, France, Germany and Italy had attacked Albanese on the basis of a "deliberately truncated video" that gravely misrepresented her remarks. "The ministers that have

disinformation must act beyond merely deleting their comments on social media — as some have done," Callamard said. "They must publicly apologise and retract any calls for Francesca Albanese's resignation."

Israeli strikes kill 12 in Palestine

NEWS DESK: Gaza's civil defence agency reported that Israeli strikes killed at least 12 people since dawn on Sunday, while a military official said the attacks were in response to ceasefire violations.

Despite a US-brokered truce that entered its second phase last month, violence has continued in the Palestinian territory, with Israeli and Hamas blaming each other for violating the agreement.

The civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authorities, said one strike hit a tent of displaced people in northern Gaza and another targeted an area in the south.

Dozens of relatives and mourners gathered at Nasser Hospital, where the bodies of some of those killed were laid out in white shrouds. "Israel doesn't understand ceasefires or truces," said Osama Abu Askar, who lost his nephew in the Jabalia attack. He said the people killed there were hit as they slept.

"We've been living under a truce for months, and they're still targeting us. Israel operates on this principle: saying one thing and doing another," Askar told AFP.

The Al-Shifa and Nasser hospitals confirmed they had received the bodies of at least seven people.

"A military official said Israeli forces attacked in response to Hamas violations of the ceasefire agreement."



Men and women stood in prayer ahead of the funeral, facing corpses in the hospital compound.

"Crossing the yellow line in the vicinity of IDF troops, while armed, is an explicit ceasefire violation, and demonstrates how Hamas systematically violates the ceasefire agreement with intent to harm the troops," the official added.

"The violation included an identification of several armed terrorists who took cover under debris east of the yellow line and adjacent to IDF troops, likely after exiting underground infrastructure in the area," the official said.

"The agency also said that one person was killed by Israeli gunfire in Beit Lahia in north Gaza."

They were still targeted us, Israel operates on this principle: saying one thing and doing another," Askar told AFP.

The agency also said that one person was killed by Israeli gunfire in Beit Lahia in north Gaza."

Carnival tribute to Brazil's Lula in Rio sparks political backlash

NEWS DESK: When Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva learned that a samba school in Rio de Janeiro would base its carnival parade this year on his journey from factory worker to president, he broke into tears and then smiled for pictures holding the school's flag.

But, as Rio's world famous carnival parade approached, the tribute became a political headache.

Opposition parties and politicians have filed a flurry of lawsuits alleging that Lula is benefiting from what they describe as an illegal form of early campaigning ahead of this year's presidential election.

The president hopes to be elected for his fourth nonconsecutive term in October. Courts have already rejected all but one of the lawsuits, including one that asked judges to stop the parade from taking place.

But more could be filed if critics believe politicians used the event, scheduled to happen on Sunday night, to ask for votes, which would be illegal.

Still, Lula is planning to watch the samba school Academico de Niteroi sing and dance to his and his mother's life stories on Sunday in Rio, his aides told Reuters, but he won't be speaking at any moment. The president's wife, Rosângela "Janja" da Silva, plans to take part



in the parade are under review, people familiar with the government's thinking told Reuters.

"It's not campaigning," said Tiago Martins, a carnival parade designer at Academico de Niteroi. "It's a plot that tells the life story of a man who, despite all obstacles, got to the presidency."

Critics disagree, pointing, for example, to mentions of the number 13 in the song's lyrics, the same one that Lula and his Workers' Party use on the ballot box.

"This is the kind of thing you see in a Soviet republic, in North Korea, an ode to the great leader," said lawmaker Marcel Van Hattem, a leader of the opposition Novo Party, which filed one of the lawsuits against Lula.

The parade designed by Academico de Niteroi describes the

president's childhood in the country's impoverished Northeastern region and his mother's journey to Sao Paulo with her children in search of a better life.

"I saw myself in my children's eyes, frightened and empty. With my heart in pieces, I set out in search of love and of my dreams," the lyrics say.

Artists at Academia de Niteroi sought the president's authorisation to use his life's story last year, before going forward with their plan. After they received it, Lula welcomed Martins and other members of the samba school for a dinner at his Alvorada presidential residence in September.

As they sang the song they had written for the parade, Lula became emotional and cried, people who were in the meeting told

Reuters. He later described it as a tribute to his mother, Dona Lindu, rather than to himself.

Lula's aides acknowledged the political sensitivity of the moment to Reuters.

After the lawsuits multiplied, the president's team consulted legal advisers to clarify what restrictions apply during the pre campaign period.

Ministers attending the parade were instructed to remain seated in the audience, refrain from participating in the parade itself, avoid public funds for travel, and not make any election related gestures, statements, or live posts on social media.

Lula will not speak publicly at the parade. Opposition figures argue the precautions show the government knows the tribute crosses legal lines.

Ahsan Iqbal departs for Dhaka to attend new PM's oath-taking tomorrow

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal will represent Pakistan at the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh due to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's foreign visit.

Dhaka is preparing for a landmark political transition on February 17 as Bangladesh's newly elected leadership takes the oath of office in a ceremony that signals both continuity and

change in the country's democratic journey. The Government of Bangladesh formally invited the Prime Minister of Pakistan to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected Prime Minister. Owing to

scheduling constraints arising from his foreign engagements, Shehbaz Sharif designated Ahsan Iqbal to represent Islamabad at the high-profile event. The planning minister has already departed for Dhaka and

is expected to engage with senior Bangladeshi officials during his stay. In a statement before his departure, Ahsan Iqbal expressed confidence that the visit would reinforce friendly ties between the two

South Asian nations. He said the ceremony provided an opportunity to deepen cooperation and explore new avenues of collaboration in political, economic and development sectors.

He also voiced optimism that bilateral engagement would help both countries advance shared goals of stability and prosperity. The oath-taking ceremony comes in the wake of a decisive electoral outcome. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party secured more than a two-thirds majority in the 13th national parliamentary election, enabling it to formally initiate the formation of a new government.



VIENNA: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif records his remarks in Visitors Book at Austrian Federal Chancellery.

Ramazan 2026: Fruits, vegetables, eatables become expensive

ISLAMABAD (INP): With Ramadan just around the corner, prices of essential food items have surged in Karachi, putting additional pressure on household budgets already strained by inflation.

Meanwhile, Ramadan bazaars set up across Punjab are offering only marginal relief, with price differences of just a few rupees compared to official rates.

In Karachi markets, the prices of key Ramadan staples such as gram (channa), gram flour (besan), and cooking oil have increased significantly over the past two to three weeks, according to shopkeepers.

Besan, which was previously available at Rs240 is now being sold between Rs260 and Rs320 per kg. Daal channa is priced between Rs250 and Rs280

per kg, while white channa is available at Rs350 to Rs450 per kg as compared to the previous Rs300.

The price of black channa has jumped sharply from Rs175 per kg to Rs280 per kg. Various brands of cooking oil have also become more expensive, with an increase of Rs20 to Rs30 per litre.

Shopkeepers say the hike has occurred gradually over the past two to three weeks. Women buyers, in particular, have expressed concern as household budgets begin to run out due to inflation.

Across Punjab, including Lahore, Ramadan bazaars have been decorated and are now active.

Convenience bazaars have been granted the status of Ramadan bazaars.

However, despite

expectations of relief, the reduction in prices of vegetables and fruits remains minimal — only Rs2 to Rs5 less than the official DC rates.

Other vegetables, including potatoes, onions, tomatoes, turnips, bitter gourds, pumpkins and carrots, are being sold at just Rs2 less than the government rate.

Fruit prices in Ramadan bazaars have also seen only minor reductions. Grapes are priced at Rs435 compared to the government rate of Rs440. Kandahari pomegranates are available at Rs625 instead of Rs630.

Melons are being sold at Rs175 against the official rate of Rs180, while Kalakoti apples are priced at Rs415 compared to Rs420. Guya prices also show almost no difference, being sold at Rs145 in Ramadan bazaars, with their official rate being Rs140.

Onions are available at Rs58 instead of Rs60, and tomatoes at Rs88 instead of Rs90. The official rate of capsicum is Rs150, while it is being sold for Rs148 in the Ramadan bazaar. Similarly, the rate of moonghri has been set at Rs125, while the Ramadan bazaar is selling it for Rs123.

Chilies are priced at Rs148 compared to Rs150 in the market, while turnips are being sold at Rs123 instead of Rs125.

Earlier, on February 16, 2026, three brothers died when a trailer hit a motorbike on the National Highway near Kotri Kabir area.

The Rescue 1122 sources said the three persons were killed on the spot as their two-wheeler run over by a speedy trailer. They said the bodies had been identified as Jameel Lashari, Shakeel Lashari, and Irshad Lashari.

The police and the rescue teams shifted the bodies to a nearby hospital for legal formalities, they said, adding the driver managed to escape from the scene. The deceased were on the way home from their workplace.

Later, the police taken trailer into custody, but the driver managed to escape from the scene. The accident took place near Manan Pump Nangu. Shah Mori on the National Highway in Naushehro Feroze.

The ill-fated car, with five people on board, was going to Karachi from Larkana. All car-riders were residents of the Lal Rayak area of Larkana.

Soon after receiving the report, a police party rushed to the spot and shifted the dead and injured persons to a hospital in Naushehro Feroze.

Later, the police, after registering a case, started an investigation.



QUETTA: Leader of Majlis Wahdat Muslimen Allama Ali Hasnain Hussaini addressing a press conference at Quetta Press Club (QPC).

PTI fails to address IHC registrar's objections to plea in Toshakhana-II case

ISLAMABAD (INP): The registrar of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday pointed out that the objections he had raised to an appeal filed by the PTI lawyers for the release of former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan on bail after suspending the sentence awarded to him in the Toshakhana-II case had not been addressed despite the passage of seven days.

The registrar said that seven days had been given to the petitioner to address these objections. "But now the time is up," he said, and added that when the objections persisted, how the petition could be fixed for the hearing.

A petition had been filed in the IHC on Saturday, seeking suspension of the sentence handed to Imran Khan in the Toshakhana-II case. The IHC set aside the sentence on medical grounds.

Filed by Barrister Salman Saifdar and Khalid Yousaf Chaudhry Advocate, the petition stated that unless the appeal was allowed, Imran Khan's prison term awarded to him would be suspended and he would be released. It was further written in the petition that only 15 per cent vision had been left in the right eye of Imran, and that Dr. Muhammad Arif at PIMS had said that the treatment of his eyes was not possible at Adiala Jail. The petitioners also stated that

the former prime minister was already 73 years old, and his prolonged imprisonment could pose serious risks to his health.

They stated that the special judge central-I Islamabad had on December 20, 2025 awarded a 10-year prison term to the PTI founder besides fining him over Rs10 million in the case, which had no justification.

The petition read that he was awarded additional seven-year prison term under the law related to the elimination of corruption. "Sentencing Imran under two laws regardless of the fact that there was only one allegation against him not only constitutes a violation of the law but

also falls in the category of double jeopardy." The petitioners argued that since the former prime minister was not a public servant, therefore, section 409 could not be applied in his case.

Imran and his wife Bushra Bibi paid 50 per cent of the actual price of the gifts received under the Toshakhana policy and kept these gifts with them," read the petition. The statements given by the witnesses Sohail Abbas and Imamullah Shah were full of contradictions.

Similarly, a petition was also filed in the IHC, seeking the suspension of sentence awarded to Imran in the Al-Qadir Trust case.

Opposition sets conditions for ending Parliament House sit-in

ISLAMABAD (INP): The opposition alliance's sit-in at the Parliament House premises has entered its fourth consecutive day with protesting lawmakers demanding transparency regarding the PTI founder's medical condition.

Members participating in the demonstration say they are waiting for the new medical report to be submitted to the Supreme Court before deciding their next course of action.

Opposition members gathered at Parliament House say the sit-in will continue until clarity is provided about Imran Khan's health. Their key demand is that Imran Khan's personal doctors be granted immediate access for an independent medical examination.

Protesters insist that public confidence can only be restored once the personal medical team evaluates his condition.

In a conversation with Samaa TV, PTI Central Secretary General Salman Akram Raja stressed that access for Imran Khan's personal doctor is their main demand. He said the nation would only be satisfied if Dr. Asim Yousuf personally examines the PTI founder.

According to Raja, Dr. Asim Yousuf has already visited Adiala Jail five times in the past, and therefore permission should not be granted for another meeting.

Also Read: No politics in Imran Khan's health, says Gohar, KP House protest ends

"Dr. Asim Yousuf should be allowed to meet him. This is our primary demand," he stated.

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate Allama Raja Nasir Abbas also spoke to Samaa TV and outlined conditions for ending the sit-in. He demanded a clear response regarding PTI Founder Imran Khan's treatment and reiterated that a personal doctor must be allowed to meet him. "The founder should be allowed to meet individuals in whom the public has confidence," he said.

Allama Nasir questioned how the sit-in could end without satisfaction over the treatment being provided, adding that whatever is necessary must be done for the treatment of

Imran Khan's eye.

While the main sit-in at Parliament House continues under the leadership of Mahmood Khan Achakzai, two out of three protest sites in the opposition's red zone have been called off. The sit-in at Parliament Lodges has ended, with opposition leaders and members of the Punjab Assembly leaving the protest site.

Similarly, the sit-in outside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House has also concluded. All routes to and from the red zone and Parliament House have now been reopened, and traffic has been fully restored.

Despite the reopening of roads and the end of parallel protests, the ongoing sit-in at Parliament House signals continued political tension.



QUETTA: Former Senator Lashkari Raisani addressing a Press Conference at Quetta Press Club (QPC).

Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) awards contract for Gwadar's desalination plant

ISLAMABAD (INP): Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) has awarded contract to Gwadar local Company "Zabard Private Limited" of critical chemicals for its 1.2-million-gallon-per-day (MGD) desalination plant in order to make sure uninterrupted operations of the facility, one of an integral part of the city's safe drinking water system.

After Zabard Private Limited fulfil all pre-requisites laid down by GPA, official contract is given on February 13 under set of SOPs, according to a Gwadar Pro's report.

Operationalized under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the desalination plant has stood out as a key source of Gwadar's water supply, particularly after its restoration to full operation in 2025 helped stabilize supplies during last year's prolonged dry spell.

The Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) has designated the facility as a permanent component of the city's daily water-supply network and a key safeguard against shortages during periods of low rainfall.

The plant has maintained steady production since it was fully operationalised last year, as reflected in recent output figures, including 915,000 gallons on Jan. 1;

535,000 gallons on Jan. 2; and 1,069 million gallons on Dec. 31.

The plant was completed and inaugurated on December 4, 2023, following a project implementation agreement signed on July 5, 2021, according to the official CPEC website.

The site says the project, built with Chinese support, cost \$12.7 million to deliver up to 1.2 million gallons of potable water daily to Gwadar city and port, easing pressure on dam storage and tanker-supplied sources. A recent GDA report on water management noted that the reverse-osmosis facility has played a "backbone-like role"

in providing drinking water to old Gwadar town and boosting the city's resilience against recurring shortages linked to climate-driven dry spells.

In a parallel government push to secure reliable power for the facility and other critical infrastructure, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal on December 4 ordered the fast-track implementation of solarisation for Gwadar's desalination plant and pumping stations, along with 132 kV grid-stability upgrades, to tackle the port city's longstanding electricity and water shortages.

Balochistan Committed to Inclusive, Sustainable and Evidence-Based Social Development: Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi

NEWS DESK: Provincial Minister for Planning and Development Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi reaffirmed the Government of Balochistan's commitment to promoting inclusive, sustainable, and evidence-based social development, emphasizing the need for effective, results-driven partnerships.

He expressed these views while addressing a high-level policy consultative meeting titled "Advancing Inclusive and Resilient Social Services in Balochistan."

A Critical Phase in Social Development. The Provincial Minister stated that Balochistan is currently passing through an important phase in redefining its social development trajectory.

He noted that the government's strategy is grounded in evidence, reforms, and strong partnerships aimed at improving human development indicators across the province.



Highlighting measurable progress over the past decade, he said that according to national surveys and development studies, child mortality rates have significantly declined.

Neonatal mortality has reduced to approximately 66 per 1,000 live births, while under-five mortality has dropped to 78 per 1,000, reflecting targeted investments in healthcare and child welfare. Progress in Education and Poverty Reduction.

Referring to improvements in the education sector, he shared that Balochistan's literacy rate has gradually increased to around 42 percent.

However, he acknowledged persistent

challenges related to delivery systems and transition to secondary education, stressing the need for continued education reforms.

He further noted a gradual decline in multi-dimensional poverty due to sustained investments in social sectors. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that Balochistan remains among the most deprived provinces at the national level, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen service delivery systems and adopt integrated policy measures. Focus on System-Based, Results-Oriented Reforms.

Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi emphasized that despite significant investments in education, health, water supply, and infrastructure, key areas such as women's literacy, nutrition, and quality of services still require focused attention. He stated that the next phase of the government's reform agenda will prioritize human resource development, quality service delivery, and institutional strengthening.

Government of Balochistan is transitioning from a project-based approach to a system-based, results-oriented model. Integration of health, nutrition, education, and social protection systems. Buledi emphasized that despite significant investments in education, health, water supply, and infrastructure, key areas such as women's literacy, nutrition, and quality of services still require focused attention. He stated that the next phase of the government's reform agenda will prioritize human resource development, quality service delivery, and institutional strengthening.

He invited development partners to collaborate through long-term, results-based partnerships to bring measurable and meaningful improvements in the lives of the people of Balochistan.

He also announced that after appointment, newly recruited doctors would be provided with accommodation, security, and other necessary facilities.

Expressing hope that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan, he further assured that stringent measures will continue against profiteers and that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan.

He also announced that after appointment, newly recruited doctors would be provided with accommodation, security, and other necessary facilities. Expressing hope that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan, he further assured that stringent measures will continue against profiteers and that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan.

BRA Conducts Awareness & Orientation Session in Hub on Provincial Tax Compliance

QUETTA: To ensure effective implementation of provincial tax laws, the Balochistan Revenue Authority (BRA) organized a comprehensive awareness and orientation session in Hub for officers and officials of various government departments.

The primary objective of the session was to fully inform government institutions about withholding tax rules and regulations, legal responsibilities, and compliance requirements. Experts highlighted that designated withholding agents are responsible for deducting sales tax at the prescribed rate at the time of payment for taxable services, depositing the deducted amount within the stipulated timeframe, and filing the relevant returns promptly.

Participants were also briefed on the practical procedures of withholding, common mistakes, legal obligations, and potential penalties and fines in cases of non-compliance. Detailed responses were provided to questions raised by representatives of different departments.

They were assured that BRA will continue to offer guidance and technical support in the future to ensure proper and effective enforcement of tax laws. According to the spokesperson, such awareness sessions aim to promote tax compliance within government institutions, enhance transparency, and strengthen the role of departments in ensuring the province's fiscal stability.

Meeting Held to Launch Extensive Tree Plantation Campaign

QUETTA: A meeting regarding the tree plantation campaign in Quetta was held under the chairmanship of Mehruallah Badini, Deputy Commissioner Quetta. The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner

it was decided that a comprehensive tree plantation drive would be carried out on all major roads, educational institutions, and other important locations across Quetta. Participants agreed to enhance inter-departmental coordination to ensure maximum

among the top priorities of the district administration. He directed the concerned authorities to carry out the plantation campaign in an organized and effective manner and to ensure proper care and maintenance of the planted saplings.



(General) Muhammad Anwar Kakar, Assistant Commissioner Revenue Hafiz Muhammad Tariq, officers of the Forest Department, and representatives of Rotary Club and Quetta Online. During the session, the tree plantation drive would be carried out on all major roads, educational institutions, and other important locations across Quetta. Participants agreed to enhance inter-departmental coordination to ensure maximum

plantation and make the city greener. Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini stated that enhancing Quetta's beauty and maintaining a clean and healthy environment is

The district administration also appealed to citizens, students, and social organizations to actively participate in the campaign and contribute towards making Quetta green and vibrant.

Naseerabad: Price Control Committee Meeting Held in Bhag Ahead of Ramadan

NASEERABAD: On the special directives of Captain (R) Juma Dada Khan Mandokhail, Deputy Commissioner Kachhi, an important meeting of the Price Control Committee was held in Bhag under the chairmanship of Syed Elahyar Shah in connection with the upcoming holy month of Ramadan.

The meeting was attended by members of the local trader community, shopkeepers, and social leaders of Bhag. Detailed discussions were held on maintaining reasonable prices of essential commodities during Ramadan, preventing hoarding, and ensuring strict implementation of the official price list.

Assistant Commissioner Syed Elahyar Shah stated that Ramadan is a month of blessings and mercy, and providing relief to the public during this sacred period is a shared responsibility of both the administration and the trader community. He directed that official price lists must be displayed prominently at shops and warned

that overcharging would not be tolerated under any circumstances. Representatives of the trader community assured full cooperation with the administration and pledged to ensure the availability of quality food items at reasonable rates for the public.

The Assistant Commissioner further announced that regular market inspections will be conducted throughout Ramadan, and strict legal action will be taken against anyone found violating price control regulations.

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Tenders Opened for Development Projects Under BSDI Phase-II

SIBI: Under the supervision of Mansoor Ali Shah, Assistant Commissioner U&P&D, the tendering process for various development projects under BSDI Phase-II of the Upland & Planning Department (UP&D) were formally opened. The ceremony was

attended by Raziq Mari, Executive Engineer UP&D; Khadim Hussain Chaudhry, Executive Engineer Irrigation; and other relevant officials.

TENDER NOTICE

Electronic bid will be submitted. No physical bid is required. Note: In All Procurement of Goods Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered at Electronic Public Procurement System of BPRA GOB. The EXECUTIVE ENGINEER - BUILDINGS PP&H DEPARTMENT DISTRICT SHERKANI invites bids from Eligible Bidders for execution of following works for the Year 2020 based on Composite schedule rates 2020 on Percentage Rates

S. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	Tender Fee	BD Security	TSE NO.
1	REPAIR/PROVISION OF WIRING/FACILITIES IN RAC KACHHI/ CONSTRUCTION OF GPS SCHOOL BUILDING WITH SHARAH SOLAR SYSTEM AT KILLI BARKAN/ BARKAN BMS CODE 1046/ REPAIR OF GPS QALANDAR LARVARI BMS CODE 1048/ MAJOR REPAIR GPS BAN LARVARI BMS CODE 1048/ (BSDI PHASE-II E BID)	32,000,000	1,000 PKR	2%	2020020403
2	CONSTRUCTION OF BHU BUILDING AT KILLI BARKAN/ MOHAMMAD AYUB WITH SOLAR SYSTEM / CONSTRUCTION OF 03 CLASS ROOMS WITH BINAL OF INTELLETS SCHOOL AT KILLI BARKAN/ LARVARI BMS CODE 1048/ DISTRICT SHERKANI (BSDI PHASE-II E BID)	32,000,000	1,000 PKR	2%	2020020403
3	CONSTRUCTION OF FOOTBALL LAND LIVING POOL AND ONE SIDE PAVILION GROUND AT HARPAL AND HARPAL REPAIR/CONSTRUCTION OF INTELLETS SCHOOL/ GPS KILLA HARBULLAH BMS CODE 1709/ CONSTRUCTION OF BINAL GEMS SHINA PUNDA SOLAR SYSTEM/ BMS CODE 1048/ DISTRICT SHERKANI (BSDI PHASE-II E BID)	35,000,000	1,000 PKR	2%	2020020403
4	CONSTRUCTION OF 2 STOREY WALL/ MAJOR ROOF AT DAKAR/ BMS CODE 1046/ CONSTRUCTION OF 2 CLASS ROOMS WITH BINAL/ SHARAH BMS CODE 1048/ REPAIR OF GPS SCHOOL, BUILDING KILLI ZAREEN/ MEDIA BMS CODE 1704/ REPAIR OF GPS LARVARI KAMAL/ KACHHI DISTRICT SHERKANI (BSDI PHASE-II E BID)	38,000,000	1,000 PKR	2%	2020020403

Procurement shall be made under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules - 2014. Eligibility of Bidders: Presence in Active Tax Payer List. The bidding time must not be exceeded by any procuring agency of Pakistan. Balochistan Revenue Authority Registration is required. Completed 3 Assignment of similar nature of work mentioned in bidding documents. Turn over mentions in bidding documents. Procedure of Procurement: Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding Procedure Bid Security: The bids must accompany Bid Security in the form of Bank Guarantee, Deposit at Call of 2% specified above in the name of the under-assigner from a scheduled bank. Tender Documents: The bidding documents can be obtained from the office of the under-assigner 1,000 PKR/ issuance of tender documents. From the date of publication of NIT to 04 March, 2020 during office hours working days Last Date of bid submission: The tenders must be submitted latest by 04 March, 2020 at 10:30 AM. Tender opening: All tenders will be opened on same day at the office of the under-assigner at 11:30 AM Address: EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MAINTENANCE (DIVISION QUETTA CIVIL Complex NEAR CHAMARA, PAFIA, H&M, B&L, KHAN JAMALI ROAD QUETTA. Phone: 0812820343 Email: maintenance@getmail.com

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER - BUILDINGS PP&H DEPARTMENT DISTRICT SHERKANI

PRQ No. 3783/16-02-2020

Loralai: Interviews Held for Contract-Based Medical Officers

LORALAI: Interviews for the appointment of contract-based medical officers were conducted under the chairmanship of

Commissioner Wali Muhammad Bareech, who stated that the new appointments would help overcome the shortage of doctors in

improved healthcare services. He further noted that the initiative would also provide employment opportunities to deserving

youth who completed their education despite challenging circumstances. The Commissioner assured that the recruitment process would remain transparent and strictly merit-based.



Wali Muhammad Bareech, Commissioner Loralai Division. A large number of male and female candidates from various districts of Balochistan, as well as from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

Health Services; Dr. Muhammad Anwar Mandokhail, Medical Superintendent; and other members, who questioned candidates and thoroughly reviewed their documents. On the occasion,

he added that after these recruitments, all departments—including operation theaters—at DHQ Duki, Musakhel, and Barkhan hospitals would become fully functional, leading to

recovery, and other necessary facilities. Expressing hope that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan, he further assured that stringent measures will continue against profiteers and that no one will be allowed to exploit consumers during Ramadan.

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Deputy Commissioner Chairs Key Meeting on Price Control for Ramadan

QUETTA: A crucial meeting regarding price control arrangements for the holy month of Ramadan was held under the chairmanship of Mehruallah Badini, Deputy Commissioner Quetta.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Muhammad Anwar Kakar, Assistant Commissioners of City, Sarial, and Kachhi, along with magistrates from all four subdivisions. During the session, strict decisions were taken to control the prices of essential commodities and pro-



vide maximum relief to the public during Ramadan. Clear directives were issued that profiteers and shopkeepers overcharging customers would face indiscriminate legal action, including possible imprisonment.

Authorities emphasized that no leniency would be shown towards violators. The Deputy Commissioner instructed all administrative officers to ensure continuous and effective price control operations within their respective subdivisions and to remain actively present in the field to monitor

implementation. The district administration reiterated that providing relief to citizens during the sacred month of Ramadan is its top priority.

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Meeting on Quetta Master Plan Held Under Commissioner's Chairmanship

QUETTA: A high-level meeting regarding the Quetta Master Plan was held under the chairmanship of Shahzaib Khan Kakar, Commissioner Quetta Division, to deliberate on the city's future development, expansion, and resolution of key urban challenges.

The meeting was attended by Mehruallah Badini, Deputy Commissioner Quetta; Divisional Director Development Zahoor Ahmed; Deputy Project Director Quetta Development Package Abid Ali; representatives of the consultant firm; and officials from QDA.

During the session, the consultant firm presented a detailed briefing on the Quetta Mas-

ter Plan, covering short-term, mid-term, and long-term planning strategies. The briefing included updates on land survey reports, digital mapping information systems, field survey findings, urban boundary demarcation, and land utilization, and improvements in road networks, sewerage, and drainage systems.

Commissioner Shahzaib Khan Kakar directed the consultant firm to complete all necessary measures promptly and submit a comprehensive report to ensure timely implementation of the master plan. He emphasized that urban planning must take into account future needs and involve all

stakeholders, while ensuring public awareness and participation. He further stressed the importance of developing a strategy to shift commercial and industrial activities outside the central city to reduce congestion and business pressure. Highlighting major urban challenges such as water scarcity and land issues, he instructed that sustainable solutions to these problems be prioritized within the master plan.

The Commissioner also directed that short-term projects be funded for immediate execution, while mid-term and long-term plans should carefully consider future population growth.

International oil prices steady as traders brace for US-Iran nuclear talks

NEWS DESK: Oil prices were little changed on Monday with investors weighing the market implications of upcoming US-Iran talks aimed at de-escalating tensions against a backdrop of expected supply increases from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (Opec+).

Brent crude futures edged up 3 cents to \$67.78 a barrel by 03:58 GMT.

US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$62.91 a barrel, up 2 cents. There will be no WTI settlement on Monday due to a US holiday.

Last week, both benchmarks posted weekly declines, with Brent settling down about 0.5 per cent and WTI losing 1pc after comments from US President Donald Trump that Washington could make a deal with Tehran over the next month drove down prices on Thursday. The two countries are due to hold a second round of talks in Geneva on Tuesday after renew-



ing negotiations earlier this month aimed at tackling their decades-long dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme and aver-

ing a new military confrontation.

Iran is pursuing a nuclear agreement with the US that delivers economic benefits

for both sides, with energy and mining investments and aircraft purchases up for discussion, an Iranian diplomat was reported as

saying Sunday. "With both sides expected to hold firm on their core red lines, expectations are low that a deal can be

reached, and this is likely to be the calm before the storm," IG market analyst Tony Sycamore said. The US has dispatched a sec-

ond aircraft carrier to the region and is preparing for the possibility of a sustained military campaign if the talks do not succeed,

US officials have told Reuters. Iran's Revolutionary Guards have warned that in case of strikes on Iranian territory, they could retaliate against any US military base. With US-Iran tensions pushing up oil prices, Opec+ is leaning toward resuming output increases from April following a three-month halt, to meet peak summer demand, Reuters reported.

Activity in global financial markets is expected to be muted on Monday, with China, South Korea, and Taiwan closed for Lunar New Year holidays, in addition to Presidents Day in the United States. "With Chinese demand cues largely absent this week, liquidity remains thin, and price action could stay erratic," said Sugandha Sachdeva, founder of SS WealthStreet, a New Delhi-based research firm. In the near term, geopolitical developments and inventory data will remain the primary drivers of volatility, keeping crude vulnerable to sharp two-way swings, Sachdeva added.

IT exports poised to hit \$5b mark

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's information technology sector is witnessing one of the most significant export surges in the country's economic history, positioning itself as a critical pillar of foreign exchange earnings and services-led growth.

In December 2025, Pakistan's IT and IT-enabled services exports reached a record \$437 million, marking the first time monthly receipts crossed the \$400 million threshold.

According to data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), this figure represents an increase of around 23% on a month-on-month basis and approximately 26% year-on-year, underscoring the sector's accelerating momentum and growing competitiveness in global markets.

This milestone is not an isolated spike but part of a sustained upward trend that has been building over several years. Official SBP statistics show that cumulative IT exports during the first half of FY2025-26 (July-December) stood at about \$2.24 bil-

lion, compared to roughly \$1.87 billion in the same period of the previous fiscal year.

This translates into around 20% growth, indicating that the sector is firmly on track to achieve – and potentially surpass – the widely discussed \$5 billion annual export target.

One of the most impactful measures has been the SBP's decision to enhance exporters' retention limits in Exporters' Specialised Foreign Currency Accounts (ESFCA) from 35% to 50%.

This reform has allowed IT companies to retain a larger share of their foreign exchange earnings, improving cash flow, facilitating re-investment, and enabling firms to scale operations without excessive reliance on domestic financing.

Additionally, the introduction of the Equity Investment Abroad (EIA) framework has enabled IT exporters to use retained foreign currency to invest in overseas subsidiaries and partnerships, strengthening their global footprint and client access.

This rapid succession of highs within a single fiscal year signals a structural shift in Pakistan's export profile.

Several factors are driving this expansion, with policy reforms playing a central role.

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Administrative challenges aggravate climate risk to cotton

NEWS DESK: As an unexpected rise in temperature has accelerated the start of cotton cultivation across most cotton-growing zones, a new study warned that the risk to the sector posed by climate change is being aggravated due to administrative weaknesses including poor pest surveillance, limited crop insurance and insufficient traceability systems.

Institutional fragmentation remains a major constraint, according to the study. There is no single accountable entity responsible for national cotton outcomes, resulting in limited data integration, weak risk-sharing frameworks, and inadequate export compliance systems.

The report, produced by EMPAK Strategies, dedicated to fostering a proactive, adaptive, and strategically sound approach to Pakistan's foreign and security policies, highlighted that Pakistan was no longer self-sufficient in the sector as it has to import cotton

worth US\$2.3 billion annually, which could negatively affect Pakistan's export competitiveness.

On the other hand, temperatures in Sindh's coastal cities, including Thatta, Badin, Gharu, Golarachi, Mirpur and Tando Muhammad Khan, reached up to 35°C, prompting the rapid commencement of cotton sowing in these areas.

Sowing is expected to begin in Sindh cities such as Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Hyderabad and Umerkot, as well as in Punjab districts of Bahawalpur, Vehari, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Toba Tek Singh within the next eight to 10 days.

Sowing season arrives early as unexpected temperature rise accelerates cultivation in Sindh's coastal cities.

The Punjab Agriculture Department has set a target of cultivating early cotton on 700,000

acres for this season. The department designated Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Sahiwal and Faisalabad divisions for early cotton sowing.

Surprisingly, Bahawalpur division, which has historically led Punjab in early cotton cultivation, has not been included in the campaign.

For several years, the Bahawalnagar district has recorded the highest acreage under early cotton in Punjab.

Additionally, large-scale early cultivation takes place in Bahawalpur and in the Cholistan areas.

Despite this, these districts have been excluded from the early cotton initiative and instead categorised under regular seasonal cultivation, causing widespread concern among cotton stakeholders.

Cotton Ginners Forum Chairman Ihsanul Haq said that recorded the highest acreage under early cotton in Punjab.

To incentivise farmers, they were offering fertilisers, agricultural chemicals, machinery, and even cash.

This development has raised fears that increased sugarcane cultivation may reduce the area available for cotton farming.

Mr Haq urged the federal and provincial governments to symbolically consider the demands of the textile and cotton industries to help reverse declining exports and strengthen the country's trade performance.



NHA stays govt's biggest fiscal drain despite higher tolls

NEWS DESK: Carrying the largest outstanding loan portfolio on its books and a negative return on assets, the National Highway Authority (NHA) — the country's logistics backbone — is the single largest entity bleeding the federal budget, exposing Pakistan to substantial fiscal risk despite the recent doubling of tolls.

The NHA is the "largest loss-maker", operating on a "structural deficit model and reliant on budgetary support", the Central Monitoring Unit (CMU) of the Ministry of Finance said in its Annual Aggregate Report on state-owned enterprises (SOEs) for the year ended June 30, 2025.

With accumulated losses of Rs2.074 trillion, the entity that owns and operates all the national highways and motorways accrued around Rs1.004tr in the last three years alone — about Rs295 billion each in FY24 and FY25 and Rs413bn in FY23.

Moreover, it stands out at the top of the SOE list, with the largest accrued financing cost of



Rs210bn in FY25, as its toll revenue remains unaligned with debt servicing, leading to fiscal dependence and sovereign guarantee exposure.

"Currently, the NHA holds outstanding loans totalling approximately Rs3.1tr, with annual debt accretion rate of Rs300bn.

This debt portfolio generates Rs98bn markup, which is expected to rise to more than Rs150bn per annum, creating a substantial credit risk for the

government of Pakistan (GoP), which guarantees these loans", the CMA said.

It said the presence of sovereign guarantees given by the federal government last year, is amplifying the government's credit risk exposure.

Rs115 billion in loans given by the federal government last year, is also among the top borrowers. On the other hand, its net assets remained almost static

over the last three years, actually declining slightly from Rs5.84tr in FY23 to Rs5.83tr in FY25. Its total equity has been declining over time from Rs2.57tr in FY23 to Rs2.27tr in FY24 and Rs1.95tr in FY25.

Conversely, NHA's total liabilities have been increasing, making it the single-largest entity to accrue current liabilities. Its total liabilities amounted to Rs3.27tr in FY23, increasing to Rs3.54tr in FY24 and reaching Rs3.88tr by the end of FY25.

A net-metering nightmare

NEWS DESK: IN what appears to be a rushed, unilateral decision, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Neptra) drastically slashed the incentives for rooftop solar adoption, replacing net-metering with net-billing for all existing and future prosumers.

The move aims to protect grid stability and contain solar penetration to prevent consumers going off-grid, but critics warn it raises regulatory risk and undermines investor confidence in renewable policy stability. Both the government side and the regulator have blamed prosumers.

Higher-than-approved solar capacity and non-metered solar installations of homeowners for grid challenges and higher capacity charges.

The regulatory changes were introduced through a predetermined set of regulations that have been published as a draft for public opinion on the proposed changes, but were notified without any change only a couple of days after the public hearing, even at the public hearing, reports suggest that Neptra



restricted dozens of relevant consumers, independent think tanks and business representatives from suggesting alternative solutions.

Existing seven-year contracts will continue, but shift immediately to net billing with export credits reduced from three months to one month.

New applicants will receive five-year contracts, and surplus power will be purchased from them at the National Average Energy Purchase Price of around

Rs10 per unit compared to Rs26 under the existing contracts, while their grid consumption will be billed at Rs37-55 per unit, depending on the relevant slab, excluding taxes, surcharges and duties.

Capacity limits have also been tightened. Under the new regulations, prosumers will not be allowed to install solar systems for net-metering beyond their original sanctioned load, effectively reducing the capacity limit by 50 per cent.

Effectively terminates unit-for-unit energy exchange between prosumers and the grid under the net-metering framework.

Notified the same draft without changing a single clause indicated a predetermined conclusion. Attempting to repair 100pc of the sector by tightening rules on the national electricity system defies logic and discredits from deeper structural distortions.

The notification effectively terminates unit-for-unit energy exchange between prosumers and the grid under the net-metering framework.

England survive Italy scare to reach T20 World Cup Super Eights

NEWS DESK: England survived a scare to qualify for the Super Eights at the T20 World Cup on Monday as Italy's swashbuckling chase of 203 fell agonisingly short in a pulsating match in Kolkata.

Will Jacks scored the fastest T20 World Cup fifty for England as they made 202-7, their highest total of the tournament so far, and eventually won by 24 runs.

Italy, the lowest-ranked team in the tournament, were on track to pull off a sensational upset when Grant Stewart and Jaspreet Singh blasted 21 off Adil Rashid's final over, the 17th of the chase, including three sixes.

That left 30 needed off 21 balls, but it proved too much and Italy were all out off the last ball of the match for 178.

Most of England's batsmen got good starts earlier after Harry Brook won the toss and chose to bat.

But only Jack's capitalised as Italy kept chipping away with



regular wickets. He reached his fifty off 21 balls to beat Eoin Morgan's 25-ball effort against the West Indies in Kandy in 2012.

Jacks took the game by the scruff of the neck after England stuttered to 105-5 in the 13th over.

He put on 54 in 25 balls with Sam Curran (25) for the sixth wicket and 35 in 16 balls with Jamie Overton (15) for the seventh.

His fourth six, which took him to his fifty, also saw England pass 200 for the first time in the tournament, with Jacks finishing 53 not out off 22 balls.

The win guaranteed England's passage to the Super Eights along with the already-qualified West Indies from Group C, South Africa and India.

Sensational catch Italy got off to a terrible start in reply as Jos Archer took wickets in the first over.

Jos Buttler then pulled off one of the catches of the tournament.

Manenti ramped Jamie Overton only for keeper Buttler to leap and take a stunning one-handed grab at full stretch.

Italy rebuilt brilliantly from 22-3 with Ben Manenti racing to 60 off 25 balls before he was caught by Tom

make it 135-5 in the 15th over, it seemed Italy's hopes of pulling off only the third successful 200-plus chase in the history of the T20 World Cup might be over.

But Stewart had other ideas, blasting 45 off 23 balls to keep Italy in the hunt.

England were earlier 56-2 at the end of the six-over power play, having lost both openers.

Buttler, who has failed to pass 30 in the tournament so far, continued his run of low scores with three.

Phil Salt got off to a rapid start before also falling for 28 off 15 balls with two sixes.

Both were caught attempting big hits and, when Jacob Bethell followed suit for 23, England were wobbling at 67-3 in the eighth over.

Brook took a four and a six off the first two balls of JJ Smuts' third over.

He edged the next ball to wicketkeeper Gian-Piero Meade, trying to cut and England were 92-4 after 11 overs before Jacks took charge.

Morikawa wins at Pebble Beach

NEWS DESK: Collin Morikawa claimed a tense victory at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am in California on Sunday, fending off a final-day charge by top-ranked Scottie Scheffler that included three eagles.

Double major-winner Morikawa had not triumphed on the PGA Tour since 2023, but started the day in joint-second and birdied the final hole in blustery conditions to win by a stroke on 22 under par.

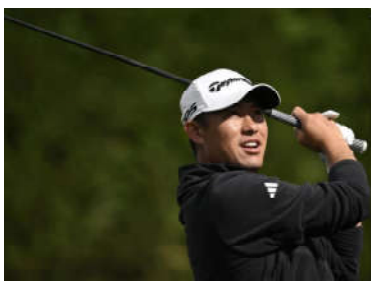
"It's special for a lot of reasons," said Morikawa, who used his win to announce that he and his wife are expecting their first child.

"We just started telling people this week, and we said, 'what better way... to just announce it to the world. If I was able to come out and win,'" he said.

Back in the state where he was born and raised, Morikawa had pulled clear of a crowded leaderboard down the stretch with a superb 30-foot putt for birdie on the 15th, and another birdie on 16.

With benign conditions turning gusty in the final hour, Morikawa hooked his tee shot on 17 and could only manage a bogey from the ocean-side rough.

He faced an agonizing 20-minute wait on



the 18th fairway as Jacob Bridgeman, of the preceding group, played a shot from the beach that cracked off a cliff and back into the ocean. But a birdie on 18 was enough to seal a single-stroke win over Australia's Min Woo Lee and Austria's Sepp Straka, with Scheffler and Tommy Fleetwood a further shot back.

"I tried to look out in the ocean as many times as I can. I love being out here," said Morikawa, of the delay.

"Pebble Beach... not many places can beat this place in the world."

Lee - chasing his second PGA Tour win, after a debut victory last

March in Houston - shot 65, finishing with birdies on the final two holes. It was in stark contrast to Lee's finish Saturday, when the 27-year-old had bogeyed the final two holes and dramatically tossed his ball into the Pacific Ocean in frustration.

But the day's best round came from world number one Scheffler, who started Sunday eight shots off the lead in joint 22nd, and made a remarkable charge up the leaderboard.

He began in blistering form with two eagles and three birdies in his first seven holes.

Pushing hard for the finish line, Scheffler missed long on four consecutive holes, picking

up two bogeys in that stretch. Still, Scheffler finished with another eagle for a round of 63 and the joint lead at 20 under par, just as winds picked up for the remaining players on the course.

It was not quite enough for a famous win. Anytime you've got three eagles in one round, good things are happening... Proud of the way I played today," said Scheffler.

Defending champion Rory McIlroy also had a superb final round, carding 64, but was never in contention after three doubles and a triple bogey earlier this week.

Brignone strikes Olympic gold again as Klaebo becomes first to win nine

NEWS DESK: Evergreen Italian Federico Brignone won a glorious second gold medal of the Milan-Cortina Games on Sunday as Mikaela Shiffrin faded, while Norwegian cross-country skier Johannes Klaebo became the first Winter Olympian in history to win nine gold medals.

Brignone is fast becoming one of the outstanding storylines of these Games as the 35-year-old skier who was on the surgeon's table 10 months ago won her second gold in front of her home fans.

Already the winner of the super-G at these Games, Brignone

clocked a combined time of 2min 13.50sec in sparkling weather in Cortina d'Ampezzo to become the first Italian woman skier to win gold in two events at the same Olympics.

In April 2025, she suffered a broken leg after crashing in a race that required extensive surgery.

Mikaela Shiffrin, the 30-year-old American who is the most successful skier in history in World Cup events, faded and could only finish 11th, continuing her fruitless Olympic run that began at the 2022 Beijing Games.

Shiffrin has one more medal chance, in

the slalom on Wednesday.

Lisa Vittingazz made the day even more delightful for the Italian as she put on a superb display of shooting to hit all 20 targets and win gold in a thrilling women's 10km biathlon pursuit race, sending home fans into ecstasy at the Antholz-Anterselva arena.

Vittozzi shot clean under enormous pressure to win by a margin of 28.8 seconds over Norway's Maren Kirkeeide who stormed back from two late misses to secure silver.

Suvi Minkkinen of Finland took bronze. "I'm so happy,"

What I've done today, I'm really proud of myself. I had goosebumps in the last few kilometres. It was a dream come true," a delighted Vittingazz told Italian TV.

"I didn't think today that I would reach the gold medal because the level of the women is really high, but I really did a good job at the range and I'm very happy. I was very calm, I tried to work well and I hit all the targets so I'm very happy."

In Tesero, Klaebo led home the Norwegian 4x7.5 kilometre relay team to win the ninth gold medal of his career, more than any man or woman has ever achieved in the Winter Olympics.

It was also his fourth gold medal of these Games and he has two more events still to come.

The Norwegian quartet were so far ahead that Klaebo was able to wave to the crowd with his ski poles in the home straight before he was greeted by his celebrating teammates.

The 29-year-old overtakes two of his compatriots who have won eight golds at Winter Olympics - former cross-country skiers Marit Bjoergen and Bjoern Daelhlie, and former biathlete Ole Einar Bjoerdalen.



South Africa into Super Eights without playing UAE



NEWS DESK: South Africa qualified for the T20 World Cup Super Eights on Monday without playing as Afghanistan's win over the United Arab Emirates was enough to send them through from Group D.

Azmatali Omarzai was the hero for Afghanistan, taking 4-15 in the UAE's 160-9 and scoring an unbeaten 40 to steer his side to a five-wicket win after a tense chase in New Delhi.

Afghanistan finished on 162-5 with four balls to spare to keep alive their slim chances of moving into the next stage.

South Africa, semi-finalists in 2024, became the third team after the West Indies and co-hosts India to secure a Super Eights berth.

Afghanistan will need a big win in their last group match against Canada on Thursday and other results to go their way if they are to edge out New Zealand from second place in Group C.

"Next game, you never know, it's a T20 game, we'll have to come up with a good brand of cricket, irrespective of the chances of making it to the Super Eights," said Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan.

"We want to make

the country and our people proud and happy."

New Zealand, with four points ahead of their final group match against bottom-placed Canada on Tuesday, look primed to claim the second Super Eight spot from Group D.

Sohab Khan top-scored for UAE with 68 and put on a stand of 84 for the third wicket with Alishan Sharafu, who made 40.

Medium-pace bowler Muhammad Arafan dismissed Ibrahim Zadran in the 14th over to tilt the scales in UAE's favour at 97-4, but Darwish Rasooli and

Omarzai put the chase back on track with a five-wicket partnership of 43.

Rasooli departed for 33 in the 18th over but Omarzai kept calm and hit the winning four to give Afghanistan their first win of the tournament.

Earlier, TV umpire Paul Reiffel found himself in the thick of action in the first four overs after Rashid won the toss and elected to field at Arun Jaitley Stadium.

UAE opener Aryanah Sharma edged the first ball from Omarzai but it was unclear if wicketkeeper Rahmanullah Gurbaz had taken a clean catch.

Reiffel went through umpire replays before giving the benefit of the doubt to the batter.

Three balls later, Reiffel was tasked with a similar job and this time the official decided that Aryanah was indeed out, caught behind for a duck. Off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman trapped UAE captain Muhammad Wassem lbw for 10, a decision which Reiffel upheld after the batter reviewed it.

In the fourth over, Sohab was initially given lbw to Mujeeb but he survived after replays confirmed the ball would have narrowly missed the leg stump.

Quadruple chasing Arsenal rout Wigan

NEWS DESK: Arsenal powered into the FA Cup fifth round for the first time in six years as the quadruple chasers crushed Wigan 4-0 on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side routed the third-tier strugglers with four goals in the first 27 minutes of the fourth round tie at the Emirates Stadium.

Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli netted before Jack Hunt's own goal was followed by a

Gabriel Jesus strike.

The Gunners are back in the last 16 for the first time since they won the FA Cup in 2020, a success that remains the only major trophy of Arteta's reign.

Holding a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League, through to the League Cup final against Manchester City and into the Champions League last 16, Arsenal could end their silverware drought with a remarkable quadruple this season.

"We made a lot of changes because of players who needed minutes. The intensity that we showed, the connections between players and the threat we had, I'm very pleased. The first-half made a difference, obviously," Arteta said.

Arsenal's latest FA Cup clash with Wigan lacked the drama of their previous one in 2014 - a semi-final win featuring

a penalty shoot-out goal from then Gunners captain Arteta.

Wigan have fallen on hard times since, arriving in north London stuck in the League One relegation zone and led by interim boss Glenn Whelan after Ryan Lowe's recent sacking.

Arsenal defender Riccardo Calafiori was injured in the pre-match warm-up, forcing Arteta to bring Bukayo Saka back into the line-up instead of resting the in-goal of resting the

Despite the late reshuffle, it took just 11 minutes for Arsenal to go in front.

Arteta gave Eberechi Eze another start despite hauling the England midfielder off at half-time after his latest disappointment in the Thursday's 1-1 draw at Brentford.

Eze repaid Arteta's faith by firing a turning pass to Madueke, who raced into the Wigan goal and finished with aplomb.

Eze, signed from Crystal Palace last year, provided another assist in the 18th minute.





At least two killed, 17 injured in IED blast in Bannu

NEWS DESK: Two people, including a child, were killed and at least 17 others were injured when an improvised explosive device planted in a motorcycle detonated near the main gate of Miryan Police Station in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu on Monday, Bannu Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sajjad Khan stated.

"The police personnel at the site were unharmed in the explosion," he added. After the blast, the police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. Police added they deployed a large contingent to secure the area and began investigations.

According to a statement by a Rescue 1122 spokesperson, Muhammad Amir, "Rescue 1122 medical teams provided initial treatment to the injured before transferring them to District Headquarters Hospital and Khaila Gul Nawaz Hospital."

According to initial information provided by Rescue 1122 spokesperson Muhammad Amir, the two deceased have been identified as 25-year-old Zohab, son of Rafiullah, and 10-year-old Danial, son of Latifullah.

Rescue 1122 has so far identified 14 injured, including 22-year-old Muhammad Akash, son of Iqbal, 22-year-old Rizwanullah, son of Asif Zaman, 20-year-old Taj Muhammad, son of Zardad, 65-year-old Irfanullah, son of Saifur Rehman, 51-year-old Abdul Rauf, son of Sharroz Khan, 16-year-old Samadullah, son of Umar Jan, 19-year-old Mulyaaz, son of Umar Liaaz, 25-year-old Rubina, wife of Nemutallah, 6-year-old Nadia, daughter of Habibullah, Sadiq, son of Yunus, 25-year-old Bage, son of Kahn, 11-year-old Habibullah, son of Hameed, 5/6-year-old Rafia, daughter of Habibullah, 4/5-year-old Taffika, daughter of Bilal, 24/25-year-old Noor Shad Ali, son of Safdar Ali, 5/6-year-old Asghar Ali Khan, son of Zoroli Khan, and 43/44-year-old Zardad, son of Zardad Khan.

KP living in the stone age, says Punjab CM Maryam

NEWS DESK: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Monday said that the PTI-led Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was living in the stone age, criticising the province's government for not taking steps for development in the age of technology.

Addressing a laptop distribution scheme at a Gujrat university, CM Maryam highlighted that students in Punjab had access to Honhaar scholarships, laptop schemes, Parwaz Card, green buses and technical training programmes.

"So there is Honhaar here, and incentive there, but this is nothing to rejoice about," she said, adding that she was extremely upset that the "people of KP were still living in the stone age."

Maryam stated: "They do not know what development is. They do not realise that Honhaar scholarships also exist if one does not have the resources for their child's studies."

Noting that Nawaz was in his 70s when he was jailed, the Punjab CM said, "He got sick after multiple heart attacks and his platelets dropped. He had cardiac pain (but) such a joke was made out of his ailment."

She continued: "When my father and I were in jail, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and her disease was ridiculed so much, it was even said that she was not sick and it is all a drama."

Maryam then recalled that Kulsoom was on a ventilator in a London hospital when "certain individuals" entered the ICU through deception by wearing doctors' uniforms to verify whether it was true or false.

"When my mother passed away, my father said, 'One has to die to prove their innocence here,'" she said, adding that she was in a jail cell when Nawaz informed her about Kulsoom's death.

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Rangers, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) arrest three alleged facilitators in Korangi, recover explosives

NEWS DESK: Sindh Rangers and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) on Monday arrested three alleged "highly wanted" facilitators linked to Fitna-e-Hindustan during a joint operation in the Chakragoth area of Korangi, officials said.

Explosives and extremist material were recovered during the operation, they added.

According to a spokesperson for Pakistan Rangers (Sindh), the operation was conducted on intelligence-based information in coordination with the CTD. The arrested suspects were identified as Yaseer Arafat, Khuda Bakhsh and Zahid Hussain alias Barakzi.

The spokesperson said five kilogrammes



of explosive material, 10 metres of prima cord, three detonators, one kilogramme of ball bearings, 250 books containing extremist literature and a laptop were recovered from the suspects' possession.

Officials said the suspects were in-

involved in facilitating a banned organisation by radicalising students of various colleges and universities and distributing extremist literature. The suspects had allegedly concealed explosive material at a secret location for use in planned terrorist ac-

tivities targeting sensitive areas of Karachi. The arrested men, along with the recovered explosives and material, were handed over to the police for further legal action.

The Rangers spokesperson appealed to the public to assist in crime preven-

tion by reporting suspicious activities or individuals to the nearest Rangers check post, the Rangers helpline at 1101, or the Rangers Madadgar WhatsApp number 0347-9001111, assuring that informants' identities would be kept confidential.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah dismisses calls to make Karachi province as 'impractical'

NEWS DESK: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has rejected calls to make Karachi a separate province, saying such demands are unconstitutional and impractical.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Bhains Colony flyover in district Malir on Sunday, he reiterated that the people of Karachi were deeply connected with Sindh.

In a thinly veiled reference to the Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, he said some so-called "claimants of the city" called for strengthening the local government system at the grassroots level but ironically they themselves got the federal government involved to carry out development work at the union council level via a federal company.

He also called for federal funds to be directly allocated to local governments to ensure effective service delivery.

Takes a dig at "so-called claimants of city" for involving federal govt in UC-level development work, he said.

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around Bhains Colony and the Mehran Highway. It will improve connectivity for residents of Malir and Ibrahim Hyderi, the Export Processing Zone, and commuters travelling between the National Highway (N-5) and Mehran Highway.

The project was executed by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) under the Competitive and Livable City of Karachi (Click) initiative, with support from the World Bank.

The project was completed in a record five months for

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'Nothing to worry about': Law minister allays concerns over Imran's vision loss

NEWS DESK: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Monday allayed concerns over PTI founder Imran Khan's vision loss, saying that there was "nothing as such to worry about."

The statement comes days after the Supreme Court (SC) was informed that Imran had only 15pc vision left in his right eye, prompting the apex court to form a medical team to examine him before February 16 (today).

Subsequently, a team of five doctors arrived at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail on Sunday, where the ex-premier is incarcerated, and carried out a detailed eye examination, took blood samples and checked his blood pressure.

However, the PTI rejected the check-up conducted with his family and personal physicians.

Addressing Bar Association Ferozwalla in Punjab's Shahdara on Monday, Tarar referred to the "latest report that had to be submitted" regarding Imran's health.

The minister added that he discussed it with Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan and the "relevant" individuals before coming to the bar association.

Tarar stated: "They said thanks to God, the examination was carried out again on the Supreme Court's order and there is no such thing about 35 or 25 [per cent]."

"If he uses glasses for his eyesight, then one eye is approximately



70pc fine and the other eye is 6/6. There is nothing as such to worry about."

According to the Cleveland Clinic, having 6/6 vision or 20/20 vision means you see the world with normal clarity and sharpness.

Before commenting on Imran's health, Tarar stressed the need to "pay attention to our national issues."

"We took difficult financial decisions, but the fruits of those can be seen now," he stated, asserting that Pakistan was now "performing way better economically."

The law minister stressed that political stability was crucial for economic stability.

"There is a lot of noise these days that what is about happen and what has been done to the

PTI founder," he noted. Addressing the PTI-led Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, Tarar said it was the "first time that a government was taking official measures to deprive the citizens of their rights."

He then referred to the blockades of major roads and KP's entry and exit points by PTI protests, which have cut off the province from the rest of the country.

He expressed the hope that the PTI would "rectify" the situation itself after looking at the latest report. "Otherwise, the federal govern-

ment will have to take some action," Tarar warned.

He further said it was the responsibility of PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, as well as the Senate and National Assembly opposition leaders, to "ensure that the KP government adheres to the Constitution."

Imran's physician urges authorities to allow access

Meanwhile, Imran's long-time personal physician Dr Aasim Yusuf released a video statement, saying that last night he spoke on the telephone to the two Islamabad-based eye doctors who were treating the ex-premier for his eye condition.

He said he asked his colleague, Dr Khuram Azam Mirza, a Lahore-based retinal specialist,

to join the phone call.

Dr Yusuf said that the phone call lasted 40 minutes, during which the doctors provided a background of when they first examined Imran, what his symptoms were, details of the treatment prescribed and what the future treatment plan.

"Their latest assessment was yesterday afternoon ... they told us that, in their view, Imran had shown significant improvement as a result of treatment and his vision had improved significantly as well," he said.

"I would be extremely happy if I was able to confirm that this was the case. Unfortunately, because I have not seen him myself and have not been able to participate in his care or talk to him.

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